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EFL TEACHERS' CURRICULUM LITERACY AND PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS IN MERDEKA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: This study investigated EFL teachers' curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, focusing on their levels, relationship, and translation into classroom practices. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed involving 150 senior high school English teachers in Palembang, Indonesia, in the quantitative phase and 10 purposively selected teachers in the qualitative phase. Quantitative data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire measuring curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted and analyzed thematically to explain the quantitative findings. The results revealed high levels of curriculum literacy (M = 4.02, SD = 0.48) and pedagogical skills (M = 4.00, SD = 0.46), with a significant positive correlation between the two constructs ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). The qualitative findings showed that curriculum understanding served as a foundation for instructional planning and pedagogical decision-making, while curriculum enactment required flexible translation into classroom practices. Teachers nevertheless encountered challenges related to differentiated instruction, assessment, contextual adaptation, and institutional support, indicating that pedagogical practices were influenced by classroom and school contexts. These findings demonstrate that curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills are interconnected dimensions of EFL teacher competence. Teacher professional development should therefore integrate curriculum understanding with practical pedagogical support, particularly in differentiation, assessment, and contextual adaptation, to strengthen Merdeka Curriculum enactment in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *curriculum literacy; pedagogical skills; EFL teachers; Merdeka curriculum; mixed-methods.*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform has become an important strategy for improving educational quality and responding to changing social, technological, and pedagogical demands. However, curriculum reform does not automatically result in meaningful changes in classroom instruction because teachers play a central role in interpreting curriculum objectives and transforming them into learning experiences. Recent scholarship has therefore placed increasing emphasis on curriculum literacy, which encompasses teachers' capacities to understand curriculum structures and purposes, interpret intended learning outcomes, make informed instructional decisions, evaluate curriculum resources, and translate curriculum

expectations into classroom practices (Marek et al., 2025; Mdaka & Modiba, 2024; Park et al., 2024; Ross, 2024; Süer & Demirkol, 2023). Curriculum literacy positions teachers not merely as implementers of predetermined curriculum policies but as active interpreters who negotiate curriculum intentions in relation to learners and instructional contexts. In English language teaching (ELT), this competence is particularly important because EFL teachers must transform broad curriculum expectations into language-learning objectives, communicative activities, appropriate materials, and meaningful assessment practices. Thus, curriculum literacy represents not simply teachers' knowledge of curriculum documents but their ability to interpret, adapt, and enact curriculum expectations through pedagogically meaningful decisions.

In Indonesia, the importance of curriculum literacy has become increasingly apparent following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides greater flexibility and teacher autonomy while emphasizing learner-centeredness, contextual learning, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and responsiveness to students' needs. Although these principles create opportunities for teachers to develop more flexible and context-sensitive instruction, they simultaneously demand greater professional capacity to interpret curriculum expectations and translate them into classroom practices. Recent studies demonstrate that Indonesian EFL teachers generally recognize the potential benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum but continue to experience challenges in understanding curriculum requirements, preparing instruction, adapting teaching materials, and implementing curriculum principles consistently (Hasibuan & Kardena, 2024; Haan et al., 2025; Ni'mah et al., 2024; Reza et al., 2023; Restika & Maisarah, 2025; Rosadi & Alim, 2025). Similar implementation challenges have been reported across different educational settings, suggesting that curriculum reform requires more than policy dissemination and depends substantially on teachers' professional capacity to interpret and enact curriculum expectations (Efendi et al., 2025; Ramli et al., 2025; Wiranegara et al., 2025).

Teacher readiness constitutes another important dimension of curriculum implementation. Recent studies indicate that teachers demonstrate varying levels of preparedness for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and that perceived readiness does not always translate directly into effective classroom enactment (Kaluge & Usmi, 2024; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Saputri et al., 2023, 2024; Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). Teachers may express positive attitudes toward curriculum reform while still experiencing uncertainty regarding instructional planning, differentiated learning, assessment, and the interpretation of curriculum outcomes. Studies focusing on teachers' perceptions similarly reveal generally positive responses accompanied by practical concerns regarding implementation (Ahmada & Azizah, 2023; Fatma & Ratmanida, 2023; Lestari et al., 2024; Waruwu, 2024; Zai, 2024). Moreover, differences in teacher characteristics and teaching contexts may shape their readiness to respond to curriculum reform (Yuliana et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that favorable perceptions and self-reported readiness alone cannot guarantee successful curriculum enactment.

Closely connected to curriculum literacy are pedagogical skills, encompassing teachers' abilities to formulate learning objectives, plan instruction, select and adapt materials, employ appropriate teaching strategies, facilitate classroom interaction, differentiate learning, integrate technology, and conduct assessment. Effective curriculum implementation therefore depends on teachers' capacity to connect what the curriculum expects with decisions about how students should be taught and assessed. Recent evidence has highlighted the importance of pedagogical competence in supporting English instruction and student learning (Damayanti et al., 2023; Gea et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024; Mafulah & Febrianti, 2025). Within the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers have attempted to employ learner-centered strategies, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and other context-responsive approaches (Hazlinda & Settiawan, 2024; Notanubun et al., 2025; Ummah & Priyana, 2025; Zaki et al., 2025). These studies reinforce the proposition that successful curriculum reform depends not only on teachers' knowledge of policy but also on their pedagogical capacity to transform curriculum expectations into meaningful learning experiences.

Nevertheless, translating these principles into classroom practice remains demanding. Differentiated instruction, for example, requires teachers to respond to variations in students' proficiency, learning needs, motivation, and classroom conditions (Naipon et al., 2024; Notanubun et al., 2025). Similarly, curriculum implementation may require teachers to modify

instructional approaches according to contextual constraints and students' learning characteristics (Haan et al., 2025; Ningsih et al., 2024; Sujariati, 2025). Assessment constitutes another critical challenge. Although the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes assessment that supports learning, teachers continue to encounter difficulties translating curriculum principles into appropriate formative and differentiated assessment practices (Astari et al., 2023; Tsalsabilla & Oktavia, 2024). Evaluations of teachers' instructional modules also indicate the importance of alignment among curriculum objectives, learning activities, teaching materials, and assessment (Umar et al., 2024). These findings reveal a persistent tension between teachers' familiarity with learner-centered curriculum principles and their ability to enact those principles consistently in classroom instruction.

The existing literature can therefore be synthesized into several interconnected strands. First, studies of curriculum literacy conceptualize teachers as active curriculum interpreters and emphasize their ability to understand, evaluate, adapt, and translate curriculum expectations into pedagogical decisions (Hamurcu, 2023; Marek et al., 2025; Mdaka & Modiba, 2024; Park et al., 2024; Ross, 2024; Süer & Demirkol, 2023). Second, research on teacher readiness and perceptions indicates generally positive attitudes toward curriculum reform while simultaneously identifying uncertainty, uneven preparedness, and practical implementation difficulties (Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Saputri et al., 2024; Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Yuliana et al., 2025). Third, studies of pedagogical competence and instructional strategies demonstrate teachers' efforts to employ learner-centered, differentiated, project-based, and context-responsive teaching approaches (Hazlinda & Settiawan, 2024; Mafulah & Febrianti, 2025; Notanubun et al., 2025; Ummah & Priyana, 2025; Zaki et al., 2025). Fourth, studies of assessment and curriculum enactment reveal continuing challenges in aligning instructional and assessment practices with curriculum expectations (Astari et al., 2023; Tsalsabilla & Oktavia, 2024; Umar et al., 2024). Taken together, these strands demonstrate substantial scholarly attention to Merdeka Curriculum implementation while simultaneously revealing fragmentation in the ways teacher competence has been conceptualized and investigated.

The relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills is therefore particularly important in EFL teaching. Teachers may possess knowledge of curriculum principles but encounter difficulties translating those principles into meaningful language-learning activities. Conversely, teachers may possess substantial classroom experience and pedagogical knowledge but have limited understanding of the rationale, learning progression, and intended outcomes of a newly implemented curriculum. Recent studies on teacher agency further demonstrate that teachers do not enact curriculum requirements mechanically; rather, they interpret, negotiate, and adapt curriculum expectations in response to students, resources, institutional conditions, and broader educational environments (Al Fikri & Prasetya, 2024; Lubis et al., 2023; Rachmawati Nur & Maulida, 2024; Vu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Teacher agency thus provides an important explanation of how curriculum understanding is transformed into actual pedagogical decisions. Consequently, examining curriculum literacy alongside pedagogical skills offers a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the intended curriculum and the enacted curriculum.

This issue becomes particularly important because curriculum implementation occurs within diverse educational contexts. Indonesian EFL teachers work in schools with different learner characteristics, resources, institutional support, and professional development opportunities. Studies across Indonesian settings have demonstrated that curriculum implementation can vary according to school contexts and that teachers frequently adapt curriculum requirements to local conditions (Elvanuri et al., 2026; Haan et al., 2025; Ramli et al., 2025; Restika & Maisarah, 2025; Rosadi & Alim, 2025). International evidence likewise suggests that teachers' curriculum enactment is shaped by professional agency and the ecological contexts in which they work (Vu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the need to investigate not only whether teachers understand curriculum requirements but also how their curriculum knowledge interacts with pedagogical competence within actual instructional contexts.

Previous Indonesian EFL research has generated valuable evidence concerning teacher readiness, perceptions, agency, assessment, pedagogical strategies, differentiated learning, and implementation challenges (Astari et al., 2023; Haan et al., 2025; Notanubun et al., 2025; Saputri et al., 2024; Tsalsabilla & Oktavia, 2024; Wiranegara et al., 2025; Yuliana et al., 2025).

Recent international research has also strengthened the conceptualization of curriculum literacy as an important dimension of teacher competence and curriculum enactment (Marek et al., 2025; Mdaka & Modiba, 2024; Park et al., 2024; Ross, 2024; Süer & Demirkol, 2023). However, three important gaps remain. Conceptually, most Indonesian EFL studies examine teacher readiness, perceptions, pedagogical strategies, assessment, agency, or curriculum implementation as separate concerns rather than investigating curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills as interconnected dimensions of teacher competence. Empirically, it therefore remains insufficiently understood whether EFL teachers with stronger curriculum literacy also demonstrate stronger pedagogical skills and how curriculum understanding is manifested in instructional decision-making. Methodologically, much of the existing literature consists of context-specific qualitative studies, perception surveys, or investigations of individual constructs, leaving comparatively limited mixed-methods evidence that integrates broader quantitative patterns with teachers' explanations of how curriculum understanding is translated into pedagogical practice. These gaps are consequential because successful curriculum reform depends not simply on whether teachers know what a curriculum requires, but on whether they can transform that knowledge into contextually appropriate instruction, differentiation, materials, interaction, and assessment.

To address these conceptual, empirical, and methodological gaps, the present study examines curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills within a single explanatory sequential mixed-methods framework. The novelty of the study lies in examining the two constructs as interconnected dimensions of EFL teacher competence in the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum context rather than treating curriculum understanding and classroom pedagogy as separate areas of investigation. The study integrates quantitative evidence concerning the levels and relationship of curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills with qualitative evidence explaining how teachers translate curriculum understanding into instructional practices and negotiate contextual challenges. In doing so, the study extends previous research beyond predominantly perception-, readiness-, or implementation-focused investigations toward an integrated explanation of the relationship between curriculum understanding and pedagogical enactment.

Accordingly, this study investigates EFL teachers' curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills in English language teaching using a mixed-methods design. Specifically, it addresses three research questions: (1) What are the levels of EFL teachers' curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills in English language teaching? (2) What relationship exists between EFL teachers' curriculum literacy and their pedagogical skills? and (3) How do EFL teachers describe the ways in which their curriculum understanding informs their pedagogical practices and the challenges they encounter in translating curriculum expectations into classroom instruction? By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how curriculum knowledge is transformed into pedagogical practice.

The study has theoretical, pedagogical, and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to emerging scholarship on curriculum literacy, EFL teacher competence, teacher agency, and curriculum enactment by clarifying how teachers' curriculum understanding is associated with their pedagogical competence. Pedagogically, the findings can inform teacher education and continuing professional development programs that integrate curriculum interpretation with practical support for differentiated instruction, assessment, materials adaptation, and context-responsive teaching. Practically, the study can provide policymakers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and teacher educators with evidence concerning the professional and institutional conditions required to support teachers in translating curriculum expectations into classroom practice. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study therefore seeks not only to identify the relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills but also to explain how that relationship operates within the realities of EFL curriculum enactment.

Curriculum literacy refers to teachers' ability to understand, interpret, evaluate, adapt, and implement curriculum expectations in classroom practice. It extends beyond familiarity with curriculum documents because teachers are expected to connect curriculum objectives, learning outcomes, instructional content, teaching strategies, and assessment when making pedagogical decisions. Recent studies conceptualize curriculum literacy as a multidimensional professional competence through which teachers interpret curriculum intentions and transform them into

contextually appropriate instructional practices (Marek et al., 2025; Mdaka & Modiba, 2024; Park et al., 2024; Ross, 2024). Marek et al. (2025) emphasized teachers' capacity to navigate curriculum and instructional materials while considering teacher identity as well as learner and community assets, while Ross (2024) highlighted teachers' interpretation of curriculum as an important element in translating curriculum potential into classroom practice. In English language education, this competence is particularly important because EFL teachers must transform broad curriculum expectations into specific language-learning objectives, communicative activities, appropriate materials, instructional strategies, and assessment practices.

Empirical evidence further demonstrates that curriculum literacy involves interconnected capacities related to curriculum knowledge, interpretation, planning, contextual adaptation, implementation, and evaluation. Süer and Demirkol (2023) and Hamurcu (2023) highlighted the importance of teachers' competencies in understanding and implementing curriculum requirements, while Park et al. (2024) and Mdaka and Modiba (2024) demonstrated how curriculum literacy is reflected in teachers' interpretation of curriculum and their ability to transform curriculum expectations into instructional practices. In English language teaching, Astrianingsih and Dwinalida (2024) found that teachers implementing a CEFR-based curriculum incorporated learner autonomy and action-oriented learning but continued to experience challenges related to instructional time, media, authentic materials, grammar, and intercultural competence. Similar challenges have been identified among EFL teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in translating curriculum principles into instructional planning, differentiated learning, materials, and assessment (Hasibuan & Kardena, 2024; Reza et al., 2023; Restika & Maisarah, 2025). These findings indicate that curriculum literacy should be understood not simply as knowledge of formal curriculum requirements but as teachers' professional capacity to interpret, adapt, implement, and evaluate curriculum expectations within actual classroom contexts.

Pedagogical skills represent teachers' capacity to transform curriculum expectations into meaningful learning experiences through instructional planning, teaching strategies, classroom interaction, materials development, differentiation, technology integration, and assessment. Contemporary EFL pedagogy requires teachers not only to deliver linguistic content but also to facilitate meaningful language use, adapt instruction to learners' needs, provide effective feedback, and create opportunities for active participation. Recent studies emphasize that pedagogical competence plays an important role in enabling teachers to select and implement instructional practices appropriate to curriculum demands and classroom contexts (Damayanti et al., 2023; Gea et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024; Mafulah & Febrianti, 2025). In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, English teachers have employed learner-centered approaches such as discovery learning, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and technology-supported teaching (Hazlinda & Settiawan, 2024; Ummah & Priyana, 2025; Zaki et al., 2025). These practices demonstrate that successful curriculum implementation depends considerably on teachers' ability to translate broad curricular principles into appropriate and context-responsive instructional strategies.

Pedagogical skills are also reflected in teachers' abilities to respond to learner diversity and implement appropriate assessment practices. Notanubun et al. (2025) reported that EFL teachers perceived differentiated instruction positively but continued to encounter constraints related to self-efficacy, time, resources, and classroom management, illustrating the complexity of adapting instruction to diverse learner needs. Assessment constitutes another essential dimension of pedagogical competence, as teachers must align assessment practices with learning objectives and use assessment information to support students' learning. Astari et al. (2023) and Tsalsabilla and Oktavia (2024) demonstrated that EFL teachers had implemented various assessment practices within the Merdeka Curriculum, although challenges remained in translating curriculum expectations into consistent classroom assessment. Furthermore, recent studies of Merdeka Curriculum implementation indicate that teachers need to adapt instructional strategies, materials, and classroom practices according to contextual conditions and students' learning characteristics (Haan et al., 2025; Ningsih et al., 2024; Restika & Maisarah, 2025). Thus, EFL pedagogical skills encompass interconnected abilities to plan instruction, employ appropriate teaching strategies, differentiate learning, facilitate classroom interaction, utilize instructional resources, and conduct assessment in ways that effectively support language learning.

The implementation of curriculum reform in Indonesia illustrates the importance of both curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, differentiation, contextualization, assessment, and greater teacher autonomy. However, recent studies indicate that teachers' readiness and actual implementation do not always develop at the same level. Saputri et al. (2024) found that EFL teachers reported relatively high levels of readiness in competence, assessment, attitudes, commitment, and teaching resources, whereas qualitative findings revealed limitations in their practical implementation of curriculum process standards. Similarly, Yuliana et al. (2025) identified a moderate overall level of curriculum readiness among 179 EFL teachers in Bangka Belitung Province, indicating that readiness involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions rather than curriculum knowledge alone.

Other research has identified contextual and pedagogical barriers affecting curriculum enactment. Rosadi and Alim (2025) reported generally positive teacher perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum alongside difficulties in curriculum understanding and implementation. Restika and Maisarah (2025) identified challenges involving mixed-ability classrooms, student motivation, curriculum-aligned materials, assessment, and institutional support. Rachmawati Nur and Maulida (2024) and Al Fikri and Prasetya (2024) further demonstrated that EFL teachers actively exercise professional agency when interpreting and adapting curriculum reform. Meanwhile, Wiranegara et al. (2025) highlighted the interaction among policy, pedagogy, and classroom practice, while Efendi et al. (2025), through a review of 37 studies, identified teacher competence, pedagogical issues, and student-related factors as recurring challenges in Indonesian ELT curriculum implementation. Collectively, these studies suggest that curriculum implementation is not simply a matter of policy compliance but an interaction among curriculum understanding, pedagogical competence, teacher agency, and contextual conditions.

Curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills are conceptually distinct but functionally interconnected. Curriculum literacy enables teachers to understand what the curriculum expects, whereas pedagogical skills enable them to determine how those expectations can be achieved in classroom practice. For example, understanding curriculum learning outcomes represents curriculum literacy, while transforming those outcomes into lesson objectives, instructional activities, appropriate materials, differentiation, and assessment requires pedagogical competence. Similarly, understanding the curriculum's emphasis on formative assessment is insufficient unless teachers can construct appropriate tasks, interpret students' performance, provide feedback, and use assessment evidence to modify subsequent instruction (Astari et al., 2023; Tsalsabilla & Oktavia, 2024).

The same relationship can be observed in differentiated and contextualized instruction. Teachers may understand that curriculum policy expects responsiveness to individual learner differences, but implementing this expectation requires skills in diagnosing learner needs, adapting tasks, grouping students, scaffolding learning, and assessing different levels of performance (Notanubun et al., 2025). Moreover, teachers actively interpret curriculum requirements according to their professional experiences and classroom environments rather than implementing them mechanically (Rachmawati Nur & Maulida, 2024; Al Fikri & Prasetya, 2024). Wiranegara et al. (2025) likewise demonstrated that curriculum policy is transformed through pedagogical practice and contextual realities. Therefore, curriculum literacy can be regarded as an interpretive foundation for teaching, while pedagogical skills constitute the practical mechanisms through which teachers enact their curriculum understanding.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, consisting of quantitative and qualitative phases. In this design, quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative phase examined EFL teachers' levels of curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills and the relationship between the two constructs. The qualitative phase subsequently explored how teachers understood curriculum expectations, translated them into English language teaching practices, and experienced challenges during curriculum implementation.

An explanatory sequential design was selected rather than a convergent or exploratory sequential design because the study first sought to establish quantitative patterns concerning the levels and relationship of curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills and then required qualitative

evidence to explain how and why those patterns occurred in teachers' classroom practices. Thus, the qualitative phase was explicitly dependent on the results of the quantitative phase rather than being conducted independently or prior to quantitative measurement. Integration occurred at three points: participant selection, interview development, and interpretation. Specifically, questionnaire results were used to identify teachers with varying curriculum literacy and pedagogical skill profiles for follow-up interviews; quantitative findings informed the issues explored during the interviews; and qualitative themes were subsequently connected with quantitative results during interpretation. This design was considered appropriate because previous research has demonstrated the usefulness of mixed-methods inquiry for investigating English teachers' curriculum literacy and discrepancies between reported competence and practical curriculum implementation (Kuloğlu & Tutuş, 2022; Saputri et al., 2024).

The population of the study consisted of 300 English teachers teaching at senior high schools in Palembang, Indonesia. From this population, 150 EFL teachers were selected for the quantitative phase using purposive sampling. Participants were required to meet the following criteria: (1) being active English teachers at senior high schools in Palembang, (2) having experience implementing the current national curriculum, and (3) being willing to participate voluntarily in the study. The quantitative sample represented 50% of the identified population and included teachers with varied demographic and professional backgrounds. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of quantitative participants*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	21–30 years	32	21.3
	31–40 years	51	34.0
	41–50 years	43	28.7
	>50 years	24	16.0
Teaching experience	<5 years	27	18.0
	5–10 years	46	30.7
	11–20 years	49	32.7
	>20 years	28	18.7
Educational background	Bachelor's degree	112	74.7
	Master's degree	38	25.3
School type	Public	91	60.7
	Private	59	39.3
Total		150	100.0

As shown in Table 1, the participants represented diverse age groups, levels of teaching experience, educational backgrounds, and school contexts. The largest age group was 31–40 years (34.0%), while teachers with 11–20 years of teaching experience constituted the largest experience category (32.7%). Most participants held bachelor's degrees (74.7%), and 60.7% taught in public senior high schools. This demographic variation provided perspectives from EFL teachers with different professional backgrounds and teaching contexts.

Following the quantitative analysis, 10 teachers were purposively selected from the 150 survey participants for the qualitative phase. Selection was based on variations in curriculum literacy and pedagogical skill scores to obtain information-rich cases representing different quantitative profiles. This connecting procedure enabled the qualitative phase to investigate how teachers with different levels of curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills interpreted and enacted curriculum expectations. Selecting qualitative participants based on quantitative results is consistent with explanatory sequential mixed-methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

To maintain confidentiality, interview participants were assigned codes T1–T10. Their profiles are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Profiles of qualitative participants*

Code	Age	Teaching	Education	School Type	Curriculum	Pedagogical Skills

		Experience			Literacy Profile	Profile
T1	29	5 years	Bachelor's	Private	High	High
T2	32	8 years	Bachelor's	Public	High	Moderate
T3	35	10 years	Master's	Public	Moderate	High
T4	38	13 years	Bachelor's	Private	Moderate	Moderate
T5	41	16 years	Master's	Public	High	High
T6	43	18 years	Bachelor's	Public	Moderate	Moderate
T7	46	21 years	Bachelor's	Private	Moderate	High
T8	48	23 years	Master's	Public	High	Moderate
T9	51	26 years	Bachelor's	Public	Moderate	Moderate
T10	54	29 years	Master's	Private	High	High

Table 2 shows that the qualitative participants represented different ages, teaching experiences, educational backgrounds, school types, and quantitative profiles. This variation was intentionally maintained to capture diverse perspectives and to provide richer explanations of the quantitative findings. The qualitative sample therefore served an explanatory purpose rather than statistical representation.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) measuring curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills. Curriculum literacy comprised curriculum understanding, interpretation of learning outcomes, planning, implementation, adaptation, and evaluation (Hamurcu, 2023; Marek et al., 2025; Mdaka & Modiba, 2024; Süer & Demirkol, 2023), while pedagogical skills covered instructional planning, teaching strategies, materials adaptation, differentiated instruction, classroom interaction, technology integration, and assessment (Astari et al., 2023; Hazlinda & Settiawan, 2024; Mafulah & Febrianti, 2025; Notanubun et al., 2025). Representative items assessed teachers' ability to translate curriculum outcomes into instructional objectives, adapt curriculum requirements to students' needs, select appropriate teaching strategies, implement differentiated instruction, and use assessment to improve teaching. The questionnaire underwent expert content validation focusing on item relevance, clarity, construct alignment, and contextual appropriateness, followed by pilot testing. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of $\geq .70$ considered acceptable.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings. The interview protocol addressed curriculum interpretation, instructional planning, materials adaptation, differentiated instruction, assessment, and implementation challenges. Sample questions included: "How does your curriculum understanding influence your lesson planning?", "How do you adapt curriculum expectations to different student needs?", and "What challenges do you encounter when translating curriculum expectations into classroom practice?" Interviews were conducted individually, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for thematic analysis. Follow-up probes were used to obtain clarification and concrete classroom examples. The interviews generated recurring patterns and sufficient explanatory depth to support interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Data collection was conducted sequentially. In the first phase, the questionnaire was distributed to the 150 selected EFL teachers after they had received information about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent. The completed questionnaires were checked, coded, and prepared for quantitative analysis. This phase generated information regarding teachers' levels of curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills and the statistical relationship between the two constructs.

After the quantitative analysis, the results were examined to identify patterns requiring further explanation. Quantitative scores were then used to select interview participants representing different curriculum literacy and pedagogical skill profiles. The quantitative findings also informed the emphasis of the interview questions, particularly regarding curriculum interpretation, differentiation, assessment, materials adaptation, and the translation of curriculum expectations into classroom practices. This connecting procedure constituted an important point of integration between the two phases.

After the quantitative results were obtained, 10 teachers were selected for individual semi-structured interviews. The selection was informed

by their questionnaire scores to represent variations in curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills. The interviews explored teachers' experiences in interpreting learning outcomes, planning instruction, selecting teaching strategies and materials, implementing differentiated learning, conducting assessment, and addressing challenges encountered during curriculum implementation. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. This sequential procedure enabled qualitative evidence to provide explanations for patterns identified in the quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were calculated at the construct, dimension, and item levels to describe teachers' curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills. Normality and linearity were examined before inferential analysis. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills when parametric assumptions were satisfied; otherwise, Spearman's rank-order correlation was applied. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Pearson correlation was considered appropriate because the study focused on the relationship between the two constructs rather than causal prediction.

Interview data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2021). The analysis involved transcript familiarization, initial coding, grouping related codes into candidate themes, reviewing and refining themes against the dataset, and interpreting the final themes. Codes focused on curriculum understanding, instructional planning, curriculum enactment, differentiation, assessment, contextual adaptation, and implementation challenges. Coding and theme development were discussed among the researchers to resolve interpretive differences. Trustworthiness was strengthened through systematic comparison of transcripts, codes, and themes, peer discussion, cross-case comparison, and documentation of analytical decisions.

1) Mixed-Methods Integration

Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through connecting and explanatory procedures. Quantitative results informed the selection of interview participants and the focus of follow-up interviews, while qualitative themes were used to explain, expand, or contextualize the statistical patterns. Areas of convergence and discrepancy between questionnaire results and teachers' reported classroom practices were examined to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how curriculum literacy was associated with pedagogical skills and translated into EFL classroom practices.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained through the relevant institutional and school authorities. All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw without consequences. Informed consent was obtained before questionnaire administration and interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by protecting personally identifiable information and using participant codes in the reporting of qualitative findings. The collected data were used solely for research purposes and were handled confidentially throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EFL teachers' curriculum literacy

The first analysis examined the level of curriculum literacy among the 150 EFL teachers. Curriculum literacy was measured across six dimensions: understanding curriculum principles, interpreting learning outcomes, curriculum-based instructional planning, curriculum implementation, contextual adaptation, and curriculum evaluation. The descriptive results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *EFL Teachers' Curriculum Literacy (N = 150)*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Category
Understanding curriculum principles	4.21	0.51	Very High
Interpreting learning outcomes	4.08	0.55	High
Curriculum-based instructional planning	4.12	0.53	High
Curriculum implementation	3.94	0.61	High
Contextual adaptation	3.87	0.64	High
Curriculum evaluation	3.91	0.59	High

Overall curriculum literacy	4.02	0.48	High

The teachers demonstrated a high overall level of curriculum literacy (M = 4.02, SD = 0.48). Understanding curriculum principles obtained the highest mean (M = 4.21, SD = 0.51), followed by curriculum-based instructional planning (M = 4.12, SD = 0.53) and interpretation of learning outcomes (M = 4.08, SD = 0.55). In contrast, contextual adaptation obtained the lowest mean (M = 3.87, SD = 0.64), followed by curriculum evaluation (M = 3.91, SD = 0.59) and curriculum implementation (M = 3.94, SD = 0.61).

The dimension-level pattern therefore indicates an important distinction between teachers' conceptual understanding of the curriculum and their ability to enact it contextually. Although all dimensions were rated highly, the lower means and greater variability for contextual adaptation, implementation, and evaluation suggest that applying curriculum expectations in diverse classroom situations was less consistent than understanding curriculum principles and planning instruction. Item-level means and standard deviations were also examined to identify specific strengths and difficulties within these dimensions and should be reported in the supplementary instrument-level results.

EFL teachers' pedagogical skills

The second analysis investigated teachers' pedagogical skills across seven dimensions: instructional planning, teaching strategies, materials selection and adaptation, differentiated instruction, classroom interaction, technology integration, and assessment practices. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

Table 2. *EFL teachers' pedagogical skills (N = 150)*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Category
Instructional planning	4.15	0.50	High
Teaching strategies	4.09	0.54	High
Materials selection and adaptation	3.98	0.58	High
Differentiated instruction	3.72	0.68	High
Classroom interaction	4.18	0.49	Very High
Technology integration	3.89	0.65	High
Assessment practices	3.96	0.57	High
Overall pedagogical skills	4.00	0.46	High

The overall mean for pedagogical skills was 4.00 (SD = 0.46), indicating a high level of perceived pedagogical competence. Classroom interaction obtained the highest score (M = 4.18, SD = 0.49), followed by instructional planning (M = 4.15, SD = 0.50) and teaching strategies (M = 4.09, SD = 0.54). These findings indicate that the teachers were particularly confident in organizing classroom interaction, preparing instruction, and selecting strategies to facilitate English learning.

The comparatively lower mean and larger standard deviation for differentiated instruction indicate not only a relative area of difficulty but also greater variation among teachers. This pattern suggests that teachers were generally confident in organizing and interacting within the classroom but differed more substantially in their capacity to respond systematically to heterogeneous learner needs. Thus, the dimension-level analysis provides a more nuanced interpretation than the high overall pedagogical skill score alone.

Relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills

Prior to correlation analysis, the distribution of the two main variables was examined. The normality test indicated that the curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills scores did not significantly deviate from normality ($p > .05$). Examination of the scatterplot also indicated an approximately linear relationship between the two variables. Therefore, Pearson's product-moment correlation was used.

Table 3. *Correlation between Curriculum Literacy and Pedagogical Skills*

Variables	M	SD	r	p
Curriculum literacy	4.02	0.48		
Pedagogical skills	4.00	0.46	.68	< .001

A significant positive relationship was found between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills, $r = .68$, $p < .001$. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .46$) indicates that the constructs shared approximately 46% of their variance.

Beyond statistical significance, the magnitude of this relationship is practically meaningful because it indicates substantial overlap between teachers' curriculum understanding and their reported pedagogical competence. In professional terms, teachers who were better able to interpret curriculum principles and learning outcomes also tended to report stronger abilities in planning, selecting strategies, adapting materials, interacting with learners, and assessing learning. Nevertheless, approximately 54% of the variance was not shared, emphasizing that pedagogical competence is also associated with other teacher-, learner-, classroom-, and institutional-level factors. Importantly, the correlation demonstrates association rather than causation. The cross-sectional data cannot establish that stronger curriculum literacy causes stronger pedagogical skills or determine the direction of influence between the constructs.

Qualitative findings

The interviews with 10 selected teachers generated four themes that primarily addressed the third research question concerning how curriculum understanding informed pedagogical practices and what challenges teachers encountered during curriculum enactment. The qualitative findings also provided explanatory evidence for the quantitative patterns identified in Research Questions 1 and 2.

Table 4. *Summary of qualitative themes*

Theme	Main Focus
Curriculum understanding as a foundation for planning	Learning outcomes guided objectives, materials, and lesson activities
Translating curriculum into flexible teaching	Teachers adapted strategies and materials to students' proficiency and classroom conditions
Challenges in differentiation and assessment	Mixed abilities, time constraints, and assessment demands complicated implementation
Contextual and institutional influences	Resources, technology, professional development, and school support affected implementation

Theme 1: Curriculum understanding as the foundation for instructional planning

The first theme indicated that teachers regarded curriculum understanding as an important starting point for instructional planning. Participants explained that they generally examined learning outcomes before determining lesson objectives, materials, classroom activities, and assessment. Teachers with a clearer understanding of curriculum expectations reported greater confidence in determining what students should achieve and how lessons should be organized.

The interviews also supported the relatively high quantitative scores for understanding curriculum principles and instructional planning. However, participants distinguished between understanding curriculum documents and implementing them in actual classrooms. Several teachers explained that curriculum requirements appeared relatively clear when planning lessons but became more complicated when adjusted to students with different levels of English proficiency. Thus, curriculum knowledge functioned as a foundation for teaching but required pedagogical judgment during implementation.

Theme 2: Translating curriculum expectations into flexible teaching practices

The second theme concerned teachers' attempts to translate curriculum expectations into flexible classroom practices. Participants described using discussions, group work, presentations, project-based activities, digital resources, and contextualized materials to make English learning more meaningful. Teachers also reported adapting textbook materials when the language level, examples, or activities did not correspond to their students' needs.

The interviews revealed that teachers did not interpret curriculum implementation as following teaching modules rigidly. Instead, they described adjusting activities according to students' proficiency, classroom conditions, available time, and learning resources. This finding helps explain the significant positive relationship between

curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills: teachers who understood curriculum expectations more clearly appeared better able to make purposeful decisions concerning strategies, materials, and classroom activities.

Theme 3: Challenges in differentiated instruction and assessment

Differentiated instruction emerged as one of the most challenging areas, consistent with its comparatively lower quantitative mean (M = 3.72). Teachers generally understood that students differed in proficiency, learning pace, motivation, and participation; however, providing different instructional support within the same classroom was considered difficult. Large classes, limited instructional time, and substantial differences in students' English proficiency were frequently mentioned as practical constraints.

Assessment presented similar challenges. Teachers reported using formative and summative assessment, but some participants found it difficult to continuously assess individual progress while simultaneously managing classroom instruction. The interviews therefore clarified why teachers could demonstrate relatively strong curriculum understanding while reporting lower confidence in differentiation and certain aspects of assessment. The difficulty was not necessarily a lack of awareness of curriculum expectations but the practical complexity of implementing those expectations under actual classroom conditions.

Theme 4: Contextual and institutional factors influencing curriculum enactment

The fourth theme demonstrated that curriculum enactment was influenced by factors beyond individual teacher competence. Participants identified access to digital resources, internet connectivity, school facilities, professional development, collaboration among teachers, and institutional support as factors affecting their ability to implement curriculum expectations. Teachers with better access to instructional resources reported greater flexibility in selecting materials and integrating technology into English lessons.

Professional development was also viewed as important. Participants valued curriculum workshops but indicated that practical training involving lesson design, differentiated instruction, assessment, and classroom examples was more useful than predominantly theoretical explanations of curriculum policy. These accounts suggest that improving curriculum literacy alone may not be sufficient; teachers also require sustained opportunities to develop practical pedagogical skills and contextual support for curriculum enactment.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings

Integration of the two phases demonstrated substantial convergence between the quantitative and qualitative findings. Quantitatively, teachers reported high levels of curriculum literacy (M = 4.02, SD = 0.48) and pedagogical skills (M = 4.00, SD = 0.46), with a significant positive relationship between the constructs ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). Qualitatively, teachers consistently explained that understanding learning outcomes and curriculum expectations guided their decisions concerning lesson objectives, materials, strategies, and assessment.

Table 5. *Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings*

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Explanation	Integrated Interpretation
High curriculum literacy (M = 4.02)	Teachers understood learning outcomes and used them for planning	Curriculum understanding provided a foundation for instructional decisions
High pedagogical skills (M = 4.00)	Teachers used varied strategies, materials, and classroom activities	Teachers were generally able to translate curriculum expectations into teaching practices
Contextual adaptation was comparatively lower (M = 3.87)	Mixed proficiency, time, and resources complicated adaptation	Curriculum enactment was influenced by classroom and institutional conditions
Differentiated instruction was the lowest pedagogical dimension (M = 3.72)	Teachers found individualized support difficult in heterogeneous classrooms	Understanding differentiation did not always result in easy classroom implementation
Curriculum literacy correlated with pedagogical skills ($r = .68$, $p < .001$)	Teachers described curriculum understanding as guiding planning and instructional decisions	Curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills functioned as interconnected professional

competencies

Nevertheless, the qualitative findings also revealed an important qualification to the generally positive quantitative results. Teachers' understanding of curriculum principles did not always translate seamlessly into classroom implementation. Differentiated instruction, contextual adaptation, assessment, and technology integration were affected by classroom diversity, time, resources, and institutional conditions. Thus, curriculum literacy appeared to provide an important foundation for pedagogical practice, but its enactment was mediated by contextual factors.

Overall, the integrated findings indicate that curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills are closely interconnected in EFL teaching. Teachers who were better able to understand and interpret curriculum expectations tended to demonstrate stronger pedagogical competence. However, the movement from the intended curriculum to the enacted curriculum was not automatic. Effective curriculum enactment depended on the interaction among curriculum understanding, pedagogical skills, teacher judgment, learner characteristics, available resources, and institutional support.

The findings indicate that EFL teachers demonstrated high curriculum literacy (M = 4.02, SD = 0.48), with stronger performance in understanding curriculum principles and planning than in contextual adaptation. This finding aligns with recent studies that conceptualize curriculum literacy as teachers' capacity to interpret curriculum expectations and transform them into instructional decisions (Marek et al., 2025; Mdaka & Modiba, 2024; Ross, 2024; Süer & Demirkol, 2023). However, the uneven scores across dimensions suggest that understanding curriculum principles does not automatically ensure teachers' ability to adapt them to diverse learners and classroom contexts. Curriculum literacy should therefore be understood as a context-sensitive competence involving interpretation, adaptation, and enactment rather than merely knowledge of curriculum documents.

Teachers also demonstrated high pedagogical skills (M = 4.00, SD = 0.46), particularly in classroom interaction and instructional planning. This result is consistent with studies documenting teachers' use of learner-centered and context-responsive strategies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Hazlinda & Settiawan, 2024; Ummah & Priyana, 2025; Zaki et al., 2025). Nevertheless, differentiated instruction received a comparatively lower score. The interviews revealed that heterogeneous proficiency, limited instructional time, resources, and classroom management constrained differentiation, supporting previous evidence that EFL teachers experience practical barriers when responding to learner diversity (Naipon et al., 2024; Notanubun et al., 2025). These findings indicate that difficulties with differentiation reflect not only teacher competence but also the contextual conditions in which pedagogical decisions are enacted.

A central finding was the substantial positive relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills (r = .68, p < .001; r^2 = .46). Qualitative evidence explained this relationship by showing that teachers used curriculum outcomes as a basis for determining instructional objectives, strategies, materials, and assessment. This supports the view that curriculum interpretation and pedagogical enactment are interconnected aspects of teachers' professional competence (Marek et al., 2025; Park et al., 2024). However, the 46% shared variance also indicates that pedagogical competence is influenced by factors beyond curriculum literacy. Teacher experience, professional development, learner characteristics, resources, collaboration, and institutional support may also contribute to pedagogical practice. Because the study was correlational and cross-sectional, the relationship should not be interpreted causally.

The integrated findings further revealed a discrepancy between teachers' relatively high self-reported competence and the practical challenges described in interviews. Similar inconsistencies between perceived readiness and actual difficulties in curriculum implementation have been reported in recent Indonesian EFL research (Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Saputri et al., 2024; Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025). Teachers reported difficulties in differentiation, assessment, contextual adaptation, and technology-supported instruction despite generally positive questionnaire responses. This divergence highlights the value of the explanatory sequential design because qualitative evidence provided contextual explanations for patterns that were less visible in the quantitative results. At the same time, the high questionnaire scores should be interpreted as perceived competence, since self-reported responses may

be influenced by social desirability and may not fully represent actual classroom performance.

Contextual and institutional conditions also shaped curriculum enactment. Teachers' capacity to implement curriculum expectations was influenced by resources, technology access, professional development, collaboration, learner characteristics, and school support, consistent with recent studies showing that Merdeka Curriculum implementation varies across educational contexts (Haan et al., 2025; Ramli et al., 2025; Restika & Maisarah, 2025; Rosadi & Alim, 2025). Curriculum implementation should therefore not be treated solely as an individual teacher competence issue. Professional development should integrate curriculum interpretation with practical training in differentiated instruction, assessment, materials adaptation, technology-supported teaching, and strategies for mixed-proficiency classrooms, while schools should provide collaborative planning opportunities and adequate instructional support.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the quantitative data were based on self-reported perceptions and may be affected by social desirability and common-method bias. Second, the study was conducted among senior high school EFL teachers in Palembang, limiting generalizability to other regions and educational levels. Third, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions or examination of changes in teacher competence over time. Finally, the absence of direct classroom observations and document analysis limits independent verification of reported pedagogical practices. Future studies should therefore employ multi-site and longitudinal designs and incorporate classroom observations and multiple data sources to examine how curriculum literacy develops and is translated into actual teaching practices.

Overall, the findings support curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills as interconnected but non-deterministic dimensions of EFL teacher competence. Curriculum literacy provides an interpretive foundation for pedagogical decision-making, but successful curriculum enactment depends on the interaction among curriculum understanding, pedagogical competence, professional judgment, learner characteristics, resources, and institutional conditions. The contribution of this study therefore lies not only in demonstrating a substantial relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills but also in explaining why high perceived competence may coexist with difficulties in classroom enactment.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that EFL teachers demonstrated high levels of curriculum literacy ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.48$) and pedagogical skills ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.46$), with a significant positive relationship between the two constructs ($r = .68$, $p < .001$). Stronger curriculum understanding was associated with stronger pedagogical competence, although this relationship should not be interpreted as causal. The qualitative findings further revealed that curriculum understanding guided teachers' instructional planning and pedagogical decision-making, while challenges remained particularly in contextual adaptation, differentiated instruction, assessment, and institutional support. These findings highlight an important distinction between understanding curriculum expectations and consistently translating them into classroom practice.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature on curriculum literacy, EFL teacher competence, and curriculum enactment by demonstrating that curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills are interconnected yet distinct dimensions of teacher competence. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that professional development should move beyond curriculum policy awareness toward practice-oriented support that scaffolds teachers' ability to translate curriculum expectations into context-responsive instruction. Such support should particularly address differentiated instruction, formative and summative assessment, materials adaptation, technology-supported teaching, and strategies for responding to heterogeneous learner needs. At the institutional level, school leaders and teacher education institutions should provide sustained professional learning, collaborative planning opportunities, appropriate instructional resources, and contextual support that enable teachers to enact curriculum principles effectively.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the quantitative results were based primarily on self-reported data and may therefore reflect teachers' perceived competence rather than their actual classroom performance. Second, the study involved 150 EFL teachers from senior high schools in a single city, Palembang, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational levels and

regional contexts. Third, the cross-sectional design captured curriculum literacy and pedagogical skills at one point in time and therefore cannot establish causal relationships or changes in teacher competence over time.

Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples across schools, educational levels, and regions in Indonesia. Longitudinal studies could examine how curriculum literacy and pedagogical competence develop over time, while classroom observations and other performance-based evidence could complement teachers' self-reports and provide a more direct account of curriculum enactment. Future studies should also investigate additional factors, including teacher agency, teaching experience, professional development, school leadership, resources, and institutional support, to explain how individual and contextual conditions shape the relationship between curriculum literacy and pedagogical practice.

Overall, this study demonstrates that effective EFL curriculum implementation depends not only on teachers' understanding of curriculum expectations but also on their capacity and contextual opportunities to transform that understanding into meaningful classroom practices. By connecting curriculum literacy with pedagogical competence and examining the conditions affecting their enactment, the study provides an integrated perspective that can inform EFL teacher education, professional development, and more context-responsive curriculum implementation.

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