

A Curriculum Design Analysis of English Learning Outcomes in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the English Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran*) for junior high school in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum to examine how language competencies are conceptualized and what curriculum design orientation they reflect. While the existing research has largely focused on classroom implementation, limited attention has been given to analyzing the learning outcomes document itself as a curriculum product. Adopting qualitative document analysis, the study examines five competency clauses and the accompanying rationales using the framework of language curriculum development. The findings indicate that the Learning Outcomes document functions primarily as a goals-and-skills specification. Learning content is broadly implied in the outcome statements and elaborated in the rationale, while methodological guidance appears only in the rationale through a genre-based approach. Assessment is not specified within the document but is addressed in separate materials, indicating a fragmented distribution of curriculum information. This pattern reflects a backward design orientation combined with partial methodological direction, revealing a tension between outcome-based flexibility and implicit pedagogical guidance. Also, the Learning Outcomes reflect a predominantly functional view of language, supported by structural elements within a genre-based framework. The curriculum ideology is largely learner-centered, with limited evidence of cultural pluralism and no indication of academic rationalism or social reconstructionism. These findings suggest increased interpretive demands on teachers and highlight the need to strengthen curriculum coherence and teacher curriculum design literacy.

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum is a major reform in Indonesia's education policy. It focuses on flexible learning, student independence, and learning outcomes based on skills. In this system, learning outcomes (*capaian pembelajaran*) are the main reference for what students should be able to do at each stage of learning (BSKAP, 2025). Learning outcomes in English language learning set the limits and goals for language abilities including listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting. In other words, learning outcomes are a basic curriculum document that helps

teachers, and anyone who implements the curriculum, understand the goals, the contents, and the assessment of language acquisition (Delany et al., 2016; Leung & Scarino, 2016).

Introduced in 2022, the Merdeka Curriculum represented a major change to Indonesia's national education system. Developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek), this curriculum was created in response to a learning crisis that worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Merdeka Curriculum replaced the 2013 Curriculum and aims to provide a simpler, more flexible education that focuses more on students (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Nugraha, 2022). One of the primary changes in this reform is that Learning Outcomes replace the Core Competencies (*Kompetensi Inti*) and the Basic Competencies (*Kompetensi Dasar*) as the main competence framework (Gumilar et al., 2023). Unlike the system in the previous Curriculum, which established detailed competency standards for each subject and grade level, the Learning Outcomes in the Merdeka Curriculum are organized based on learning phases that cover several grade levels, thereby allowing schools and teachers more autonomy in determining how to achieve these outcomes (Hadi et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum organizes learning outcomes into six phases: Phase A (Grades 1–2), Phase B (Grades 3–4), Phase C (Grades 5–6), Phase D (Grades 7–9), Phase E (Grade 10), and Phase F (Grades 11–12). Phase D, which is the focus of this study, covers junior high school grades 7 through 9. Compared to earlier phases, these junior high school learning outcomes introduce more complex competencies such as argumentation and multimodal literacy, yet the outcome statements remain broad and unelaborated. This makes it important to examine what curriculum design principles and views of language actually underlie these outcomes.

To understand this analysis, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual differences between curriculum, syllabus, and learning outcomes in language education. In language teaching, the term "curriculum" refers to a comprehensive set of processes involving the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a language program, which includes objectives, content, methodology, instructional materials, and assessment (Richards, 2001). On the other hand, the term "syllabus" is more explicit and relates to the order and content of a course (Macalister & Nation, 2019). Richards (2001) argues that language teaching has historically focused too narrowly on syllabus design while neglecting the broader curriculum development process. On the other hand, the term "learning outcomes" refers to specific statements describing what learners are expected to be able to do by the end of a learning phase. Learning outcomes are the output dimension of the curriculum, as opposed to learning objectives, which reflect instructional intents, and competencies, which indicate broader abilities (Hartel & Foegeding, 2004; Leung & Scarino, 2016). Learning outcomes document in the context of Merdeka Curriculum outlines the competencies that students should accomplish without providing the sequencing of contents, teaching methods, or specific assessment instruments. Therefore, instead of being a complete and standalone curriculum document, Learning Outcomes act as a part of the curriculum's structure, specifically as learning objectives and outcomes. Thus, analyzing what is and is not included in this document provides insight into which dimensions of language curriculum design have been centralized to the government and which have been delegated to teachers and schools.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Richards' (2001) model of language curriculum development. Richards (2001) conceptualizes language curriculum development as a systematic process involving interrelated components consisting of needs analysis, situational analysis, goal setting, syllabus design, instructional material development, methodology, and

evaluation. Each of these components represents a series of decisions that shape the language program as a whole (Richards, 2001). The core of this framework is the acknowledgement that curriculum design reflects a particular view of language. Richards (2001) also identifies three main perspectives: (1) the structural view, which views language as a system of rules and grammatical patterns; (2) the functional view, which views language as a means of expressing meaning and serving communicative functions; and (3) the interactional view, which views language as a tool for creating and maintaining social relationships (Richards, 2001). These perspectives shape how goals are formulated, how content is selected and organized, and what is considered to be successful learning. Additionally, Richards (2001) identifies several curriculum ideologies that influence the philosophy of language programs, including academic rationalism, social reconstructionism, learner-centered approaches, and cultural pluralism. In a subsequent work, Richards (2013) further proposed a distinction between forward-design (starting from the syllabus), central-design (starting from methodology), and backward-design (starting from learning outcomes), arguing that this distinction clarifies the logic underlying various approaches to curriculum development. For the purposes of this study, Richards' (2001) concepts related to views on language, curriculum components, and curriculum ideology serve as analytical categories are chosen to examine Learning Outcomes for junior high school.

Research on the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education has grown rapidly in recent years, yet its focus has been almost entirely on classroom implementation. Several studies have examined teaching practices and learning strategies within the new curriculum (Latifa & Ratih, 2023; Lestari et al., 2024), teachers' perceptions and readiness to adapt to curriculum changes (Ferdus & Novita, 2023; Lestari et al., 2024), the integration of technology in English language classrooms (Antika et al., 2024), and the alignment of textbooks with Learning Outcomes (Nuralawiah et al., 2024). Other studies have also explored teachers' literacy regarding Learning Outcomes and how they translate these outcomes into learning goals in their teaching practices (Afriyanti et al., 2024; Novita et al., 2023). Although this body of research has provided valuable insights into how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in the classroom, these studies treat the Learning Outcomes document primarily as a reference standard, rather than as an object of analysis in its own right.

A small number of studies have begun to examine the curriculum documents themselves. Rohimajaya and Hamer (2023) compared the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum for English language courses at the high school level using content analysis across several dimensions, including an analysis of targeted competencies, curriculum structure, and assessment. Muslim and Sumarni (2023) analyzed the design of the English curriculum in the Merdeka Curriculum by synthesizing the main frameworks of language curriculum design and applying them as a rubric to the Learning Outcomes document. Despite these studies, unfortunately, there has been a noticeable gap in research that employs a systematic language curriculum development framework specifically to analyze English Learning Outcomes in order to investigate what these outcomes reveal regarding curriculum design orientation, their implicit views on language, and how language competencies are conceptualized and organized within the document.

This gap matters because learning outcome specifications are not merely a neutral list of competencies. As Richards (2001) points out, the way learning outcomes are formulated reflects fundamental assumptions about the nature of language, the goals of language learning, and the relationship between language knowledge and language use. Learning Outcomes documents

implicitly represent specific views of language, whether structural, functional, or interactional, as well as specific curriculum ideologies that shape what is considered valid language knowledge and how learning should be organized (Richards, 2001, 2013). Without such analysis, teachers and curriculum implementers are forced to implement documents where the underlying design logic remains unclear. When the theoretical orientation of the Learning Outcomes is not explicitly explained, there is a risk that teachers will interpret and implement them in inconsistent ways and with pedagogical directions other than those intended by the curriculum. For example, teachers may rely on structural or grammar-focused instruction even though the learning outcomes are designed based on communicative or text-based principles (Le et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2024). This misalignment between curriculum intentions and classroom practice has been widely documented in the context of language education research, where policy documents are adopted without systematic analysis of their conceptual foundations (Le et al., 2021; Rose & McKinley, 2023). Therefore, analyzing the design orientation and language views embedded in the Learning Outcomes is not merely an academic exercise but an important step toward ensuring a coherent curriculum implementation grounded in adequate information.

Building on this gap, the present study aims to analyze the English Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran) for junior high school in the Merdeka Curriculum, as outlined in Decision No. 046/H/KR/2025 (BSKAP, 2025), to examine how language competencies are conceptualized and organized, and what design orientation the outcomes specification reflects. Guided by Richards' (2001) language curriculum development framework, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What curriculum components, as defined by Richards (2001), are reflected in the English Learning Outcomes for junior high school?
2. What view of language and language learning ideology underpins the Learning Outcomes?

This study contributes to the field of language curriculum studies by focusing its analysis directly on the Learning Outcomes document as a curriculum product. Rather than asking how teachers implement the Learning Outcomes or how textbooks align with them, this study examines what the document itself reveals about the logic behind the design of the English language curriculum within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. These findings are expected to provide insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and English teachers who seek to understand the pedagogical foundations of the learning outcomes they are required to implement.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach using a document analysis design to examine the English Language Learning Outcomes documents for junior high school of the Merdeka Curriculum. Document analysis was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct a systematic and interpretive examination of official texts to uncover the meanings, patterns, and assumptions embedded within policy documents (Bowen, 2009). This approach is also suitable for curriculum research that aims to understand how educational intentions are formulated in formal documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the official document on English Language Learning Outcomes for junior high school, as stipulated in Decision No. 046/H/KR/2025 issued by

the Head of the Agency for Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment (BSKAP, 2025). The document was publicly accessed online through a digital repository containing official curriculum policy documents published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This document contains the English language competencies expected to be achieved by junior high school students (grades 7-9) in the Merdeka Curriculum. The data analyzed in this study consist of two components of the document, namely: (1) a background description, which explains the curriculum's pedagogical orientation, the recommended language learning approaches, and their connection to the graduate profile; and (2) the learning outcome statements, which are organized based on three skill domains covering the Listening-Speaking (*Menyimak-Berbicara*), Reading-Viewing (*Membaca-Memirsa*), and Writing-Presenting (*Menulis-Mempresentasikan*) dimensions. The English Learning Outcomes document for junior high school contains three learning outcome statements, one for Listening-Speaking, one for Reading-Viewing, and one for Writing-Presenting. Some of these statements cover more than one competency, which are separated by semicolons. To allow for a more detailed analysis, each competency is treated as a separate unit of analysis. The Listening-Speaking and Writing-Presenting statements each contain two competencies separated by a semicolon, while the Reading-Viewing statement contains a single continuous competency in which comprehension and response are presented as a single integrated process without a semicolon. This results in a total of five units of analysis (see Table 2).

Analytical Framework

The analysis draws on Richards' (2001) framework for language curriculum development. Rather than applying the entire framework, which covers the curriculum development process from needs analysis, situational analysis, methodology, instructional materials, to evaluation, this study selectively utilizes the most relevant components to analyze the learning outcomes specification document. The analysis specifically focuses on two dimensions:

1. Curriculum components: examining which elements of Richards' (2001) framework are present in the document and which are absent or left to the teacher's decision. The elements examined include objectives, content specifications, skill categorization, syllabus types, methodology, and assessment.
2. Views on language and curriculum ideology: analyzing whether the learning outcomes reflect a structural view (language as a system of grammatical rules), a functional view (language as a tool for expressing communicative meaning), an interactional view (language as a resource for social relations), or a combination of these views; as well as which curriculum ideology (academic rationalism, student-centered, social reconstructionism, etc.) is embodied by these learning outcomes (Richards, 2001).

The selective application of this framework is justified by the nature of the data, in which Learning Outcomes are a statement of achievement specifications rather than a complete curriculum package, and therefore not all components of Richards' model are expected to be present.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted in four steps:

Step 1 was unitization. Each competency clause in the junior high school learning outcomes was identified as a unit of analysis. The five competency clauses were extracted verbatim

and organized into a data matrix along with the introductory background descriptions. This is presented in Table 1 in the method section.

Step 2 was deductive coding for RQ1. The competency clauses and introductory rationale were coded based on Richards' (2001) curriculum components using a deductive coding approach (Saldaña, 2016). Coding categories were predefined based on the framework, as follows:

Table 1. Coding Categories for Identifying Curriculum Components

Code	Definition	Example indicator	Example from LO
Goals	What students should be able to do by the end of the phase	What students should be able to do by the end of the phase	"Understand the entire flow of information..."; "Communicate their ideas and experiences..."
Content/Syllabus type	What topics, text types, or language items students will learn	References to specific or general content areas	"everyday topics or topics of interest"; "various types of written or multimodal texts"
Skills organization	How language skills are grouped or arranged	Skills being paired, integrated, or separated	Listening paired with Speaking; Reading paired with Viewing; Writing paired with Presenting
Implied methodology	How teachers are expected to teach	References to teaching approaches or learning activities	"text-based teaching" (found in the rationale section only)
Assessment orientation	How learning should be tested or evaluated	References to performance criteria, tests, or evaluation methods	Not found in the document

Source: Adapted from Richards (2001)

For each learning outcome statement, the researchers noted which components were explicitly present, implicitly implied, or absent altogether. Step 3 was interpretive coding for RQ2. Each learning outcome statement was further analyzed to identify the underlying views on language reflected within it. Three codes were used based on Richards (2001):

1. Structural: emphasis on grammatical accuracy, linguistic forms, and rules
2. Functional: emphasis on communicative functions, meaning-making, and real-world language use
3. Interactional: emphasis on social interaction, negotiation of meaning, and interpersonal communication

Additionally, units are coded based on the curriculum ideology in which these indicators are embedded. For example, a student-centered approach is marked by references to students' interests or choices, and academic rationalism is marked by an emphasis on disciplinary knowledge of language.

Step 4 was pattern identification and interpretation. After the coding process, the researcher examines the coded data to identify patterns within it, such as which curriculum components appear most frequently, which are absent, and whether perspectives on language remain consistent across outcome statements or vary by skill domain. The introductory rationale is also compared with the outcome statements to identify additional curriculum-related information which is not covered in the outcome statements itself. These patterns are then interpreted in relation to Richards' (2001) framework and within the broader literature on language curriculum design.

Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to ensure the credibility and reliability of the analysis. First, a theory-based coding scheme with clearly defined categories was established prior to the analysis process to minimize subjective interpretation (Saldaña, 2016). Second, repeated document readings were conducted, in which the researchers read the documents in whole at least three times before coding to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the text (Bowen, 2009). Third, all coding decisions were documented along with their rationale to ensure transparency and the confirmability of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fourth, peer debriefing was conducted to strengthen credibility. This step involves discussing emerging themes and interpretations with a peer who is not personally involved in the research. It allows the research to be evaluated by an outside perspective and helps identify any potential biases that have not yet been identified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the manuscript was prepared collaboratively, the coding and primary analysis were conducted by the first author. The use of a predefined coding framework and the documentation of coding decisions served as measures to minimize personal bias in interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the English Learning Outcomes for junior high school in the Merdeka Curriculum to examine how language competencies are conceptualized and organized, and what design orientation the document reflects. The analysis was guided by Richards' (2001) framework for language curriculum development and addressed two research questions.

The junior high school English Learning Outcomes, as stipulated in Decision No. 046/H/KR/2025 (BSKAP, 2025), contain three outcome statements distributed across three skill domains. These statements were divided into five competency clauses, which serve as the primary units of analysis. The complete data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Junior High School English Learning Outcomes: Competency Clauses

No.	Skill Domain	Competency Clause
1a	Listening-Speaking	Understand the entire flow of information, main ideas and details of oral texts about everyday topics or topics of interest
1b	Listening-Speaking	Use English to express ideas and experiences in various types of texts orally about the topics discussed using simple and compound sentences, both formally and informally in line with its context
2	Reading-Viewing	Understand the entire flow of information, explicit and implicit information from various types of written or multimodal texts about everyday topics or topics of interest and respond in line with its context
3a	Writing-Presenting	Communicate ideas and experiences in various types of texts, in written or multimodal texts, about everyday topics or topics of interest, by starting to use simple and compound sentences with appropriate text structures and language features
3b	Writing-Presenting	Express opinions and defend arguments on issues related to daily topics or topics of interests

Source: Adapted from BSKAP (2025)

In addition to the outcome statements, the introductory rationale of the document was also analyzed. This rationale states that communication in English learning occurs "*pada tingkat teks*,

bukan hanya sekedar kalimat" (at the text level, not merely at the sentence level), and that students must attend to "*fungsi sosial, struktur organisasi, dan unsur kebahasaan*" (social function, organizational structure, and language features) when producing and comprehending texts (BSKAP, 2025).

The following sections present the findings along with the discussion in relation to each research question.

RQ1: What curriculum components, as defined by Richards (2001), are reflected in the English Learning Outcomes for junior high school?

The coding of the five competency clauses and the introductory rationale based on Richards' (2001) curriculum components resulted in the following findings, which are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Presence of Curriculum Components in Junior High School Learning Outcomes Document

Curriculum Component	Outcome Statements	Introductory Rationale
Goals	Explicitly present. All five clauses use action verbs: <i>understand, use, communicate, express, defend</i> .	Explicitly present. The " <i>Tujuan</i> " (Purpose) section lists four overarching aims: communicative competence, intercultural competence, self-confidence and independence, and critical and creative thinking (BSKAP, 2025).
Content/ Syllabus type	Implicitly present. References to "various types of texts," "everyday topics or topics of interest," "everyday topics or topics of interest," and "multimodal texts," but no specific genres, grammar items, or functions are listed.	More specific. The rationale sets a CEFR A2 proficiency target for junior high school and specifies a vocabulary benchmark of 2,000 high frequency words. It also mentions text types in general terms but does not list specific genres for junior high school.
Skills organization	Explicitly present. Skills are paired into three integrated domains: Listening-Speaking, Reading-Viewing, and Writing-Presenting.	Explicitly present. The rationale clarifies that these three domains consist of six elements taught in an integrated manner.
Implied methodology	Absent. The outcome statements contain no guidance on how teaching should be conducted.	Substantially present. The rationale explicitly endorses genre-based pedagogy and describes a four-stage instructional cycle: (1) Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF), (2) Modelling of the Text (MoT), (3) Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT), and (4) Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT) (BSKAP, 2025). It also states that other relevant language teaching approaches may be used.
Assessment orientation	Absent.	Absent. Neither the outcome statements nor the rationale specify how learning should be assessed, what performance criteria should be used, or what forms of evaluation are expected.

The analysis reveals a clear division of function within the document. The outcome statements serve primarily as goal statements, describing what students should achieve by the end of junior high school through action verbs such as “understand”, “communicate”, and “express”. Content is implied through general references to “everyday topics” and “various types of texts,” but no specific genres, grammatical structures, or communicative functions are listed. The outcome statements contain no guidance on teaching methods or assessment.

The introductory rationale, by contrast, carries a substantially heavier curriculum design load. It specifies overarching aims through the “*Tujuan*” section, content benchmarks through the CEFR A2 proficiency target and the expectation of 2,000 high frequency words, methodology through the explicit endorsement of genre-based pedagogy with a prescribed four-stage teaching cycle (BKoF - MoT - JCoT - ICoT), and skills structure by explaining that six language elements are integrated into three paired domains. This suggests that the curriculum’s practical impact depends on how extensively teachers engage with the full document rather than only the outcome statements. It also creates potential gap between curriculum design and classroom practice, as teachers who rely only on outcome statements may overlook key methodological guidance embedded in the rationale.

The inclusion of CEFR benchmarks introduces a global reference framework, which assumes standardized proficiency descriptors that may not reflect the variability of local classroom conditions and students’ language exposure, and may therefore not fully align with local curricular priorities. It also may create challenges for teachers in interpreting how global proficiency targets should be translated into locally relevant instructional practices. Previous research suggests that teachers often engage selectively with curriculum documents, focusing on outcome specifications rather than the broader rationale (Graves, 2008), which raises a practical concern about how much of the curriculum's design intent actually reaches classrooms.

The only curriculum component entirely absent from both parts of the document is assessment. Richards (2001) argues that evaluation is an essential component of curriculum development because it provides the feedback loop connecting goals to actual learning. Without assessment guidelines aligned to the functional and genre-based orientation of the outcomes, there is no mechanism within the document to ensure consistency in how student achievement is evaluated across schools. This absence may lead to inconsistent interpretations of student achievement across schools, particularly given the communicative and genre-based orientation of the outcomes.

In Richards' (2013) terms, this pattern is consistent with backward design, in which the curriculum specifies desired outcomes and expects implementers to develop assessments and detailed content sequences. It indicates that the curriculum does not fully delegate pedagogical decisions but instead combines outcome-based flexibility with implicit methodological direction. The government prescribes a preferred instructional approach rather than leaving methodology entirely to teachers, while still allowing flexibility for alternatives. At the same time, the delegation of content and assessment to teachers reflects the Merdeka Curriculum’s broader emphasis on teacher autonomy (Hadi et al., 2023; Nugraha, 2022). The combination suggests a partial decentralization of curriculum design, in which autonomy is granted at the level of outcomes and content, but constrained at the level of methodology. As a result, a tension emerges between the curriculum’s stated emphasis on teacher autonomy and its implicit guidance toward a preferred pedagogical approach.

RQ2: What view of language and language learning ideology underpins the Learning Outcomes?

The coding of competency clauses and the introductory rationale for views of language yielded the patterns summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Views of Language Reflected in Junior High School Learning Outcomes

No.	Competency (simplified)	Clause	View of Language	Why this code was assigned
1a	Understand information, main ideas, details from oral texts		Functional	The clause focuses entirely on understanding meaning (information, ideas). No reference to language form or grammar.
1b	Use English to express ideas and experiences orally using simple and compound sentences		Functional Structural	+ (1) Expressing ideas and experiences = meaning-making (functional). (2) "Simple and compound sentences" = reference to grammatical form (structural).
2	Understand explicit and implicit information from written/multimodal texts and respond in context		Functional	The clause focuses on understanding meaning from texts. "Respond in context" suggests some interactional element, but the primary focus is comprehension.
3a	Communicate ideas in written/multimodal texts with appropriate text structures and language features		Functional Structural	+ (1) Communicating ideas = meaning-making (functional). (2) "Appropriate text structures and language features" = attention to form and genre (structural/genre-based).
3b	Express opinions and defend arguments		Functional Interactional	+ (1) Expressing opinions = communicating meaning (functional). (2) Defending arguments = using language to persuade or influence others (interactional).
Introductory Rationale (policy statement)	Text-based approach; social function, organizational structure, language features		Functional Structural (genre-based)	+ Explicitly names social function, text structure, and language features as the three dimensions of text study.

The dominant view of language across the document is functional: language is consistently treated as a tool for meaning-making and communication. Each competency clause focuses on what students can do with language, like understand, express, communicate, respond, and argue, rather than on what they know about language. However, a structural dimension is also present in clauses 1b and 3a, which reference "simple and compound sentences" and "appropriate text structures and language features." These structural references serve a supporting role: they describe the linguistic resources needed for effective communication rather than positioning language form as a learning goal in itself.

The introductory rationale reinforces and extends this interpretation through its three-part analytical framework: social function ("*fungsi sosial*"), organizational structure ("*struktur organisas*"), and language features ("*unsur kebahasaan*"). This framework reflects a genre-based perspective, in which language is understood through the lens of text types that serve specific social purposes (Derewianka, 2003; Richards, 2001). It positions the curriculum between purely functional and structural views, attending to language form but always in service of communicative purpose. Notably, the three-part framework operationalizes the genre-based approach at the policy level. It

tells teachers that every text should be analyzed through these three lenses, effectively prescribing a genre-based analytical method even though the outcome statements themselves do not specify methodology. While these patterns reveal how language is conceptualized, they also point to underlying curriculum ideologies that shape what counts as valid knowledge and learning.

Regarding curriculum ideology, the document shows indicators of several orientations to varying degrees. Learner-centeredness is evident through repeated references to “everyday topics or topics of interest” (*“topik sehari-hari atau yang sesuai dengan minat”*), which positions student interest as a criterion for content selection. However, this learner-centeredness operates at the content level only; the document does not reference student autonomy in choosing learning methods, self-assessment, or other markers of deeper learner-centered pedagogy. Cultural pluralism is partially present: the Purpose section lists intercultural competence as one of four overarching aims, though this remains a stated goal rather than being operationalized in the outcome statements themselves. Academic rationalism, which emphasizes systematic mastery of disciplinary knowledge about language, is not reflected. In other words, the outcomes focus on language use rather than language knowledge. Social reconstructionism, which positions language education as a means to address social inequality or promote social transformation, is also absent. The document does not reference equity, social justice, or community change as goals of English learning. This pattern suggests that curriculum prioritizes communicative competence and learner relevance, while giving limited attention to language as disciplinary knowledge and as a tool for social transformation.

The inclusion of argumentation and opinion expression in clause 3b is noteworthy because it introduces critical thinking dimension that goes beyond basic communicative competence. This positions junior high school English learning as not only functional but also intellectually demanding, requiring students to engage with ideas and defend positions, which is a feature increasingly emphasized in 21st-century language education frameworks (Yuan et al., 2022).

Taken together, the junior high school Learning Outcomes embody a hybrid functional-genre view of language, integrating multiple pedagogical orientations rather than adopting a single perspective (Richards, 2001; Rose & McKinley, 2023). The curriculum ideology is predominantly learner-centered at the content level, with partial cultural pluralism and an emerging critical thinking dimension, while academic rationalism and social reconstructionism are absent. While this hybrid orientation provides flexibility, it may also result in varied interpretations among teachers due to the lack of explicit guidance on how these perspectives should be operationalized in practice.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the English Learning Outcomes for Phase D in the Merdeka Curriculum using Richards' (2001) framework for language curriculum development to address two central research questions.

Regarding the first research question, the analysis found that the Phase D document functions primarily as a goals and skills specification. Of the curriculum components identified by Richards (2001), goals and skills organization are explicitly present in both the outcome statements and the introductory rationale; content is implied at a general level in the outcome statements but specified more concretely in the rationale through a CEFR A2 proficiency target and a vocabulary benchmark of 2,000 high frequency words; methodology is addressed only in the rationale, which endorses genre-based pedagogy with a four-stage instructional cycle: (1) Building Knowledge of

the Field (BKoF), (2) Modelling of the Text (MoT), (3) Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT), and (4) Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT). Crucially, assessment orientation is entirely absent from both outcomes the rationale, which considered as a gap that suggest a radical backward design orientation where the government mandates a specific methodology while leaving the critical feedback loop of evaluation entirely to the teachers' interpretation. This omission creates a systemic risk of assessment anarchy and validity drift, where inconsistent evaluation criteria across regions could undermine the curriculum's communicative goals and exacerbate educational inequality.

Regarding the second research question, the document reflects a predominantly functional view of language where structural elements serve only to support meaning-making. However, the underlying curriculum ideology reveals a noticeable limitation. While the document is learner-centred in terms of students' interest, it is largely silent on social reconstructionism, with no explicit positioning of language as a tool for engaging with broader social issues. It suggests a policy orientation that prioritizes communicative and functional language use, with relatively limited emphasis on the development of students' critical perspective. Furthermore, the tension between global CEFR benchmarks and local curriculum learning goals highlights a potential disconnect from the diverse socio-economic realities of Indonesian classrooms. Ultimately, because vital design information is buried in the rationale rather than the outcome statements, there is an urgent need for professional development that focuses on curriculum design literacy, ensuring teachers can decode these policy contradictions rather than remaining passive implementers of a broad and theoretically unbalanced framework.

These findings carry two practical implications. First, the document distributes curriculum information unevenly: the outcome statements specify goals broadly, while the rationale provides substantially more detail on methodology, content benchmarks, and overarching aims. Teachers who engage only with the outcome statements for their phase will miss significant curriculum design guidance. As a result, implementation may vary considerably across classrooms, depending on how extensively teachers interpret and integrate the full document. Teacher professional development programs should therefore equip English teachers not only with classroom techniques but also with literacy regarding the curriculum design, including the ability to interpret outcome statements within the context of the full document.

Second, the absence of assessment criteria within the Learning Outcomes document raises a critical issue regarding how learning will be interpreted and evaluated at the classroom level. While assessment guidance is available in other supporting documents, such as curriculum implementation guidelines, the separation of assessment from the outcome specification may reduce its visibility and coherence at the point of use. As a result, teachers who rely primarily on the Learning Outcomes may lack clear direction for aligning assessment practices with the intended competencies. This fragmentation creates a risk of variation in how student achievement is evaluated across schools, potentially weakening the alignment between intended outcomes and actual learning. Supplementary efforts to integrate assessment guidance more explicitly with outcome specifications may therefore be necessary to support more coherent implementation.

This study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a single policy document containing five competency clauses and an introductory rationale, a limited dataset that restricts the generalizability of the findings. The study relied on a single coder, which may affect the reliability of the coding. As a document analysis, this study examined only the intended curriculum and cannot

speak to how the Learning Outcomes are interpreted or enacted by teachers in classrooms. Future research should investigate the implementation of Phase D English Learning Outcomes through classroom observation and teacher interviews to understand how the design logic identified in this study translated into pedagogical practice. Comparative studies analyzing Learning Outcomes across different phases or subject areas would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum design within the Merdeka Curriculum.

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