



UNPACKING THE GOVERNMENT POLICY'S IMPACT ON EFL TEACHERS' LESSON PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

Lesson planning is a central aspect of educational policy in Indonesia, yet its implementation often diverges from regulatory intent due to school-level constraints. This study aims to examine how Indonesian EFL teachers interpret and enact government-mandated lesson planning policies within their institutional contexts. Using a qualitative design grounded in policy enactment theory, data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and written reflections from 15 participants, including teachers, principals, Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP) leaders, and supervisors. Findings reveal that lesson planning is frequently treated as an administrative requirement, with limited use for actual instructional guidance. Teachers often reuse past plans or adapt materials from official platforms with minimal contextualization, constrained by heavy workloads, limited supervisory support, and ambiguous curricular messaging. The study highlights the need for policy frameworks that recognize teachers as policy actors and curriculum makers. It recommends enhancing subject-specific mentoring, peer collaboration, and clear exemplars to ensure lesson planning is both context-sensitive and pedagogically meaningful.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A pressing issue surrounding EFL teachers' response to lesson planning policy in Indonesia lies in the dissonance between central mandates and local implementation. While the central government, via Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021 and Ministerial Regulation No. 16 of 2022, emphasizes that teachers must develop lesson plans to ensure effective instructional preparation, many local schools permit only a single annual plan as a formality attached to the school-based curriculum (SBC). Consequently, most teachers do not engage in detailed daily or weekly planning, which contradicts the intended spirit of the national policy. Some teachers mitigate this by adapting pre-prepared plans to align with classroom needs, reflecting a form of local enactment that blends compliance and contextual flexibility (Ball et al., 2012); (Arcila, 2018). This policy-practice gap illustrates a broader conflict between professional autonomy and bureaucratic standardization (Shalem et al., 2018; Brain et al., 2006). Teachers are not passive executors of policy, but mediators who navigate and reinterpret mandates to fit their pedagogical realities.

Discussing this topic is significant because it sheds light on how teachers interpret and reshape national mandates within their local school environments. This conversation reveals that teachers are not mere policy recipients, but reflective practitioners who enact, adapt, or negotiate directives based on contextual constraints and pedagogical goals (Braun et al., 2010; Li, 2010). It also highlights the importance of teacher agency and autonomy in maintaining instructional quality amid top-down reforms (Xu, 2015; Shalem et al., 2018). Moreover, this discussion promotes understanding of how reflective practice and localized decision-making enhance lesson planning effectiveness, supporting meaningful, student-centered instruction (Farrell, 2010; Sawyer et al., 2019). Overall, unpacking this policy-practice dynamic is crucial for informing more flexible, teacher-empowering reforms in language education.

Despite extensive research on lesson planning—spanning pedagogical frameworks, theoretical models, and assessment strategies—a notable gap exists in understanding how government policies influence English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' lesson planning processes (Li & Zou, 2017). Governmental directives often prescribe curriculum content and instructional approaches, limiting teachers' autonomy to tailor lessons to their students' diverse linguistic and contextual needs (Jeong & Luschei, 2018). In Indonesia, studies have identified

ongoing struggles among teachers to align classroom practices with national curriculum standards and high-stakes assessments, underlining the need for stronger coherence between policy and practice (Widiati et al., 2018; Qoyyimah, 2016). However, few studies have directly examined the mechanisms through which policy mandates shape EFL teachers' daily lesson planning activities. This gap calls for more focused inquiry into how national education policies are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted at the classroom level.

This study investigates how EFL teachers in Indonesia respond to government policy directives in their lesson planning. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Indonesian EFL teachers interpret and implement government education policies in their lesson planning practices?
2. What strategies do teachers use to reconcile policy requirements with the contextual needs of their students and classrooms?
3. What challenges do EFL teachers face in constructing lesson plans that comply with national policy mandates?

This study adopts Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment theory, which views teachers as active agents who interpret, adapt, and negotiate policy within specific school contexts. This framework helps illuminate the complex, context-dependent ways Indonesian EFL teachers respond to government lesson planning directives in their everyday professional practice.

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 & William, 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 et al., (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

This research adopts a qualitative case study design to explore how Indonesian EFL teachers respond to government policy directives in their lesson planning. A case study is an in-depth inquiry into a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear (Yin, 2018). It allows researchers to gain rich, detailed insights into complex processes, practices, and meanings from the participants' perspective. According to Gerring (2017), case studies are particularly valuable for investigating "how" and "why" questions, making them well-suited for examining the nuanced ways teachers interpret and enact policy. Ellet (2018) adds that case studies help unpack decision-making and contextual factors influencing behavior, which is critical when exploring educators' reasoning and strategies. Given that this study aims to capture the lived experiences, adaptations, and challenges EFL teachers face when translating policy into practice, the case study design is especially appropriate. It provides the flexibility and depth to understand teachers' interpretations, strategies, and responses within their school environments.

Participants and Context

The participants in this study were selected through voluntary participation, reflecting their willingness and interest in contributing to policy and lesson planning research. A total of 15 senior educators from seven different provinces in Indonesia participated in the study. They represented a diverse professional background, including five EFL teachers, four vice principals, four school principals, and two school supervisors. Among the research participants, only two individuals come from non-EFL backgrounds: a vice principal and a school supervisor. These individuals were approached through professional educator networks and regional education forums and were provided with clear information about the research aims, procedures, and ethical

considerations. Upon agreeing to participate, each individual gave informed consent, acknowledging their voluntary involvement and the right to withdraw at any point. Their varying roles in the school system offered a rich, multi-perspective understanding of how lesson planning policies are enacted in practice, allowing the study to capture classroom-level implementation and administrative and supervisory interpretations of government directives.

Table 1. Qualifications of Research Participants

Participant	Gender	Province	Position	Teaching Experience
PG	Male	C	Teacher	15 Years
SSS	Female	C	Teacher	14 Years
AA	Female	B	Teacher	15 Years
RLA	Female	E	Teacher	9 years
SH	Female	C	Teacher	18 Years
AFS	Female	C	Vice Principal	21 Years
OBHP	Male	A	Vice Principal	16 Years
SL	Female	B	Vice Principal	25 Years
S	Female	G	Vice Principal	20 Years
AZ	Male	C	Principal	32 Years
IR	Male	D	Principal	36 Years
SW	Female	E	Principal	28 Years
RA	Female	F	Principal	30 Years
SA	Female	D	Supervisor	33 Years
H	Female	C	Supervisor	28 Years

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using three complementary methods: open-type questionnaires, personal and in-depth interviews, and document analysis. First, participants completed an open-ended questionnaire to elicit their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of government policy on lesson planning. This was followed by personal, in-depth interviews conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing, allowing researchers to explore participants' responses in greater detail and probe into specific strategies, challenges, and contextual factors. Such interviews effectively capture rich, contextual narratives and co-constructed meaning between researcher and participant (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020). Lastly, document analysis was carried out using participants' lesson plans. These documents were examined to assess how policy guidelines were reflected in actual planning practices and to triangulate data from the interviews and questionnaires. Combining these tools enabled method triangulation, improved the credibility of findings, and offered a multidimensional understanding of the issue (Billups, 2020; Flick, 2018), while honoring the ethical complexity of qualitative engagement (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020).

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study employed the interactive model developed by Miles et al., (2020), which provides a systematic and iterative approach to qualitative data analysis through four interconnected components: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Given the study's use of open-type questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, this model offered a cohesive structure to handle diverse and richly textured qualitative data. Data collection was not a one-time event but an ongoing and adaptive process, allowing the researcher to revisit emerging themes through follow-up questions and document reviews as new insights surfaced. Once collected, the data were condensed through coding, categorization, and thematic summarization to highlight key patterns and reduce complexity while preserving meaning. This was especially crucial for handling lengthy interview transcripts and varied lesson plan samples. Data display involved organizing and visualizing these themes in matrices and narrative formats, facilitating cross-case comparisons. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through triangulation and member checking to ensure the findings were credible, consistent, and representative of participants' lived experiences and interpretations of policy enactment.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the study's findings, addressing the three research questions. It explores how Indonesian EFL teachers interpret and implement government education policies in their lesson planning practices, the strategies they adopt to balance policy compliance with the contextual needs of their classrooms, and the key challenges they encounter in aligning their lesson plans with national mandates. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between policy directives and local teaching realities, highlighting adaptive practices and structural constraints shaping teachers' decision-making processes

Interpretation and Implementation of Government Policies in EFL Lesson Planning

This section examines how government policies on lesson planning are interpreted and implemented in EFL classrooms. Drawing on insights from teachers, school leaders, and supervisors across multiple provinces, the findings reveal how national mandates are not enacted in a uniform or linear manner, but are subject to local reinterpretation, negotiation, and adaptation. These practices exemplify what Ball et al., (2012) refer to as *policy enactment*, wherein educators function as policy actors who actively mediate official directives through the lens of their institutional realities. Similarly, Spillane et al., (2002) emphasize that policy implementation is shaped by local actors' beliefs, knowledge, and contextual conditions, adapting both necessary and inevitable.

All research participants indicated that teachers are formally required by their schools to prepare lesson plans only once annually, specifically at the beginning of the academic year. This document functions as a year-long instructional framework and is incorporated into the SBC, which must be submitted to the Provincial Education Office. While teachers typically develop six to ten lesson plans per class each year, not all are appended to the official SBC. Teacher AA from Province B clarified that only one representative lesson plan per subject, including English, is included as an official attachment, whereas the remaining plans serve primarily as individual instructional references or are utilized for administrative functions such as supervision and accreditation. This interpretation was corroborated by Vice Principal OBHP from Province A, Vice Principal S from Province G, and a Principal from Province F, who all emphasized that although teachers generate multiple lesson plans, only one per subject is submitted formally. The additional lesson plans are implemented with flexibility in the classroom and adjusted according to the specific instructional needs of each context.

This finding illustrates how government policies are interpreted and implemented at the school level, particularly in EFL lesson planning. Submitting a single lesson plan per subject is widely viewed by schools as sufficient to meet regulatory requirements. Meanwhile, teachers continue to develop additional lesson plans tailored to their daily classroom needs. These supplementary plans, although unofficial, allow for flexibility and adaptation, reflecting how educators navigate between compliance and instructional practicality in applying national education policies. Vice Principal OBHP elaborated:

The fact that the lesson plan is attached to the SBC is correct. At my school, only one lesson plan per subject is included as an attachment, not one from each teacher. The school's subject teacher working group prepares the lesson plan for administrative purposes. It is left to each teacher's discretion for teaching and learning activities. Not all of the collected lesson plans are used for classroom instruction. Some lesson plans are modified to meet the specific needs of certain classes, without changing the learning objectives.

Although teachers are required to prepare lesson plans, they often reuse or adapt previous years' plans rather than writing entirely new ones. This was acknowledged by Teacher SSS from Province C, who stated that while she adheres to policy by designing proper lesson plans, she usually modifies earlier versions. As a graduate of a Master's program in English Language Education, she also integrates insights from academic literature to update her plans. Her practice reflects an informed and reflective approach to lesson planning in EFL, showing that it is not a purely mechanical task, but one that evolves with professional growth and classroom realities.

School Supervisor H from Province C reinforced these interpretations by detailing her active role in supporting the development of the SBC at the beginning of each academic year. She emphasized that the process is highly collaborative, involving all teachers, school staff, the school committee, and supervisors in an initial coordination meeting to determine the curriculum direction for the upcoming year. This meeting serves as the foundation for drafting the SBC document. Furthermore, she highlighted the role of the Provincial Office of Education and Culture, which issues technical guidelines each year to assist schools in aligning their curriculum

with national standards. This structured, multi-stakeholder approach illustrates how government regulations are not only interpreted at the local level but also operationalized through coordinated planning and adherence to official policy frameworks. She explained this in detail as follows:

Yes, that is correct. As a school supervisor, I have the responsibility of assisting the schools under my supervision in developing the SBC at the beginning of each academic year. The school holds an initial meeting involving all teachers and staff, the supervisor, and the school committee to determine the curriculum direction for the upcoming academic year, which will be outlined in the SBC. The Provincial Office of Education and Culture—specifically the Curriculum Development Team—prepares technical guidelines for SBC development at the start of each academic year. Based on these technical guidelines, schools then develop the SBC document, which consists of a primary document and appendices that include the syllabus and lesson plans.

A review of relevant government regulations provides strong legal support for the practices described by the participants. The Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 16 of 2022 explicitly mandates that teachers prepare learning plans as part of the instructional process (Article 3, Paragraph 2). Similarly, Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 on National Education Standards affirms this obligation, stating that learning plans are a fundamental component of professional teaching responsibilities (Article 11, Paragraph 2). These provisions make it clear that lesson planning is not simply a local administrative routine but a nationally regulated professional standard that all teachers must fulfill.

Furthermore, Regulation Number 12 of 2024 explicitly states that each educational institution must develop an SBC that includes, at minimum, a learning plan (Article 29, Paragraph 1), and must refer to the curriculum framework set by the ministry (Article 27). The SBC's development is to be conducted collaboratively under supervision of the Education Office (Article 29, Paragraph 4), affirming the participatory and structured nature of curriculum planning described by the participants. The authority of the Provincial Education Office over secondary schools is established in Law Number 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, which outlines the division of responsibilities between central and local governments.

In sum, these findings demonstrate that while government policies require teachers to prepare lesson plans as part of a formal curriculum framework, schools and EFL educators interpret and implement these requirements with a blend of compliance and professional discretion. Lesson plans serve dual roles—formal documentation for administrative accountability and flexible instructional tools shaped by daily pedagogical realities—revealing the adaptive nature of policy enactment in real classroom settings. These practices reflect not only a pragmatic response to policy but also the exercise of informed professional judgment. This suggests that policy frameworks should account for teachers' need for autonomy and responsiveness, enabling more context-sensitive and sustainable approaches to curriculum compliance and instructional planning.

Strategies for Reconciling Policy Requirements with Classroom Contexts

This section explores the strategies teachers employ to reconcile formal lesson planning requirements with the dynamic realities of their classrooms. In line with [Ball et al., \(2012\)](#) theory of policy enactment, teachers are not passive implementers of policy but active interpreters who adapt mandated practices in response to local contexts. These adaptations reflect teacher agency ([Priestley et al., 2015](#)) and highlight the pragmatic decisions educators make to maintain instructional coherence while navigating structural constraints.

For Teacher AA, the lesson plan serves as a critical pedagogical tool that guides instructional delivery. While she acknowledges that implementing planned activities does not always proceed as intended, the presence of a lesson plan enhances her preparedness and instructional clarity. It provides a structured framework for teaching, helping her navigate classroom activities with greater confidence, and enables post-lesson reflection to assess what content was effectively conveyed and what requires improvement in subsequent sessions. A parallel perspective is offered by Teacher RLA from Province E, who underscores the importance of preparing a lesson plan before instruction to ensure that the content is systematically organized and aligned with clearly defined learning objectives. These perspectives collectively highlight that lesson plans are not merely bureaucratic requirements but are essential for improving instructional quality and fostering teacher reflection on pedagogical practices.

However, a noticeable gap exists between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. While many

educators acknowledge the significance of lesson planning, not all consistently prepare comprehensive plans prior to teaching. This discrepancy was illustrated by the experiences of Teacher SSS and Teacher SH from Province C. Teacher SSS reported that her professional workload is exceptionally demanding. In addition to teaching English for 28 periods per week, she also serves as a homeroom teacher and a mentor for the *Guru Penggerak* program. Within such constraints, she indicated that she has minimal time to develop lesson plans before entering the classroom. Although she recognizes the pedagogical value of thoughtful planning, the practical realities of her role impede ideal implementation. Her account exemplifies the challenges educators face in balancing institutional responsibilities with instructional quality, and underscores the persistent disjunction between theoretical understanding and routine classroom execution. She stated that:

In my daily routine, I prepare my teaching scenario about five minutes before entering the classroom. This is possible because the material I teach has been covered in previous years, familiarizing me with the topics I will teach. However, I do not prepare a daily written lesson plan due to the significant workload at school, making it challenging to find sufficient time to prepare a detailed teaching plan.

Therefore, teachers employ three primary approaches in responding to lesson planning requirements. The first involves adapting the lesson plans initially developed at the beginning of the academic year. This adaptation process is undertaken to ensure that the instructional design remains responsive to the evolving and contextualized needs of students. Such a strategy was evident in the practices of Teacher RLA and Teacher AA. Teacher RLA reported that although she had submitted her lesson plan to the school's curriculum office at the start of the year, she continued to revise it for her own instructional purposes. Similarly, Teacher AA noted that despite the absence of a formal mandate from the school to prepare lesson plans on a regular basis, she consistently adapted her original plan to align with the specific demands of each teaching session.

Second, some teachers adapt or replicate lesson plans sourced from the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM), a digital educational initiative developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which offers a range of tools and resources to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, teachers draw upon lesson plans collaboratively developed through the Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP) forum. This approach reflects a pragmatic strategy to balance instructional demands with limited preparation time. Teacher OBHP exemplified this practice, noting that he selectively adopts and modifies teaching materials from these sources to align with the specific needs of his classroom. He asserted:

I only copy and paste teaching modules that I find suitable for my classroom instruction. The development of teaching modules initiated by the MGMP, as well as those shared through the PMM platform, has been very helpful in broadening my perspective and serves as a comparison or second opinion to the teaching modules used in the previous year.

Third, a number of teachers opt not to use formal lesson plans, relying instead on textbooks as their primary instructional guide. This approach was noted by Teacher PG from Province C, who, in addition to being a senior educator at his school, also serves as the Head of MGMP in his municipality. He explained that despite participating in various professional development initiatives, including those focused on lesson planning, many teachers prefer to base their instruction on government-issued textbooks, viewing them as sufficient for delivering curriculum content effectively. He stated the following:

Although the English MGMP has held several workshops to improve teachers' skills, including workshops on lesson planning, teachers tend to return to their usual habits. They prefer to teach based on government-issued textbooks rather than the lesson plans they have created.

In sum, teachers employ adaptive strategies that reflect both pragmatism and professionalism to reconcile policy requirements with classroom realities. Some, like Teachers AA and RLA, revise pre-existing annual lesson plans to suit students' evolving needs, demonstrating curriculum adaptation in practice (Ben-Peretz, 1990). Others, such as Teacher OBHP, utilize and modify externally sourced modules from platforms like PMM and MGMP forums, balancing efficiency with pedagogical enrichment. Meanwhile, some teachers adopt a minimalist approach by using government-issued textbooks as their primary guide, particularly under heavy workloads. These strategies illustrate how teachers act as policy actors (Ball et al., 2012), exercising agency (Priestley et al., 2012) to mediate between top-down curricular mandates and bottom-up classroom conditions.

Challenges Faced by EFL Teachers in Aligning Lesson Plans with National Policy Mandates

This section explores the challenges encountered by EFL teachers in aligning their lesson plans with national policy mandates. Despite the existence of clear regulatory expectations—such as those outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 16 of 2022 and Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021—the implementation of lesson planning policies remains inconsistent across school contexts. Drawing on insights from teachers, school leaders, and supervisors across provinces, the findings reveal how structural limitations, contextual disparities, and professional tensions create implementation gaps. These patterns resonate with [Ball, Maguire, and Braun's \(2012\)](#) concept of policy enactment, which views educators not as passive recipients of mandates but as active agents who interpret, mediate, and sometimes resist policy according to their situated realities. Similarly, [Spillane et al., \(2002\)](#) argue that teachers' responses to policy are shaped by their beliefs, resources, and institutional conditions—making variation and improvisation inevitable.

Administrative Burden and Surface-Level Compliance

One of the most prominent challenges in aligning lesson plans with national policy mandates lies in the gap between formal compliance and practical instructional needs. Teachers such as AA and Principal AZ noted that lesson plans are typically prepared only once a year for submission as part of the SBC, which is reviewed primarily for structural completeness by the Provincial Education Office. These plans, often developed collectively through MGMP, tend to serve more as administrative artifacts than as tools for active instructional guidance. Daily lesson plans used in classrooms are usually informal, inconsistent, and rarely standardized—reflecting symbolic compliance rather than substantive pedagogical engagement. Supervisor H affirmed that SBC validations typically emphasize document format over instructional quality, with content-level reviews delegated to school supervisors or principals who may lack curriculum expertise. Echoing this view, Supervisor SA described the use of her area's E-SBC platform, where lesson plans are digitally uploaded and validated for completeness. She observed that while some schools are beginning to engage in more reflective planning through coaching and collaborative learning, many still treat lesson planning as a bureaucratic formality tied to inspection or documentation rather than as a living component of instructional practice.

Time Constraints and Workload Pressures

Heavy workloads and limited preparation time consistently emerged as major barriers to effective lesson planning among EFL teachers. With responsibilities ranging from 30 to 40 instructional hours per week, administrative reporting, extracurricular duties, and mentoring, teachers often struggle to engage in deep, reflective curriculum development. Teacher PG admitted to reusing and minimally modifying previous years' lesson plans to cope with time constraints—an approach that restricts pedagogical adaptation and responsiveness to students' changing needs. Supervisor H corroborated this pattern, noting the widespread reliance on copy-paste practices from older plans, MGMP lesson plans, or PMM resources, often without proper contextualization. She emphasized that in the absence of strong institutional leadership and support for reflection, lesson plans become static bureaucratic documents rather than living instructional tools. Supervisor SA added that the provincial requirement to upload lesson plans into the E-SBC platform encourages short-term compliance, but many teachers subsequently neglect or ignore the documents. Without ongoing supervision, lesson plans are frequently excluded from actual classroom use, further highlighting the disconnect between policy and practice.

Inconsistent Capacity Building and Supervisor Support

The quality and effectiveness of lesson planning are significantly influenced by the availability and caliber of professional development and instructional support. Although in-house training (IHT) sessions are commonly conducted, their impact varies depending on the expertise of the facilitators. Principal AZ observed that many school supervisors lack subject-specific depth, leading to guidance that focuses more on formatting than on pedagogical substance. Similarly, H explained that supervisors are now required to support all subject areas, regardless of their academic backgrounds. As a result, they often lack the disciplinary expertise necessary

to provide meaningful instructional feedback and instead rely on collaboration with MGMP leaders to bridge content knowledge gaps. However, not all MGMPs are equally functional or well-resourced, contributing to uneven support across schools. In contrast, schools like the one where AA teaches benefit from supervisors with strong subject-matter proficiency, enabling richer mentoring and lesson planning guidance. These disparities lead to inconsistent interpretations of lesson planning standards and reinforce surface-level compliance, where lesson plans meet administrative expectations but lack instructional depth or contextual responsiveness. SA confirmed this, adding that although she has an English language background, she makes efforts to deliver pedagogically sound support to all subjects by focusing on universal instructional principles. She initiates IHT by involving more capable teachers, guides collaborative lesson planning in small groups, and uses sample analysis and peer review to enhance pedagogical reflection.

Erosion of Professional Motivation and Validation

A significant challenge in aligning lesson plans with national policy mandates lies in the erosion of professional motivation and the dominance of surface-level compliance, which undermine the pedagogical purpose of lesson planning. Teachers—particularly senior or honorary staff—often view lesson plans as bureaucratic requirements rather than instructional tools. Principal AZ estimated that about 25% of teachers require sustained mentoring due to low motivation, limited digital literacy, and disengagement from curriculum developments. Teacher AA echoed this, noting that many colleagues draft plans solely to fulfill formal obligations, without tailoring them to student needs. This trend is exacerbated by evaluation systems that emphasize document completeness over instructional quality, offering minimal pedagogical feedback. Supervisor H highlighted that weak accountability and superficial oversight further demotivate teachers, reducing lesson planning to an administrative task. Similarly, Supervisor SA observed that in her area, many teachers are only motivated by external triggers such as supervision or competitions. However, she also noted that in active school-based communities, some teachers are engaging in reflective planning tied to student assessment, offering a more hopeful countertrend.

Interpretive Challenges with the Merdeka Curriculum and PMM Platform

Although the Merdeka Curriculum promotes flexibility and teacher autonomy, its implementation has introduced interpretive challenges, particularly regarding lesson planning. Teachers like AA expressed concern that permissive messaging (such as “anything a teacher creates is not wrong”) blurs standards of instructional quality and creates ambiguity, especially in the absence of clear structural support. Supervisor H confirmed that while the curriculum aims to free teachers from rigid mandates, the lack of authoritative exemplars and subject-specific guidance has left many relying on uncontextualized PMM or MGMP lesson plans, reinforcing surface-level compliance over pedagogical depth. SA offered a complementary view, noting that many teachers lack the confidence to independently design high-quality plans due to the absence of clear benchmarks. She cautioned against the overreliance on PMM as a one-size-fits-all platform and emphasized that engagement should be based on professional growth, not external incentives. In her more reflective school communities, however, teachers collaboratively revise plans through lesson study and student assessment, illustrating a shift from compliance-driven planning to more meaningful, context-responsive instructional design.

In sum, EFL teachers face a complex array of challenges in aligning lesson planning with national policy mandates—including administrative burdens, time and resource constraints, uneven professional development, motivational barriers, and interpretive ambiguities. These challenges are not merely operational but reflect deeper tensions between top-down policy logics and bottom-up professional realities, as articulated in policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2012). The findings show that even well-intentioned reforms such as the Merdeka Curriculum can falter when supporting structures, professional clarity, and capacity-building mechanisms are not in place. For policy implementation to be sustainable and meaningful, frameworks must acknowledge that teachers are not only implementers, but also curriculum makers (Priestley et al., 2015)—active agents who interpret, reshape, and recontextualize educational policy through their pedagogical judgments and situated practices. Thus, enabling conditions such as strong supervision, space for collaborative planning, and consistent mentoring are critical for translating mandates into authentic, classroom-based instructional practice.

5. Discussion

This study examined how Indonesian EFL teachers navigate government-mandated lesson planning, revealing significant discrepancies between regulatory intent and school-level practice. Drawing on Ball, Maguire,

and Braun's (2012) policy enactment theory, the findings underscore that teachers are not mere implementers of policy, but active mediators who interpret, negotiate, and adapt directives based on contextual realities. Rather than enacting policy in a uniform manner, teachers respond variably, shaped by institutional capacity, workload, leadership quality, and available pedagogical support.

A key theme emerging from the data is the administrative framing of lesson planning. Teachers and school leaders reported that lesson plans are typically prepared only once a year for submission to provincial offices and are often developed collectively through MGMP. These plans serve primarily bureaucratic functions, while day-to-day instructional planning is often informal or non-existent. Supervisors like H and SA confirmed that validation emphasizes completeness and format over pedagogical rigor, leading to symbolic compliance rather than authentic instructional design. These patterns reveal a structural disconnect between policy design and classroom utility.

Further, the findings illustrate that excessive workloads and time constraints severely hinder reflective lesson planning. Teachers like PG and SSS described coping by reusing prior plans or copying materials from PMM or MGMP, often without contextual adaptation. This practice, while pragmatic, limits responsive teaching. SA observed that unless supervision or inspections are imminent, many teachers neglect their lesson plans entirely, reinforcing their marginal role in instructional decision-making. These challenges are compounded by weak capacity-building structures. Supervisors often lack subject-matter expertise, as noted by AZ and H, leading to generic feedback. Although some supervisors like SA implement collaborative initiatives (such as peer review and lesson study) these practices are not yet widespread. The inconsistent quality of MGMP forums also affects the extent to which teachers can access meaningful support for lesson planning.

Crucially, this study reveals that teacher motivation is closely tied to how policies are enacted. While prior literature (e.g., Karimi & Abaszadeh, 2017) emphasizes autonomy as a motivator, this study finds that autonomy alone is insufficient in the absence of institutional validation, clarity, and substantive feedback. Teachers like AA and AZ noted that many peers produce plans merely to fulfill formalities, with little belief in their instructional value. However, where professional communities and reflective practices are encouraged—as in some of SA's schools—lesson planning regains its pedagogical relevance. Lastly, the Merdeka Curriculum's promise of flexibility remains unevenly realized. Teachers appreciated its spirit but critiqued vague messaging such as “no wrong lesson plan,” which led to confusion and weakened expectations. Supervisors echoed these concerns, highlighting the need for clearer exemplars and structured support. This reflects a broader lesson from policy enactment theory: that teacher agency requires more than policy freedom—it requires supportive conditions for informed professional judgment. As Priestley et al., (2015) argue, teachers should be recognized as curriculum makers whose agency is essential for translating policy into meaningful classroom practice.

In sum, while teachers demonstrate considerable resilience and adaptive capacity, their ability to align lesson plans with policy mandates is often constrained by systemic factors. This discussion affirms the need for reforms that not only mandate policy compliance but also cultivate enabling conditions—discipline-specific mentoring, collaborative planning time, and reflective supervision—that empower teachers to enact policy with depth, intentionality, and contextual relevance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Indonesian EFL teachers' engagement with government-mandated lesson planning is shaped by a complex interplay of administrative requirements, structural constraints, and pedagogical agency. While regulatory policies (such as those embedded in Ministerial Regulation No. 16 of 2022 and Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021) clearly mandate the development of lesson plans, teachers often encounter systemic barriers that hinder meaningful implementation. These include administrative burdens, excessive workloads, inconsistent supervisory support, and a lack of contextualized professional development. As a result, lesson plans are frequently treated as formalities, produced for compliance rather than used as active instructional tools.

Anchored in policy enactment theory (Ball et al., 2012; Spillane et al., 2002), the study illustrates that teachers are not passive recipients of policy but active agents who interpret and adapt mandates according to their situated realities. These findings align with Priestley et al., (2015) conception of teachers as curriculum makers—professionals who negotiate between policy frameworks and the needs of their students. To bridge the gap between policy and practice, the study suggests that educational authorities must go beyond mandating lesson plans and instead provide enabling conditions for their pedagogical use. This includes delivering coherent,

discipline-specific guidelines, investing in sustained mentoring, clarifying supervisory roles, and encouraging reflective, collaborative planning practices. By recognizing the cognitive, contextual, and creative labor involved in lesson planning, reforms can better empower teachers to develop responsive, instructionally rich lesson designs that are both compliant and pedagogically meaningful.

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