



Unpacking Government Policy's Impact on EFL Teachers' Lesson Planning

Joko Nurkamto^{1*}, Kristian Adi Putra²

¹English Language Education Study Program, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

²Department of English, Preparatory Year Program, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received : February 2, 2025

1st Revision : March 8, 2025

Accepted : May 09, 2025

Available Online : May 14, 2025

Keywords:

Curriculum policy;

EFL teachers;

Lesson planning;

Policy implementation;

Teacher autonomy

*Corresponding Author

Email address:

jokonurkamto@staff.uns.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Government policies are crucial in shaping English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' lesson planning, often creating conflicts between national mandates and local classroom realities. This study investigates how senior EFL teachers in Surakarta, Central Java, navigate these policy directives while designing lesson plans. The research examines the impact of rigid policy enforcement on teachers' autonomy and adaptability in meeting diverse student needs. Using a biographical narrative inquiry approach, the study captures teachers' lived experiences with policy implementation. Three senior EFL teachers with over a decade of teaching experience participated in the study. Data collection involved document analysis of curriculum guidelines and lesson plans, complemented by in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model, focusing on data condensation, display, and conclusion verification. Findings indicate that lesson planning is often treated as a bureaucratic obligation rather than an instructional tool due to inconsistent policy guidelines and insufficient institutional support. Teachers struggle with unclear requirements, lack of format uniformity, and minimal feedback, leading them to rely on past lesson plans rather than creating context-specific ones. To enhance lesson planning effectiveness, teachers emphasize the need for standardized exemplars, expert-developed guidelines, and professional training that prioritizes pedagogical impact over policy compliance. The study recommends balancing regulatory mandates with teacher autonomy to make lesson planning more relevant and effective in classroom instruction.

How to cite: Nurkamto.J, Putra. K. A (2025). Unpacking Government Policy's Impact on EFL Teachers' Lesson Planning. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education*, 9(1), 179-188. <https://doi.org/10.20961/ijpte.v9i1.99123>

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflicting interpretations and misalignments between local and national education policies present significant challenges for teachers, especially those in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, as they navigate differing expectations from governing bodies. These policy discrepancies often confuse instructional planning and adherence, impacting the teaching environment and classroom delivery (Brain et al., 2006). For instance, while national mandates may require detailed lesson plans for each session to ensure curriculum adherence, some local authorities demand only a single annual lesson plan at the beginning of the academic year. This conflicting approach creates ambiguity, forcing teachers to juggle between rigorous daily planning and broader, less frequent documentation requirements. Such fragmentation within policies can undermine teachers' autonomy and influence their ability to make informed decisions during lesson delivery, potentially detracting from the effectiveness of educational strategies at the classroom level (Li, 2010).

The impact of these policy-driven requirements is especially significant in EFL classrooms, where standardized lesson plans may limit teachers' flexibility to adapt instruction to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. While government policies often dictate lesson plan structure and content to uphold national standards, they can impose rigid frameworks that restrict teachers' creativity and responsiveness to varying student language proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds (Shalem et al., 2018). In regions prioritizing adherence to national standards, teachers are constrained in their ability to align instructional methods with local linguistic dynamics, thereby limiting their capacity to provide differentiated instruction that meets students' needs. Balancing national policy mandates with local flexibility is thus crucial to fostering effective EFL instruction that remains standardized and adaptable (Pozas et al., 2019).

While research has extensively examined various aspects of lesson planning, such as pedagogical practices, theoretical frameworks, and assessment criteria, a notable gap exists in understanding how government policies specifically affect EFL teachers' lesson design (Li & Zou, 2017). Governmental guidelines can prescribe specific curriculum content and instructional methods, limiting teachers' freedom to adapt plans based on unique classroom needs, especially in diverse linguistic settings (Jeong & Luschei, 2018). Studies on lesson planning in Indonesia highlight the challenges of curriculum alignment, particularly in objectives and assessments, calling for improvements in how lesson plans can better meet national standards. While factors like teacher motivation and technology use are shown to influence planning quality, few studies have examined the direct impact of government policies on EFL teachers' lesson-planning processes, leaving a critical area for exploration (Widiati et al., 2018; Qoyyimah, 2016).

This study investigates how senior EFL teachers in Surakarta, Central Java, respond to government policy directives in their lesson planning. Employing a biographical narrative inquiry approach, the research explores the complex interplay between top-down policy requirements and classroom realities, highlighting how teachers adapt prescribed standards to suit their unique teaching contexts. By focusing on how government policies shape EFL lesson planning, this study seeks to provide valuable insights into policy implementation and its effects on teaching practices. Findings from this research may help inform policy adjustments that support teachers in creating effective, context-sensitive lesson plans that balance policy requirements and students' diverse learning needs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lesson Plan as Teaching-Learning Framework

A lesson plan is a structured document that guides teachers in organizing and delivering instruction by outlining the objectives, materials, activities, and assessment methods for a specific instructional session, ensuring that learning is organized and purposeful (Reiser & Dempsey, 2018). While it is a part of the curriculum, it serves a distinct function within the broader educational framework. The curriculum establishes a structured set of learning objectives, content, and standards that guide instruction at an institutional or national level, providing the foundation for what students should learn (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). In contrast, a lesson plan is a more detailed, teacher-specific document that translates these curriculum objectives into concrete daily instructional activities, allowing for flexibility in teaching approaches while maintaining alignment with the broader goals (Richards, 2017). In other words, lesson plans operationalize the curriculum by defining the specific methods of instruction, the resources needed, and the ways student progress will be evaluated.

A lesson plan functions as the blueprint for teaching-learning activities, providing a structured and systematic framework for instruction that ensures learning objectives are effectively met. Serving as a roadmap for teachers, it helps organize instructional activities, select appropriate teaching strategies, and utilize resources efficiently (Reiser & Dempsey, 2018). A well-designed lesson plan maintains lesson coherence, ensuring content is delivered logically and enhancing student comprehension (Richards, 2017). It also plays a vital role in classroom management by enabling teachers to allocate time effectively and anticipate potential challenges. Additionally, lesson plans facilitate assessment by incorporating formative methods, such as quizzes and discussions, and summative evaluations, like tests and projects, to measure student progress (Black & Wiliam, 1998). They further promote differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to tailor lessons to accommodate diverse learning needs and abilities (Tomlinson, 2014). Ultimately, lesson plans provide a framework for effective instruction, fostering student engagement and achievement by ensuring a structured and goal-oriented learning experience.

Impact of Government Policy on EFL Lesson Planning

Government policies in education are often prescriptive, imposing top-down requirements that dictate curriculum content, instructional methods, and assessment strategies. These policies ensure standardization and accountability across educational institutions, particularly in subjects like English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where national proficiency benchmarks are often established (Li & Zou, 2017). While such regulations provide structure and consistency, they may also restrict teachers' ability to tailor instruction to meet their students' diverse linguistic and cultural needs (Yang, 2020). Standardized curricula and mandated teaching practices may not always align with the specific challenges EFL learners face in different contexts. As a result, teachers often find themselves navigating a rigid framework that prioritizes policy compliance over pedagogical flexibility. The extent to which policies dictate lesson planning varies across regions, with some governments allowing for

localized modifications while others impose strict adherence to national guidelines (Xu, 2015). This creates both challenges and opportunities in shaping effective lesson-planning strategies.

The influence of government policies on EFL lesson planning is significant, as it determines the extent of teachers' autonomy in designing and delivering instruction. In highly regulated systems, teachers must adhere to prescribed lesson structures, often limiting their ability to adjust lessons based on students' backgrounds, language proficiency, and learning preferences (Yang, 2020). However, research suggests that effective lesson planning under such policies requires balancing compliance and adaptability. Teachers integrating mandated guidelines with locally relevant teaching strategies can enhance instructional effectiveness while meeting policy requirements (Xu, 2015). When policies are overly rigid, lesson planning may become mechanical, reducing opportunities for student-centered learning and engagement. Conversely, when policies provide room for teacher input, they encourage a more dynamic, context-sensitive approach to lesson planning, ultimately improving instructional quality and student outcomes (Han, 2021). In EFL contexts, where students' needs vary widely, policies that allow flexibility can lead to more meaningful and impactful learning experiences.

Policy Enactment Theory

Policy Enactment Theory, developed by Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012), challenges the traditional view of policy implementation as a straightforward, top-down process. Rather than being passively received and executed, policies undergo complex processes of interpretation, negotiation, and adaptation, influenced by various contextual factors within institutions and classrooms. Schools, for example, do not merely apply policies as prescribed but actively reshape, modify, or reinterpret them based on their unique organizational culture, available resources, and external pressures such as local governance structures and socio-economic conditions (Arcila, 2018).

Policy Enactment Theory emphasizes that teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders actively shape policy implementation rather than merely following directives. They interpret and "translate" policies through the lens of local realities, balancing official mandates with practical classroom constraints, student needs, and community values. This process leads to three major forms of enactment: compliance, adaptation, and resistance. Compliance occurs when institutions strictly follow policy directives due to oversight or alignment with institutional goals. Adaptation happens when educators modify policies to better fit their teaching contexts and student demographics, ensuring relevance and effectiveness. Resistance emerges when policies are perceived as unrealistic, overly prescriptive, or misaligned with the needs of the learning environment (Braun et al., 2010). By highlighting the dynamic and interactive nature of policy implementation, this theory presents policies not as fixed texts but as evolving frameworks actively shaped by those enacting them. It underscores the importance of teacher agency and institutional autonomy, ensuring that educational policies remain adaptable, effective, and responsive to diverse learning communities.

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Research Design

The research design used in this research was biographical narrative inquiry (BNI), a qualitative method that captures individuals' life stories to examine how personal experiences shape identity, behavior, and professional roles. Using narrative accounts, BNI fosters a collaborative environment where participants can authentically share experiences, enabling a deep understanding of their growth and responses to social influences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is particularly suitable for studying seasoned EFL teachers' responses to government policies, as it allows exploration of how long-term policy exposure influences their lesson planning, professional identities, and adaptive strategies, providing valuable insights into the complexities of educational practice (Bolívar & Domingo, 2006).

Participants and Context

Three senior EFL teachers at secondary schools in Surakarta City, Central Java, participated in this research. They have more than 10 years of teaching experience. Below is their qualification.

Table 1. Qualifications of Research Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational Qualification	Teaching Experience
Andi	Male	42	Master of English Education	15 Years
Vera	Female	49	Master of English Education	21 Years
Tina	Female	42	Master of English Education	14 Years

Data Collection

The data collection techniques deployed in this study were document analysis and personal interviews. Document analysis involved systematically reviewing government regulations, curriculum guidelines, and teacher lesson plans to reveal both explicit objectives and implicit priorities in language education. This provided context for practices within regulatory frameworks and curricular expectations. Complementing this, in-depth interviews with three senior EFL teachers from secondary schools in Surakarta, Central Java, captured firsthand insights into classroom realities, pedagogical challenges, and adaptive strategies, offering perspectives beyond what written policies alone can convey (Tracy, 2020).

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique was an interactive model (Miles et al., 2020), which presents a structured approach to qualitative data analysis through four core components: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In this model, data collection remains an ongoing process where researchers gather pertinent information using interviews and document reviews. Data condensation follows, aiming to distill the data by summarizing and focusing on critical elements to facilitate a clearer analysis. Data display then organizes this information textually to make interpretation more accessible. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification help researchers derive and confirm insights, ensuring that findings are well-grounded and accurately represent the richness of the data (Miles et al., 2020).

4. RESULTS

Research Participants' Personal Narratives

Tina's Critical Perspective on the Lesson Plan Policy at Her School

Tina, an experienced teacher, has a rather critical view of the lesson plan policy at her school. In her daily routine, Tina prepares her teaching scenario about five minutes before entering the classroom. This is possible because the material she teaches has been covered in previous years, familiarizing her with the topics she will teach. However, Tina does not prepare a daily lesson plan due to the significant workload at school, making it challenging to find sufficient time to prepare a detailed teaching plan. Despite this, her students accept her teaching style without much objection.

Tina is only required to create a formal teaching module or lesson plan once a year, specifically at the beginning of the school year in June. This lesson plan is completed in detail as part of the Education Unit Curriculum (EUC). The number of lesson plans she prepares is limited to her classes. For instance, if Tina teaches grades X, XI, and XII, she only needs to prepare three lesson plans, one for each grade level. Beyond this, there is no requirement from the school for Tina to prepare additional lesson plans for each class session.

Tina's verification process for the lesson plans is also relatively straightforward. Once the lesson plan is completed, it is acknowledged by the Principal and the Head of the Branch Office, but there is no substantive review process to assess the quality or effectiveness of the plan. The verified lesson plan is sent to the Provincial Office as formal documentation but without further evaluation. According to Tina, this lack of substantial review means that the lesson plan she prepares does not meet any clear standard from the authorities responsible for assessment. She asserts that:

The teacher creates a complete and best lesson plan only at the beginning of the academic year, usually in June. After being reviewed by the principal, it is uploaded to Google Drive and submitted to the branch office of Region VII (Surakarta and Sukoharjo) for approval by the senior high school supervisor. After that, the lesson plan is forwarded to the Central Java Provincial Education Office. There is no feedback from the principal, the branch office, or the provincial office.

In this situation, Tina feels that her lesson plan receives little meaningful attention from herself and the responsible authorities. Without substantial feedback from the school or relevant offices, she feels little motivation to create an ideal lesson plan. Tina finds it difficult to answer questions about the challenges of preparing a lesson plan, as she lacks a clear understanding of what an ideal lesson plan entails.

As a teacher, Tina hopes for a guide to quality lesson plans, both in format and substance, that she could use as a reference. In her view, such modules should be developed by Ministry Experts or academics rather than uploaded to the PMM portal, where fellow teachers create most. Tina seeks a solid foundation for developing higher-quality teaching modules that can support improved learning outcomes in the classroom.

Vera's Perspective on the Lesson Plan Policy and Its Practical Challenges

Vera shares her views on the lesson plan policy, which faces various challenges in practice. At the beginning of each academic year, usually in June, schools must prepare the Education Unit Curriculum (EUC). One attachment of the EUC is the lesson plan prepared by subject teachers, including English teachers.

Vera observes that teachers are only obligated to prepare lesson plans at the beginning of the academic year when the EUC is created. Outside of this period, teachers are not required to develop lesson plans unless during internal supervision by the principal, vice principal, or a supervisory team of senior teachers. During these supervision sessions, the focus is only on classroom teaching practices, not on the content or quality of the lesson plans themselves. In this relation, Vera explained:

The teacher must prepare a lesson plan at that moment (i.e., writing the lesson plan as an attachment to the Educational Unit Curriculum). Outside of that, teachers are not required to create a lesson plan except during internal school supervision (conducted by the principal, vice principal, or an appointed team of senior teachers). In this context, the supervisor focuses only on the teaching process in the classroom and does not assess the lesson plan. The important thing is that the teacher provides a hard copy of the lesson plan and presents it to the supervisor.

Additionally, before lesson plans are submitted to the provincial level, they are verified by the School Curriculum Team, School Supervisors, and the Branch Office. However, Vera notes that this verification only checks for the completeness of the lesson plan elements without considering their substance or quality. This leads to a situation where the lesson plans produced may not reflect an ideal teaching plan. Regarding the format and components of lesson plans, schools provide varying guidelines based on agreements from the English Teacher Working Group (ETWG) at the city level. While the government offers lesson plan preparation guidelines, with a minimum version containing five elements and a full version with up to eighteen elements, the inconsistency in guidelines makes lesson plan preparation a largely formal task for teachers.

As a result, as Vera states, teachers' attention to lesson plans is very low. Many teachers tend to copy-paste from previous lesson plans or from those used in prior years. Some even rely solely on lesson plans provided by ETWG or the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (MMP). This situation is further exacerbated by directives from Merdeka Curriculum instructors, who instill the principle that "there is no wrong" in anything teachers create. According to Vera, this approach does not provide a real solution, as teachers need examples of ideal lesson plans designed by curriculum developers at the Ministry or relevant experts, along with detailed explanations for each element.

Vera asserts that the Ministry should provide quality example lesson plans designed by authorities or experts with curriculum competence. Teachers need more than just an administrative format; they need clear, substantive guidance to enhance teaching quality. For Vera, a policy that only emphasizes administrative completeness without addressing the quality of lesson plan content reduces teachers' motivation to create lesson plans that genuinely meet students' learning needs.

Andi's Perspective and Attitude Towards the Lesson Plan Construction Policy

At the beginning of the academic year, Andi observes how his school prepares the Education Unit Curriculum (EUC), following the Ministry's Basic Framework and Curriculum Structure. The lesson plan is crucial to the EUC; each teacher is responsible for creating it. The school holds In-House Training (IHT) to support this process, typically guided by a school supervisor. However, Andi notices that the supervisor often only provides a lesson plan format without fully understanding each subject's content. Hence, the quality of the lesson plan

frequently depends on each teacher's interpretation. In this context, Andi explained that:

At the beginning of the academic year, schools develop the Educational Unit Curriculum (EUC) based on the curriculum framework and curriculum structure set by the Ministry. One of the attachments to the KSP is the lesson plan, which is created by subject teachers, including English teachers. Some schools conduct inhouse training beforehand to ensure that teachers can properly develop their lesson plans. This training is usually led by supervisors. However, since supervisors do not have expertise in lesson plan content for all subjects, they typically only provide guidance on the lesson plan format.

Andi feels that lesson plan preparation is mostly a formality. He only needs to create the lesson plan once at the start of the year for inclusion in the EUC, with no requirement for ongoing development. Consequently, the lesson plan holds little importance in daily teaching. This lack of attention is further compounded by the absence of school or branch office verification before lesson plans are submitted to the province. Without verification, Andi and other teachers never know if their lesson plans meet the standards. In addition, the format of lesson plans varies across schools, depending on each school's adaptation of government policies. These lesson plans typically include identity, learning objectives, teaching materials, learning procedures, and assessment. The number of lesson plans created also varies depending on each teacher's understanding of Learning Outcomes (LO). According to Andi, teachers' knowledge of LO is often inconsistent, leading to differences in lesson plan quality. A lack of understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum also presents challenges for Andi. Many teachers, including branch office officials, feel unconfident when guiding this new curriculum, which Andi believes further affects the quality of lesson plans and teachers' understanding of its classroom implementation.

Andi also senses resistance among teachers, who feel comfortable with their current situation, primarily due to the certification allowance they receive. This attitude makes many teachers reluctant to deepen their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and its applications. Even though the English Teacher Working Group (ETWG) has held several workshops on lesson plans, Andi feels these efforts do not endure. Teachers prefer teaching based on government-issued textbooks rather than on the lesson plans they create. Overall, Andi views the lesson plan construction policy as suboptimal. Its formal nature, lack of verification, limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the teachers' comfort create significant challenges to improving lesson plan quality. Andi hopes for concrete steps that encourage teachers to understand the essence of lesson plans and their role in the learning process beyond merely fulfilling an administrative requirement.

The Themes of Research Findings

The research findings highlight key themes regarding teachers' challenges and perspectives on lesson planning. Issues such as formalism, inconsistent guidelines, limited daily relevance, adaptation to new curricula, reliance on past practices, and a lack of institutional support reveal teachers' need for clear standards, quality exemplars, and meaningful professional development.

Formalism vs. Substance in Lesson Planning

Each teacher – Tina, Vera, and Andi – expresses frustration with the lesson plan policy's formal and largely administrative nature. Lesson plans are only required annually, and the verification process focuses on checking for formal completeness rather than evaluating the substance or quality. This approach makes lesson planning seem like a bureaucratic formality rather than a tool for enhancing teaching effectiveness. The lack of substantial feedback, evaluation, or guidance from authorities reinforces this perspective, leaving teachers unmotivated to invest effort in lesson plan quality.

Need for Quality Standards and Exemplars

All three teachers desire more transparent standards and high-quality exemplars to guide lesson plan creation. They feel that a lack of guidance from curriculum experts leads to inconsistency and a superficial approach to lesson planning. Tina and Vera emphasize that teachers would benefit from example lesson plans created by ministry experts, which could set a quality benchmark and clarify expectations. This would move lesson planning from a "tick-box" exercise to a meaningful, structured process that supports teaching quality.

Inconsistency in Lesson Plan Format and Guidelines

The inconsistent lesson plan format and guidelines across schools is a recurring issue. Different schools, English Teacher Working Groups (ETWGs), and even the government provide varying lesson plan formats, which makes standardization difficult. Andi notes that formats may differ not only from school to school but also based on 10 teachers' interpretations of the Learning Outcomes (LO). This lack of uniformity results in varied lesson plan quality and contributes to teachers' limited engagement with lesson planning.

Limited Role of Lesson Plans in Daily Teaching Practice

For each teacher, lesson plans hold minimal relevance in their daily teaching practice. Tina, for example, prepares her lessons just before class, relying on her experience rather than a detailed plan. Andi notes that the lesson plan's annual preparation and lack of ongoing development mean it holds little significance day-to-day. Without encouragement to use lesson plans as a practical tool, teachers do not feel motivated to incorporate them into their teaching, reducing the lesson plan's potential value in enhancing classroom outcomes.

Challenges in Adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum presents additional challenges for teachers like Andi, who mentions that neither he nor some branch office officials fully understand its application. This gap in understanding impacts the quality of lesson plans, as teachers lack confidence in implementing the new curriculum framework. This issue is compounded by teachers' reliance on certification allowances, which may reduce their motivation to adapt to curriculum changes, creating a barrier to embracing new teaching practices.

Teacher Autonomy and Reliance on Past Practices

Teachers tend to rely on prior lesson plans or resources developed by their peers or provided platforms, such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (MMP). Vera points out that teachers often copy-paste from previous lesson plans or use materials from the ETWG. This tendency can be attributed to time constraints and the lack of substantive requirements from school administration, allowing teachers to maintain familiar practices without institutional accountability mechanisms.

Desire for Professional Development and Practical Guidance

The teachers express a need for professional development that goes beyond procedural requirements. Andi acknowledges that in-house training (IHT) provides limited benefit, as trainers often lack specific subject expertise. Tina and Vera also suggest that teachers would benefit from guidance from curriculum experts. Teachers are open to training that is practical, subject-specific, and led by knowledgeable professionals, as they recognize that this would enhance their ability to develop lesson plans that support better student outcomes.

Teacher Motivation and Institutional Support

Teachers' motivation to engage in lesson planning is low, partly due to the absence of meaningful institutional support and substantive feedback. The verification process is limited to checking for completeness rather than quality, and schools do not provide 11 substantial guidance on improving lesson plans. This lack of institutional support discourages teachers from dedicating time and effort to refining lesson plans, as they do not see value or recognition for doing so. Vera and Andi emphasize that institutional changes are necessary to make lesson plans a more impactful tool for teachers.

5. DISCUSSION

The research explores EFL teachers' challenges with government-mandated lesson planning policies, revealing the constraints, inconsistencies, and limitations that impact teaching effectiveness. Teachers like Tina, Vera, and Andi express frustrations with the overly formalized nature of lesson planning, which feels bureaucratic rather than pedagogically beneficial. They report that lesson plans are often treated as formalities, verified only for administrative completeness, with minimal emphasis on instructional quality or daily applicability. Additionally, guideline inconsistencies and a lack of clear exemplars from authorities exacerbate these issues, leaving teachers unsupported and reducing their motivation to produce high-quality, relevant lesson plans. Teachers desire more professional development opportunities and guidance from curriculum experts to enhance the substance and utility of lesson planning.

The findings align with prior research, particularly in emphasizing the bureaucratic nature of lesson planning requirements in many educational settings. Like Brain, Reid, and Boyes (2006) and Bergh (2015), this study highlights the conflict between rigid national mandates and local autonomy. Teachers in the study echoed similar sentiments of frustration, describing lesson planning as a formal exercise with little pedagogical benefit due to inadequate substantive feedback and evaluation processes. This observation is consistent with previous studies showing that when policy demands are viewed as merely administrative tasks, teachers are less likely to see the value in engaging deeply with lesson planning as a tool for improving instructional practices (Bergh, 2015).

In contrast, the current study modifies the understanding of flexibility in lesson planning found in some prior studies. Wiediantin et al. (2023) previously argued that teachers could often adapt lesson plans to meet student's needs, but this research found limited evidence of such flexibility. The teachers, particularly Vera and Andi, noted that the inconsistent policy guidelines across schools and the frequent reliance on outdated formats restricted their ability to create contextually relevant plans. This divergence suggests that while flexibility is theoretically possible, in practice, inconsistencies in policy and the lack of support for adaptation make such flexibility challenging for teachers to realize.

Moreover, the findings are partly contradictory to the assumption by Karimi & Abaszadeh (2017) that teacher motivation and autonomy naturally lead to better lesson planning practices. The research shows that motivation is negatively affected when lesson planning is reduced to a formalistic process without clear standards or quality exemplars. Teachers like Tina expressed frustration with the lack of guidance and meaningful review, and this lack of support appears to diminish their motivation. This finding suggests that without institutional support and substantive professional development, teachers' motivation alone may not suffice to improve lesson planning quality.

The study supports the call for greater institutional support and professional development, consistent with previous literature. Teachers in the study highlighted the need for practical training led by curriculum experts and substantive feedback that would make lesson plans more relevant to daily teaching needs. This aligns with previous research, such as Yang (2020), which recommends professional development as a crucial factor in enhancing lesson planning effectiveness. By providing quality exemplars and meaningful guidance, policy changes could empower teachers to transform lesson plans from formalities into tools that improve educational outcomes.

6. CONCLUSION

The study highlights significant challenges EFL teachers face due to government-mandated lesson planning policies, which often prioritize administrative compliance over pedagogical relevance. Teachers like Tina, Vera, and Andi report feeling constrained by rigid, bureaucratic requirements and inconsistent guidelines that lack substantive feedback or support from authorities. These issues reduce motivation and restrict teachers' ability to adapt lessons to meet the diverse needs of their students. The findings align with existing research on the need for professional development and institutional support, underscoring that well-implemented policy guidelines, practical guidance, and curriculum-specific exemplars could enhance the quality and utility of lesson planning, making it a more impactful educational tool. To improve the effectiveness of lesson planning for EFL teachers, it is recommended that educational authorities and policymakers provide clear, standardized guidelines that allow for both structure and adaptability. Practical training sessions, led by curriculum experts, should equip teachers with the skills and resources necessary to create lesson plans that address national standards and local classroom dynamics. Additionally, the introduction of quality exemplars and more meaningful feedback mechanisms would support teachers in refining their planning practices, motivating them to view lesson planning as a vital instructional tool rather than a bureaucratic task. Such initiatives would promote a more dynamic, responsive approach to EFL education, benefiting students' learning experiences.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the participating educators and the institutional support that facilitated the completion of this research.

7. REFERENCES

- Arcila, F. C. (2018). ELT policy interpretations and translations in rural Colombia. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 19(4), 363-382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2017.1377903>
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. Routledge.
- Bergh, A. (2015). Local educational actors doing education: A study of how local autonomy meets international and national quality policy rhetoric. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2015(2), 281-46. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.28146>
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102>
- Bolívar, A., & Domingo, J. (2006). Biographical-narrative research in Iberoamerica: Areas of development and the current situation. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(4), Art. 12. <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/185>
- Brain, K., Reid, I., & Comerford Boyes, L. (2006). Teachers as mediators between educational policy and practice. *Educational Studies*, 32(4), 411-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690600850396>
- Braun, A., Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (2010). Policy enactments in the UK secondary school: Examining policy, practice and school positioning. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(4), 547-560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680931003698544>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Han, K. (2021). Fostering students' autonomy and engagement in EFL classroom through proximal classroom factors: Autonomy-supportive behaviors and student-teacher relationships. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 767079. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.767079>
- Jeong, D. W., & Luschei, T. F. (2018). Are teachers losing control of the classroom? Global changes in school governance and teacher responsibilities, 2000-2015. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 62, 289-301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.07.004>
- Karimi, M. N., & Abaszadeh, A. (2017). Autonomy-supportive teaching, willingness to communicate in English, motivation, and English speaking self-efficacy among EFL learners: A structural equation modelling study. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, 20(2), 113-156. <https://ijal.khu.ac.ir/article-1-2825-en.html>
- Li, M. (2010). EFL teachers and English language education in the PRC: Are they the policy makers? *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 19(3), 439-451. <http://www.philjol.info/philjol/index.php/TAPER/article/view/1852>
- Li, W., & Zou, W. (2017). A study of EFL teacher expertise in lesson planning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 66, 231-241. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.04.009>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Ornstein, A. C., & Hunkins, F. P. (2018). *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Pozas, M., Letzel, V., & Schneider, C. (2019). Teachers and differentiated instruction: Exploring differentiation practices to address student diversity. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12481>
- Qoyyimah, U. (2016). Inculcating character education through EFL teaching in Indonesian state schools. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 11(2), 109-126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2016.1165618>
- Reiser, R. A., & Dempsey, J. V. (2018). *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology*. Pearson.
- Richards, J. C. (2017). *Curriculum development in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Shalem, Y., De Clercq, F., Steinberg, C., & Koornhof, H. (2018). Teacher autonomy in times of standardised lesson plans: The case of a Primary School Language and Mathematics Intervention in South Africa. *Journal of Educational Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9318-3>
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

-
- Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Widiati, U., Suryati, N., & Hayati, N. (2018). Unraveling the challenges of Indonesian novice teachers of English. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(3), 621-629. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i3.9824>
- Wiediantin, L., Triana, N., & Elyani, E. P. (2023). The challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers during Asistensi Mengajar program. *Getsempena English Education Journal (GEEJ)*, 10(2), 143-157. <https://ejournal.bbg.ac.id/geej>
- Xu, H. (2015). The development of teacher autonomy in collaborative lesson preparation: A multiple-case study of EFL teachers in China. *System*, 52, 139-148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.05.007>
- Yang, L. (2020). Learning in collective lesson planning discussions: Shifts in EFL teachers' practices. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 2(4), 24-35. <https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.12.04>