

## EMPOWERING EFL WRITING: TEACHERS' VOICES ON CURRICULUM INNOVATION

**Ary Maulana Muaripin, Meri Perda, Sajidin, Dedi Sulaiman**

Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

E-mail: [muaripin95@gmail.com](mailto:muaripin95@gmail.com)

Received: 2025-05-31

Accepted: 2025-06-14

Published: 2025-06-26

### Abstract

This article explores the contribution of curriculum innovation in writing instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at junior high schools in Indonesia. Through a qualitative study design, employing semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers, the research investigates their beliefs, implementation models, and challenges encountered during curriculum changes. The findings reveal that teachers generally perceive curriculum innovation as beneficial and educative. However, the lack of resources, inadequate training, and limited institutional support are significant barriers that hinder the effective implementation of the innovations. Teachers reported that these constraints impede their ability to fully integrate and apply the new curriculum effectively in the classroom. In response, policy recommendations are made, emphasizing the importance of providing sufficient resources, ongoing professional development, and stronger institutional support. These actions would help bridge the gap between curriculum innovations and the practical realities of classroom teaching, enabling teachers to optimize the benefits of curriculum changes in EFL instruction.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum innovation; EFL writing; junior high school; qualitative research; teacher perception*

### 1. Introduction

Writing within the context of world English language learning is one of the most difficult and challenging skills for EFL students, particularly in secondary education. Writing involves not only grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to construct a text, express focus, and organize thoughts cohesively (Hyland, 2023; Nation, 2021). In junior high schools in Indonesia, students often face difficulties related to these aspects, leading to their low writing proficiency levels in both national examinations and classroom assessments (Kusumaningrum, Kurniawati, & Santosa, 2019). Contributing factors include a lack of exposure to English writing outside of the classroom, limited class time, and traditional grammar-focused teaching methods (Herlina & Manara, 2022).

With the growing influence of new curriculum changes in Indonesia, there has been a promotion of communicative competence and higher-order thinking skills in language teaching and learning (Kemendikbud, 2020). The new curriculum is based on task-based and

genre approaches to pedagogy, designed to foster authentic, student-centered learning. However, the extent to which these curricular innovations are understood and implemented in EFL writing classrooms has not been well-investigated. In this process, teachers, as the primary advocates of educational change, play a crucial role. Their interpretation, adaptation, and professional responses are vital to the success of curriculum reforms (Setiawan & Kuswandono, 2021; Jiang & Lee, 2021).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 EFL Writing Instruction**

Writing in a second or foreign language is a complex process resulting from the interaction between linguistic knowledge, rhetorical understanding, and metacognitive abilities. According to Zhang, Yan, & Wang (2020), EFL writing instruction should not only focus on grammatical correctness but also on fluency and creativity. They argue that developing writing proficiency requires an approach that integrates both language mechanics and the ability to express ideas effectively. Research by Tran and Pham (2022) emphasizes the importance of involving learners in recursive procedures such as drafting, revising, and editing to develop both form and content mastery. Furthermore, writing plays a crucial role in language reinforcement and lexical development (Cheng, 2021).

Three major pedagogical models have been used to teach EFL writing: the product approach, focusing on the accurate copy of model texts; the process approach, emphasizing repeated practice and feedback; and the genre-based approach, which focuses on the conventions and purposes underpinning specific types of texts (Davis & Lighfoot, 2020). Among these, the genre-based model has become influential in Asia, including in Indonesia, due to its alignment with national curriculum objectives and academic literacy needs (Emilia, 2021).

### **2.2 Curriculum Innovation**

Curriculum change is the deliberate and systematic process aimed at improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Print, 1993). "Curriculum reform is multileveled and multipatterned, influenced by one's conception of educational practice, by institutional policy, and by broader social and cultural circumstances" (Fullan, 2022, p. 543). In the EFL field, many innovations specifically involve integrating digital technology, collaborative learning, and genre-based instruction for authentic language use (Jiang, 2021)

The 2013 Curriculum of Indonesia (Kurikulum 2013 or K-13) represents an ambitious step toward a competency-based approach, aiming to promote communicative competence and learner autonomy (Kemendikbud, 2014). Despite the progressive nature of this approach, discrepancies in its implementation—particularly in EFL writing classes—have been reported due to a lack of teacher training and the unavailability of teaching materials adapted to the local context (Astuti, Aziz, Sumarti, & Bharati, 2019; Herlina & Manara, 2022).

### **2.3 Teachers' Role in Curriculum Reform**

Teachers are key actors in the successful adoption of educational reforms. According to Jiang and Lee (2021), teachers interpret policy texts and apply them practically in classrooms. Their pedagogical values, personal histories, and institutional contexts all influence the enacted curriculum. Carless (2020) argues that if reforms are perceived as out

of sync with classroom realities or too directive, teachers may only engage superficially with them.

In Indonesia, research by Astuti, Aziz, Sumarti, & Bharati (2019) and Setiawan & Kuswandono (2021) demonstrates that teachers encounter role conflicts and identity negotiations as they engage in reform efforts. The role of teacher agency—the ability to make independent, context-specific teaching decisions—is increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable curriculum reform. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers receive support through professional learning communities and inclusive policy designs.

## 2.4 Studies on Curriculum Innovation in EFL Writing

Empirical evidence supports the potential of curriculum innovation in improving EFL writing performance. Tuan (2011) shows that genre-based instruction enhances textual structure and communication clarity. In Arab EFL settings, Fareh (2010) reports positive impacts and stresses that teacher readiness and institutional cohesion are critical for success.

Indonesian studies also provide convergent evidence. Kusumaningrum, Kurniawati, & Santosa (2019) find that project-based learning fosters critical thinking and writing competency. Herlina and Manara (2022) report that while teachers acknowledge the benefits of writing reforms, they face significant challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms and pressure from standardized tests. These findings highlight the need for continuous education, training, and a supportive environment for teachers to effectively implement curriculum innovations.

## 3. Research Method

The research design of this study was qualitative, with a thematic analysis employed to explore how curriculum innovation was implemented and perceived in junior high EFL writing instruction. Twelve EFL teachers from both public and private secondary schools in West Java and Central Java were purposefully selected to participate in the study due to their involvement with the K-13 curriculum.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into the teachers' experiences. The interview schedule focused on four areas of concentration: understanding of curriculum innovation, teaching strategies, implementation issues, and classroom impact. The interviews, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, and were later transcribed and translated into English. Analysis was conducted inductively using NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2018), with coding and theme development guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model. To enhance the rigor of the study, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trail record-keeping were employed (Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were observed throughout the research process. The purposive sampling technique was chosen to ensure participants with relevant experience in implementing the K-13 curriculum were included in the study.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Implementation of Curriculum Innovations

Teachers reported adopting *process writing* methods, peer review, and genre-based models, in alignment with the guidelines of the national curriculum. Instructional strategies for teaching chaining included the use of modeled cue words, guided practice (or shadowing), and stages of independent writing (Emilia, 2011). Peer response activities were integrated to promote student reflection, encourage collaboration, and support iterative textual revision. These approaches are consistent with global trends in writing pedagogy, which emphasize learner agency, scaffolding, and social dimensions of writing development (Hyland, 2003).

However, the extent and consistency of implementation varied notably across contexts. Urban schools, generally advantaged by greater staffing levels, better infrastructure, and more consistent access to resources, tended to demonstrate a higher and more sustained level of curriculum innovation. These schools often had greater capacity to organize professional development, provide teaching aids, and engage in reflective practice communities. In contrast, rural schools cited limited facilities, insufficient teaching materials, and restricted access to updated resources as major barriers that hindered the full realization of these pedagogical approaches (Setiawan & Kuswandono, 2021). Teachers in rural settings also reported feelings of professional isolation and limited opportunities to engage with peers for collaborative learning and support. This uneven uptake reflects systemic inequities and illustrates how structural conditions—including funding allocation, policy implementation fidelity, and local leadership—shape the capacity of schools to enact national curriculum reforms (Carless, 2005).

Moreover, the pressures of high-stakes testing and accountability frameworks appeared to moderate the extent to which process-oriented pedagogies were prioritized. In several cases, teachers felt compelled to narrow their focus to test-preparation activities, particularly in under-resourced settings where school rankings were tied to exam results. This tension between innovation and performativity aligns with broader critiques of curriculum reform efforts that are insufficiently attuned to local realities (Nguyen, 2023). These findings emphasize the critical need to address infrastructural and resource disparities if curriculum innovations are to be implemented equitably across educational settings. Without such interventions, reforms risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them. Ensuring that all teachers, regardless of school context, have access to sustained professional learning, mentoring, and practical resources is essential for the success of these initiatives. Future research should investigate scalable and context-sensitive strategies—such as targeted professional development, enhanced resource distribution, the integration of digital learning tools, and the fostering of teacher networks—to support educators in under-resourced regions.

Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the sustainability and impact of these innovations on student learning outcomes would provide valuable insight into the long-term effectiveness of the reforms. Such studies could also explore how teacher agency, school culture, and community engagement contribute to the embedding of curriculum innovations in diverse contexts. There is a pressing need for policy frameworks that not only mandate change but actively support its realization through adaptive, locally responsive measures.

## 4.2 Challenges Encountered

The successful implementation of the curriculum encountered several significant barriers that impeded the full realization of its intended pedagogical innovations. Chief among these was the lack of focused training in genre-based and process-oriented writing pedagogy. While the curriculum advocated for these approaches, many teachers reported insufficient formal preparation in applying them effectively in classroom contexts. As a result, educators often resorted to self-study, informal peer support, and trial-and-error strategies to bridge the knowledge gap. This reliance on ad hoc learning solutions placed additional strain on teachers and contributed to uneven pedagogical practices across schools.

Moreover, structural constraints within the educational system further compounded these challenges. Large class sizes and rigid timetables limited teachers' ability to engage students in extended writing processes, including drafting, peer review, and revision cycles. Such conditions curtailed opportunities for individualized feedback and sustained writing development, which are core to process-oriented pedagogy. In many cases, teachers expressed frustration at the disconnect between the curriculum's ambitions and the realities of their teaching environments.

The dominance of standardized testing created an additional layer of complexity. The high-stakes nature of these assessments heightened pressure on teachers and schools to prioritize test performance, often at the expense of pedagogical practices that foster deeper learning and critical literacy skills. This tension between policy mandates and practical enactment aligns with Carless's (2005) critique of top-down educational reforms, which frequently overlook local contexts and the operational conditions necessary for meaningful change.

Furthermore, disparities in resource distribution exacerbated these difficulties, particularly in rural and under-resourced schools. Limited access to teaching aids, professional development opportunities, and up-to-date materials left many educators ill-equipped to translate curriculum guidelines into effective classroom practice. These findings highlight not only the technical challenges of curriculum implementation but also the systemic inequities that shape educational opportunities and outcomes.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Policy makers and education leaders should prioritize sustained, context-sensitive professional development that builds teachers' confidence and competence in implementing genre-based and process-oriented writing instruction. Additionally, systemic reforms that reduce class sizes, promote flexible scheduling, and de-emphasize high-stakes testing would create conditions more conducive to authentic writing pedagogy. Future research might explore the interplay between teacher agency, institutional support, and curriculum fidelity to identify sustainable pathways for overcoming these barriers.

## 4.3 Perceived Impact on Student Writing

Despite the challenges associated with implementing the curriculum innovations, several teachers reported gradual but discernible improvements in students' written assignments over time. The adoption of process writing, genre-based instruction, and collaborative learning strategies appeared to contribute positively to students' writing development. Teachers observed that, with these approaches, students became more confident in generating ideas and felt increasingly capable of expressing themselves in written form. There was a noticeable enhancement in students' understanding of text structure, including their ability to organize content coherently according to genre conventions. This shift reflected the impact of instructional scaffolding that emphasized model texts, explicit teaching of organizational patterns, and peer-supported drafting and revision.

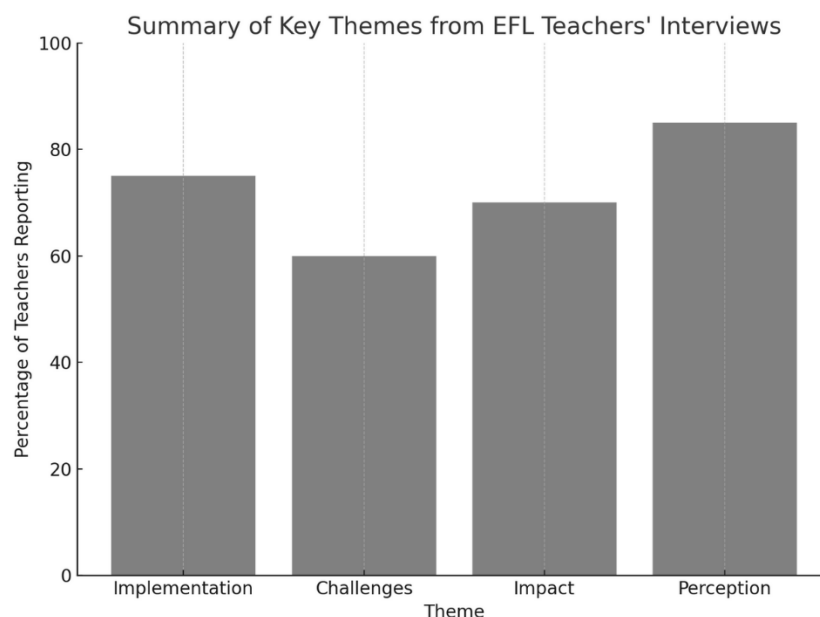
Teachers largely attributed these gains to the cumulative effects of genre-based instruction, which provided students with clearer frameworks for writing, and to the collaborative tasks that fostered dialogue, reflection, and shared problem-solving. These practices encouraged students to move beyond mechanical writing to engage more deeply with the communicative purpose of their texts. Peer response sessions, in particular, were highlighted as valuable opportunities for students to receive constructive feedback, helping them to refine their work through successive drafts.

However, despite these positive developments, persistent challenges were noted. Grammatical errors, narrow vocabulary, and inaccuracies in language use continued to feature prominently in students' writing. These issues suggest that while students were making progress in higher-level aspects of writing such as content development and coherence, their control over linguistic accuracy lagged behind. This mirrors broader trends reported in the literature. For example, Nguyen (2023) found that students in Vietnamese EFL contexts similarly demonstrated improvements in content organization and logical flow, yet continued to struggle with grammar and lexical range. Nguyen advocated for ongoing writing practice, deliberate vocabulary enrichment, and focused feedback on language form as essential strategies for addressing these gaps.

These findings point to the need for a balanced instructional approach that nurtures both the macro- and micro-level dimensions of writing competence. While genre-based and process writing pedagogies are effective in fostering ideas, structure, and coherence, they must be complemented by systematic attention to grammar, vocabulary development, and language accuracy to ensure comprehensive writing proficiency.

Furthermore, the results underscore the importance of sustained support over time, as writing competence develops incrementally and requires repeated practice across diverse contexts and genres. Future research should investigate how integrated approaches—combining process writing, explicit language instruction, and feedback mechanisms—can be best designed and implemented to support students in achieving both fluency and accuracy in writing.

The following figure provides an overview of the key themes that emerged from teacher interviews, illustrating the perceived strengths and areas for further development in students' writing:



According to the diagram, teachers most frequently discussed their perceptions of how the curriculum had changed (85%) and least frequently mentioned the challenges they

encountered (60%). This was followed by references to how the curriculum would be implemented (75%) and its impact on students (70%). These trends highlight the importance of both teacher attitudes and contextual factors in the successful implementation of curriculum change.

#### 4.4 Teachers' Perceptions

Overall, teachers expressed a generally positive attitude toward the curriculum change, acknowledging that it aligned well with contemporary pedagogical trends and international movements toward communicative, process-oriented, and genre-based writing instruction. Many appreciated the curriculum's emphasis on developing students' writing skills in meaningful and authentic ways, and they recognized its potential to enhance student engagement and literacy outcomes.

However, teachers also highlighted several areas where further support was needed to translate curriculum intentions into effective classroom practice. A recurrent theme in their responses was the call for easier access to high-quality exemplar materials—model texts, annotated samples, and practical guides—that could assist them in planning lessons and scaffolding student learning. Teachers felt that such resources would help clarify expectations and provide concrete reference points for both instruction and assessment. Similarly, there was strong advocacy for more collaborative professional development opportunities, such as joint workshops, peer mentoring schemes, and school-based learning communities. These were seen as vital for fostering shared understanding, building teacher confidence, and enabling the exchange of effective strategies.

A significant number of participants also stressed the importance of contextualizing curriculum content and teaching materials to ensure relevance and resonance within the local socio-cultural setting. Teachers pointed out that generic or imported materials often failed to reflect students' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, or linguistic realities, thereby limiting their effectiveness. As one teacher poignantly remarked, *"Curriculum innovation is our guide, but lack of proper training makes it like walking in the dark."* This sentiment encapsulates the challenges many educators faced: while they valued the direction offered by the curriculum reforms, inadequate institutional support—particularly in the form of targeted training and locally adapted resources—left them feeling underprepared and uncertain in their implementation efforts.

These insights underscore the crucial role of institutional structures and policy frameworks in enabling meaningful educational reform. For curriculum innovation to move beyond policy rhetoric and take root in classrooms, it must be accompanied by sustained, context-sensitive professional development, the provision of culturally relevant teaching materials, and mechanisms for ongoing teacher support. Future research should explore how school leadership, local education authorities, and national policy initiatives can work in tandem to create conditions that empower teachers as agents of change rather than passive recipients of reform.

## 5. Conclusion

While curriculum innovation holds great potential for enhancing EFL writing practice in Indonesian junior high schools, this study reveals that teachers are generally receptive to new methods. However, systemic limitations often present significant barriers to effective implementation.

To realize the goals of curriculum reform, it is essential for all educational stakeholders to prioritize continuous professional development for teachers, ensure equitable resource distribution, and provide flexibility in implementation strategies. Future research should explore students' perceptions and gather longitudinal data to assess the long-term impact of writing instruction innovations.

Ultimately, empowering teachers through a responsive curriculum design, alongside strong institutional support, is crucial for fostering meaningful and sustainable educational change.

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