



Communicative Competence: Its Implications for English-as-a-Foreign-Language Teachers in Indonesia

Faisal

English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia

*Corresponding author's email: faisal@ump.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This paper forms part of a broader study investigating the competencies required of secondary-school English teachers and the implications of communicative competence for teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) within the Indonesian context, as emphasized in national curriculum documents. Employing a document analysis methodology, the study examines these curriculum frameworks to identify key implications for English language teachers at the secondary level in Indonesia. The findings highlight essential considerations for instructional practices, including an emphasis on fluency, student-centered learning, and communicative-based approaches. Specifically, the study suggests that English teachers in Indonesia should prioritize fluency over accuracy, adopt student-centered pedagogies, and integrate communicative strategies to facilitate effective language acquisition and help students achieve desired learning outcomes. By enhancing the understanding of TEFL practices in Indonesia, this study offers valuable insights for English language educators in designing effective teaching programs that align with the competencies outlined in the national curriculum.

Keywords: Communicative competence, English teaching, secondary-school English writing teachers

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INTRODUCTION

The imperative for English language proficiency in Indonesia is increasingly pronounced (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b). Specifically, the primary goals for English language learning at the secondary level encompass the cultivation of students' communicative skills, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The curriculum outlines that students should be able to articulate and interpret both spoken and written meanings, engage in negotiation, and respond appropriately within diverse social contexts. This necessitates the fluent and contextually appropriate use of interpersonal, ideational, and textual resources to facilitate effective engagement in daily life.

To realize these curricular objectives, the educational framework in Indonesia's underlying framework aligns with the concept of communicative competence, as Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) articulated. Within this concept, discourse competence is posited as a fundamental component of communicative proficiency. Discourse competence enables the creation of unified and comprehensible texts that resonate with members of the linguistic community. It facilitates textual coherence by ensuring

that linguistic elements, such as lexical choices and grammatical structures, are deployed in a contextually appropriate and logically connected manner (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Furthermore, discourse competence contributes to textual fluency by enabling the establishment of cohesive links between utterances and facilitating the prediction of subsequent discourse elements (Kaplan & Knudson, 1993).

A critical aspect of the implementation of communicative competence concerns the multifaceted nature of language proficiency, extending beyond grammatical correctness to encompass the ability to communicate meaningfully and appropriately in various contexts (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2020). Another involves the balance between fluency and accuracy, a tension that is particularly pronounced in the Indonesian context. Agustien (2016) suggests that students benefit most from tasks that engage them in creating coherent texts, both spoken and written, rather than focusing solely on sentence-level accuracy. Tasks that prioritize content and meaning over strict grammatical adherence (Hadley & Reiken, 1993; Weaver, 1996) have been shown to enhance language mastery and communicative competence.

Notwithstanding being labeled as a curriculum with a communicative approach, teachers often orchestrate instructional practices that are considered far from communicative. While communicative competence emphasizes fluency and meaningful communication, traditional teaching practices often prioritize grammatical accuracy (e.g., Lestari et al., 2025; Pasaribu et al., 2024), reflecting the influence of high-stakes examinations. Teachers typically dominate EFL instruction and offer limited opportunities for students to exchange their ideas with their peers (e.g., Faisal & Rakhmasari, 2024; Yundayani & Alghadari, 2025); thus, teacher centeredness remains prevalent (e.g., Bahar et al., 2024; Wungu et al., 2024). They place considerable emphasis on grammatical units given in isolation from a communicative context. They orient their teaching towards succeeding their students in the end-of-school evaluation rather than fostering their students to use the learned language as a means of communication (Puspitasari, 2024; Wilson & Defianty, 2024).

Hence, while policies emphasize communicative competence, the extent to which these policies translate into effective classroom practices remains unclear. Moreover, there is limited insight into how these teachers understand and operationalize the various components of communicative competence (e.g., grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence) as contained in the curriculum documents. The primary aim of this study is to investigate the implications of the Indonesian national curriculum documents' articulation of communicative competence for secondary school English teachers. To approach the aim, this study will address the following question: *What are the implications of the communicative concept for secondary school English teachers as the Indonesian national curriculum documents (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) articulate?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary objective of learning English in the current Indonesian curriculum of teaching English as a foreign language (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) is to assist students in mastering sufficient communicative competence so that they are capable of solving any problems in and sustaining communication with anyone in their closest environment. To help the students attain the intended competence, teachers should know how the curriculum develops, organizes, and articulates communicative competence along with its nature and underpinning principles.

Regarding the nature of communicative competence, the curriculum draws on the concept coined by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), stating that such competence should have support from linguistic, strategic, socio-cultural, and discourse competencies. The current curriculum defines linguistic competence as students' ability to understand and utilize lexico-grammatical items such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and phrase and sentence construction in their texts. Such items serve as the underlying systems that can realize meanings into spoken or written physical and observable forms. The meanings or messages that someone is trying to convey are, accordingly, communicative and understandable.

There are some implications for teachers regarding linguistic competence in the curricula contained. Teachers should be knowledgeable about how specific linguistic items work to create acceptable and meaningful texts implicitly contained in the curricula and how particular grammatical features are utilized in real-life communication acts. They must understand how each linguistic component works in a text to attain a specific communicative intent. They should comprehend that using language does not merely construct or put chains of words, phrases, sentences, or utterances correctly and accurately. Such chains should be formulated in such a comprehensive way that they are able to convey and exchange various meanings that are socially and contextually understandable (Agustien, 2006; Masduqi et al., 2024; Susiati & Mufidati, 2020). In turn, the teacher's knowledge of linguistic competence would also assist their students in "expressing messages and attitude and creating coherent texts" (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 46).

Socio-cultural competence in the current curriculum (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) addresses how to express messages appropriately within the overall social context of communication. It concerns the need to possess language variations regarding the socio-cultural norms of the target language. In addition, it relates to factors affecting a communication process, such as the status of interlocutors, interactional purposes, or the expectations of parties involved in a communication act (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b).

Considering the curriculum's underpinning concept of socio-cultural competence (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b), teachers should be well informed about the relevant knowledge needed to use language suitably in accordance with specific contexts and cultures. Such knowledge includes participant and situational variables as well as cultural factors contributing to a writer's selection of style, words, and

tones in her/his attempt to convey her/his message suitably. The teachers should comprehend how such variables and factors may considerably impact lexico-grammatical constructions. In addition, teachers need to prepare culturally and contextually related teaching materials to maintain the meaningfulness of text so that their students can achieve a specific communicative intent (i.e., Faisal et al., 2023; Hartono et al., 2017; Hidayah et al., 2021; Melati, 2017).

Strategic competence in the current curriculum (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) concerns the ability to utilize various strategies to tackle any issues arising in a communication process. This competence also relates to one's skill to compensate, for instance, her/his linguistic insufficiency when s/he conveys and comprehends any message. In other words, this competence involves how well a person uses verbal and non-verbal communication to overcome her/his lack of language knowledge.

For teachers, they have to be knowledgeable about what strategic competence is and how it should be taught to their students. Teachers should understand various yet appropriate strategies, for example, how a person starts, maintains, and ends a conversation with a new peer at school or a colleague in any context (Faisal et al., 2021; Faisal et al., 2023). Another instance is that they should be conversant with how a native speaker asks and responds to clarification. In terms of written communication, they should know how to write an opening part of an invitation or an introductory paragraph of, for example, an argumentative text. They should be acquainted with suitable strategies to compensate for any areas of weakness so as to make a message or text understandable and communicative (Agustien, 2006; Faisal, 2024; Fauziati et al., 2020; Nailissaadah & Triastuti, 2023).

The current curriculum (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) defines discourse competence as an ability to select, sequence, and arrange words, structures, or utterances, as well as utilize appropriate, cohesive devices so that the written or spoken messages can attain their communicative purposes. In this curriculum, discourse competence is also interpreted as an ability to create a communication process by taking into account particular topics, interpersonal relationships, and specific modes of cultural context.

As the primary learning goals that the curriculum contained are aimed at enhancing students' communicative skills, the current curriculum (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) considers that discourse competence is able to facilitate a balanced improvement of accuracy and fluency for several reasons. Discourse competence allows students to learn about and use language in various communication contexts. This competence integrates the other competencies the students have learned and possessed into meaningful spoken or written messages. In this respect, the curriculum views that the acquisition of communicative competence could be realized by taking it as the starting point; thus, a balance between the ends of learning the language and the means could be reached (Budiyanto & Haryanto, 2019; Masduqi et al., 2024; Prihananto, 2021).

The highlight of discourse competence in the current curriculum (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b) calls for teachers to consider some of the following implications. Teachers should be knowledgeable about

the principles of teaching linguistic, strategic, socio-cultural, and actional competencies that lead to creating a discourse, that is, contextually coherent texts. In terms of the creation of such texts, they should understand that every sentence should relate to and fit other sentences in a text and that such texts are built by relevance and consistency of ideas and logical relationships between utterances; therefore, the teachers should be well-informed about utilizing cohesive devices such as pronouns or conjunctions suitably (i.e., Agustien, 2006; Harahap & Ardi, 2023; Prihananto, 2021). The teachers should also be conversant with strategies to introduce grammatical markers like verbs in an integrated manner and a context of communication rather than in isolation.

Teachers should have knowledge about how discourse structures and the selection of styles are represented in written texts (Faisal et al., 2023; Sukmawati, 2018; Yuzar, 2020). They should be well-informed about the nature of the generic structure, which refers to organizing a text to attain its communicative purpose for a specific audience through a particular rhetorical step. They need to know their audience's characteristics and expectations in the target culture. They should know about writing conventions and strategies required to generate text. They should understand how to write topic sentences and use appropriate linkages among sentences in a paragraph and between paragraphs. They should also be conversant about what subjects are to be written and developed within each paragraph in accordance with their student's interests and characteristics.

In the Indonesian context, numerous scholars have explored the implementation of communicative competence in teaching English across various educational levels (i.e., Agustin & Wirza, 2020; Makruf et al., 2021; Noviyenty, 2022), as well as the challenges perceived by both teachers and students (i.e., Adiantika et al., 2021; Masduqi et al., 2024). Other studies (Nailissaadah & Triastuti, 2023; Tumansery & Munden, 2020a) have examined how communicative competence is represented in curricula and textbooks at specific educational levels. Prihananto (2021) provides a detailed analysis of the communicative competence construct and approach reflected in five different curricula for secondary-level English education. While a significant body of research has investigated various aspects of the communicative competence construct, as highlighted in the previous discussion, few, if any, studies have focused on its implications for English writing teachers.

To provide a robust analytical framework for this study to address the identified gap, the research draws upon the model of communicative competence developed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995). This model posits that communicative competence comprises linguistic, sociocultural, discourse, strategic, actional, and learning competencies. These components interact dynamically, reflecting the reality that effective communication is not merely a matter of grammatical accuracy but also involves sociocultural awareness, discourse management, and strategic problem-solving (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022; Prihananto, 2021). This framework is particularly suitable for analyzing communicative competence within the Indonesian context due to its comprehensive nature and its emphasis on

sociocultural factors (Kariadi & Pratiwi, 2022; Prihananto, 2021). Given Indonesia's rich linguistic and cultural diversity, the sociocultural component of the framework provides a valuable tool for examining how the curriculum addresses the development of culturally appropriate language use. Furthermore, the model's focus on discourse competence aligns with the curriculum's emphasis on creating coherent and contextually relevant texts (Hasanah & Gunawan, 2020; Iswandari & Ardi, 2022).

The analysis will proceed by examining how the curriculum documents address each of the components articulated in Celce-Murcia et al.'s framework. Specifically, the investigation will explore how the curriculum guides teachers in fostering the development of discourse competence, considering its role in enabling learners to produce coherent and contextually appropriate texts (Aprilianti, 2020; Tumansery & Munden, 2020b). The sociocultural component will be utilized to analyze how the curriculum promotes the integration of cultural awareness and sensitivity into English language teaching. By systematically applying Celce-Murcia et al.'s framework (1995), this study will provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Indonesian curriculum conceptualizes communicative competence and what its implications are for secondary English teachers.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2009) with a document analysis method to explore how communicative competence is represented in Indonesian curriculum documents and its implications for junior secondary school English teachers. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for a deeper understanding of the curriculum's principles, teaching guidelines, and expectations (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2015).

The study analyzed three key Indonesian curriculum documents of junior secondary schools MoEC stipulated: Basic Competencies (MoEC, 2013a), Process Standards (MoEC, 2013c), and Content Standards C (MoEC, 2013b). These documents that the MoEC issued define the required competencies, teaching methods, and content for English instruction at the junior secondary level. The analysis aimed to identify references to communicative competence and its instructional implications.

A thematic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Vaismoradi et al., 2016) was applied to examine how communicative competence is reflected in the curriculum systematically. The process started with familiarization, where the documents were carefully reviewed to understand their structure, content, and teaching focus. This step helped identify explicit and implicit references to communicative competence in English language instruction. Next, a coding process (Burla et al., 2008; Harding, 2015) was used to extract key terms, phrases, and teaching guidelines related to communicative competence. These coded elements were grouped into themes to clarify how the curriculum conceptualizes communicative competence and what it means for teaching practices. In the final stage, the findings were analyzed to identify how communicative competence is embedded in the curriculum and what adjustments teachers

may need to make. To ensure reliability, triangulation (Connelly, 2016) was applied by comparing findings across different curriculum documents to maintain consistency in interpretation. The following diagram represents the overall stages of the thematic analysis.

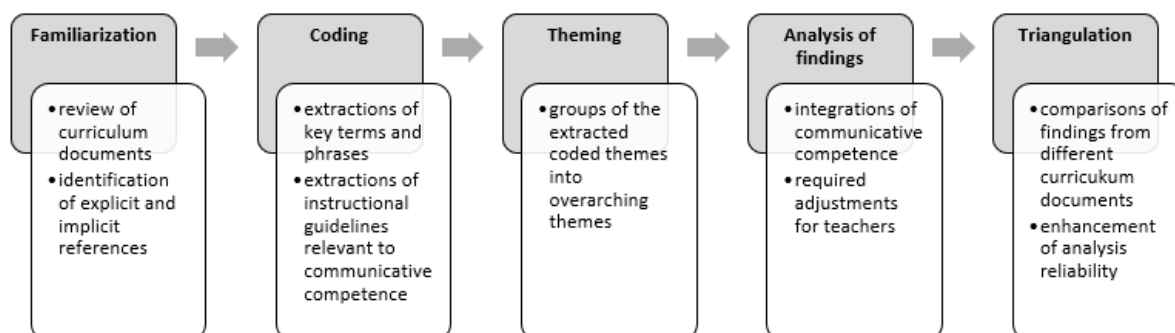


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Processes

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the analyses of relevant documents (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). With reference to the document analyses, this study posits that teachers should be aware of and knowledgeable about three prime implications – student-centeredness, an emphasis on fluency, and communicative-based practices – that are evident from the curriculum documents. Each of the implications will be elaborated in the following parts.

Student-centeredness

To date, the current curriculum (MoEC, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) has been deemed a student-centered learning approach. This approach has been implemented based on empirical premises that, firstly, the teacher-centered mode in the Indonesian context was no longer considered to be able to develop and foster students' communicative competence (i.e., Faisal et al., 2021; Harahap & Ardi, 2023; Prihananto, 2021). Secondly, the student-centered approach has successfully encouraged the students to participate actively in the learning process. More and more students have become independent, curious, initiative, cooperative, creative, and critical (i.e., Adiantika et al., 2021; Darsih, 2018). Accordingly, the student-centered approach needs teachers to understand their students coming to class with varying levels of, for example, ability and motivation.

To succeed in implementing student-centered learning, Law Number 16/2007 (MoNE, 2007) formulates a set of students' knowledge for English teachers to possess. One of the sets relates to teachers' knowledge of their students' potential, including their learning preferences and strategies, their affective and behavioral characteristics, and learning difficulties. Another set concerns teachers' comprehension of each student's prior language knowledge, which refers to teachers' knowledge of their

students' understanding or misunderstanding, conception, or misconception regarding particular aspects of learning materials. The students' prior knowledge also deals with their set of understanding concerning specific content, awareness of language structure, and attitude as a response towards the materials they study in addition to their previous language exposure, experience, and potential typical error and perception, and such dimensions regarding students' prior knowledge are acknowledged by the literature (i.e., Baxter & Lederman, 1999; Bernalles, 2016; Faisal et al., 2021; Hill et al., 2008).

Law Number 16/2007 (MoNE, 2007) highlights that every student has a specific personality, a unique characteristic like traits, emotional state, or behavioral pattern that makes each individual different. In particular, this knowledge dimension would help teachers deal with their students, who are considered to have specific yet unique characteristics to the Indonesian context (Exley, 2005; Faisal et al., 2021; Fauziati, 2014; MoNE, 2007). Furthermore, teachers should be able to foster their students' positive character traits, such as being responsible, creative, independent, democratic, curious, appreciative, and socially attentive (MoEC, 2011; MoNE, 2011), particularly when they use English as a means of oral and written communication.

Understanding students and facilitating their potential are vital in improving the instructional activities and learning outcomes in writing. It has been known for a long time that the outcome of English writing has been under expectation, and the student's written communication competence appears insufficient. Relevant to this, Lengkanawati (2005) and Faisal et al. (2021), among other scholars, share one observation in common that secondary school graduates, despite studying the language for six years and accumulating nearly 900 hours of classroom instruction, appear to face challenges in using it effectively for communication. Some factors that may have contributed to this issue include but are not limited to students' difficulties crafting and organizing ideas, writing grammatically correct sentences, and applying writing rules (i.e., Faisal, 2024; Fitri & Al-Hafizh, 2013; Novelia & Faisal, 2023).

Focus on fluency

One key implication of the curriculum's notion of communicative competence concerns the focus on fluency over accuracy. In this respect, teachers should consider that students would benefit most from the tasks when a strict grammatical application emphasizing accuracy is minimized. Hence, "[the] students need to be involved in the acts of creating [coherent] texts, spoken or written" (Agustien, 2016, p. 214) rather than creating those at the sentence level. Furthermore, tasks focusing on content and meaning rather than accuracy (i.e., Faisal, 2024; Nation, 2017; Tavakoli & Hunter, 2018) will best support students' language mastery and foster their communicative competence.

To assist students in writing appropriately to communicate their ideas with others, teachers should consider some implications regarding the knowledge of content, its constituents, and the complex and multidimensional nature of writing (Teng et al., 2022; Voronchikhina & Pinto, 2024). The first

implication relates to writing tasks teachers set for their students to complete. The current curriculum documents (BSNP, 2007) write that the underpinning principles of the writing tasks include teachers' provision and orchestration of (1) relevant and meaningful tasks to help the students to be familiar with a text's elements text and the way each element works in a text; (2) opportunity for students to practice constructing a text based on its social function, generic structure, language features, audience; (3) scaffolded and systematic text-composing tasks encompassing planning, drafting, revising, and editing steps; and (4) relevant corrections and comments to respond to students' written work in addition to appropriate acknowledgment of their efforts or achievements.

Drawing on the current curriculum documents, teachers should know and understand that every writing task they design should have a particular focus. Depending on the task foci (Nation, 2009; Nation, 2017), teachers are recommended to supply familiarization, controlled, and guided writing tasks (Hyland, 2003). The familiarization tasks allow students to identify and analyze related vocabulary, grammar, and the generic structure used in a specific text type. Filling in the gaps with correct forms of, for example, verbs, adjectives, or nouns, rearranging jumbled sentences or paragraphs, and writing specific syntactic patterns like active or passive voice are examples of controlled writing tasks. The guided writing tasks include types of tasks such as question-based, keyword writing, information gap, or model imitation.

The current curriculum also mandates teachers to be knowledgeable about task purpose when they set their writing tasks. The curriculum suggests that the teachers provide writing tasks to construct English phrases and sentences accurately through manipulation, substitution, transformation, or completion exercises. It recommends that they provide tasks whose purposes deal with content by utilizing relevant text models longer than sentences and having the students imitate the rhetorical and syntactic patterns. It requires the teachers to offer an experience for the students to generate their ideas rather than designing a writing task emphasizing grammatical accuracy. Providing such tasks with appropriate purposes will be able to assist the students in possessing the skill to understand and convey information content (Elmiana, 2018; Foong, 1999; Skehan & Luo, 2020; Widiati & Cahyono, 2006).

The second implication in relation to the current curriculum's mandated knowledge of content concerns the feedback provision. According to the curriculum (MoEC, 2013b, 2013c), teachers should provide feedback to their students to help them meet any communicative intent for their texts (Chang et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). They should offer corrective feedback indicating that an error has been committed. They should also supply correct forms of the target language or provide a type of metalinguistic information about the nature of the error (Thi & Nikolov, 2021; Yu, 2021). They might offer positive and specific comments intended to assist their students in improving their learning of a specific text or acknowledge their efforts or achievements. It is recommended that constructive and comprehensive feedback be given incorporating language features, generic structure, and content.

Communicative-based practices

The highlight of communicative competence in the current curriculum calls for teachers to consider implications regarding the know-what and know-how of this construct. The former requires the teachers to be conversant with this construct's underlying rules and principles and its constituents, as the previous paragraphs detailed. The latter relates to an ability to put know-what of this construct into instructional practices, emphasizing communicative practice in classrooms.

Relevant to implementing communicative competence construct, teachers should be conversant with principles characterizing communicative practice as suggested by scholars of language teaching. One of the principles requires the teachers to create and organize activities that are able to facilitate actual communication acts. Such acts can be realized through interaction among students where, as Gass and Mackey (2006) point out, the students can discuss, negotiate, and resolve any potential communicative issues. However, when engaging the students in active interaction, teachers do not simply ask them to work in pairs or groups to complete any assigned tasks. Instead, they should bear in mind that interaction should be projected to foster the students autonomously to practice their language knowledge in acts of communication, both inside and outside their classrooms (i.e., Brown, 1994; Chen, 2020; Christianto, 2019; Cruz-Ramos et al., 2019; Walsh, 2013).

Another implication demands that teachers know the tasks they set for their students. The teachers' tasks should offer their students valuable opportunities to use their language knowledge in actual communication acts. In this respect, Johnson (1982) and Zarrinabadi and Alipour (2020) point out that teachers should encourage learning activities where the students can use language through meaningful tasks. Furthermore, Swain (1995) argues that with specific task conditions, the teachers will motivate their students not only to reveal their language hypotheses but also to think about them seriously and use the language appropriately. Furthermore, tasks given in a communicative context will best support the students' mastery and improve their communicative competence (i.e., Christianto, 2019; Hunt, 2015; Watson, 2015; Wei et al., 2018).

The next implication concerning implementing communicative competence is that teachers should be aware of and implement task-scaffolding principles. The task scaffolding allows students to experience graded practices from the simplest to the most complex, with increased speed and decreased teacher assistance (Hyland, 2003; Nation, 2009). Such scaffolded practices are deemed to help the students initially obtain basic language knowledge and skills and eventually become autonomous language users (Coe, 2011; Kamil, 2018; Suherdi, 2008; Utami & Nurkamto, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

The document analysis underscores three pivotal implications for English language teaching in Indonesia, signaling a transformative shift toward dynamic, learner-centered, and communication-oriented pedagogy. Foremost, the strong emphasis on student-centered activities reflects a move toward instructional strategies that prioritize active learner engagement, fostering autonomy and participation in alignment with communicative competence principles. Additionally, the prioritization of fluency over accuracy marks a departure from traditional methods, urging educators to cultivate learners' ability to communicate coherently and confidently in real-world contexts. Furthermore, the integration of communicative-based practices signifies a move beyond rote memorization, advocating for the contextualized application of language skills in authentic interactions. Collectively, these implications reflect an evolving paradigm in language education—one that not only aligns with contemporary pedagogical trends but also holds significant potential to enhance learners' overall proficiency and communicative effectiveness within Indonesia's TEFL landscape.

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