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INDONESIAN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The *Merdeka* Curriculum places flexibility, competency development, and students' learning needs at the center of instructional planning. However, systematic research connecting Indonesian language instructional design with the opportunities and challenges of curriculum implementation in secondary schools remains limited. This study analyzed Indonesian language instructional design within the *Merdeka* Curriculum and identified the opportunities and challenges associated with its implementation. A descriptive qualitative approach with a library research design was employed. Data were obtained from official government policy documents and scholarly articles selected purposively according to their relevance, recency, and source credibility. The data were collected through documentation and examined using qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that instructional design is organized through the alignment of Learning Outcomes, sequences of learning objectives, teaching modules, and assessment practices. Key opportunities include instructional flexibility, contextual and experience-based learning, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and teacher collaboration. Conversely, implementation is constrained by variations in teacher readiness, limited facilities, the need for continuous teaching-material development, regulatory changes, and disparities in instructional capacity across schools. The study

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concludes that curriculum flexibility alone is insufficient to ensure effective implementation without sustained professional and institutional support. These findings clarify the organizational components and implementation conditions required to develop Indonesian language instruction that is contextual, adaptive, and responsive to students' learning needs.

Keywords: Indonesian Language; Instructional Design; Learning Outcomes; *Merdeka* Curriculum; Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly expected to prepare learners not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop the capacity to communicate, reason, make responsible decisions, and respond to changing social realities. This orientation reinforces the humanistic view of education in which learners are regarded as developing individuals whose abilities, experiences, and potential need to be nurtured rather than treated uniformly (Pristiwanti et al., 2022). At the international level, curriculum reform has consequently moved toward greater flexibility, learner agency, competency development, and contextual adaptation. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Development, 2024b) , emphasizes that curriculum flexibility and autonomy can enable schools and teachers to respond more appropriately to diverse learner needs, although greater autonomy must be accompanied by professional capacity and institutional support. Digital transformation has added another layer to this challenge because technology can enrich access to resources, interaction, and learning experiences while simultaneously reproducing educational inequalities when infrastructure, teacher preparation, and pedagogical alignment are inadequate (UNESCO, 2023). These developments indicate that contemporary instructional design needs to balance national learning expectations with the realities, diversity, and humanity of learners in particular educational contexts.

Curriculum design is therefore more than the preparation of lesson documents; it is a process through which educational purposes are interpreted and transformed into meaningful learning experiences. Policy enactment theory explains that educational policies are not simply transferred from official documents into classrooms but are interpreted, negotiated, and reconstructed by educational actors within specific institutional conditions (Ball et al., 2012). Remillard & Heck (2014) similarly conceptualize curriculum enactment as a process in which formal curricular intentions are translated and transformed through the

interactions among curriculum materials, teachers, learners, and classroom activities. Teachers consequently occupy a central position because their professional judgment determines how curriculum expectations become actual learning experiences. Priestley et al. (2016) argue that teacher agency is particularly important in curriculum reform because the ability to make informed pedagogical decisions is shaped by teachers' professional knowledge, prior experiences, institutional cultures, and available resources. This theoretical perspective provides an important basis for examining instructional design under a curriculum that intentionally gives teachers greater room for interpretation.

Indonesia's curriculum development reflects a continuing effort to respond to changes in educational needs, moving through several curriculum models before the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum. The reform places greater emphasis on flexible learning, essential competencies, contextualized instruction, and stronger teacher responsibility for designing learning according to student characteristics (Daga, 2021) . Such flexibility does not eliminate national standards but changes the way teachers work with them. Current curriculum policy requires nationally determined Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran* or CP) to be interpreted into learning objectives, sequences of learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment practices suited to each educational context. Curriculum regulations have also continued to evolve, including the revision of Learning Outcomes through Decree of the Head of the Board of Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment No. 046/H/KR/2025 and policy adjustments introduced through Ministerial Regulation No. 13 of 2025 (Board of Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment (Badan Standar dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024, 2025; Development, 2024a). Rohmatika (2023) notes that the adaptive character of the Merdeka Belajar policy creates opportunities for educational improvement while simultaneously requiring teachers and institutions to continuously update their curricular understanding.

Indonesian language education occupies a strategic position within this reform because language competence supports literacy, reasoning, communication, cultural understanding, and participation in academic and social life. The design of Indonesian language instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to connect Learning Outcomes with the integrated development of listening, reading and viewing, speaking and presenting, and writing competencies. Ahmad et al. (2024) show that Learning Outcomes provide an important reference for determining the relevance of Indonesian language learning materials and the learning activities developed from them. Pratiwi (2023) further

reports that curriculum flexibility enables Indonesian language teachers to adapt learning to student needs and characteristics, although teacher readiness, instructional material development, and technology use remain persistent concerns. Contextualization is particularly relevant in secondary education because language learning becomes more meaningful when texts, communicative situations, and learning tasks are related to learners' actual experiences and environments (Utari & Gafari, 2023). Assessment also forms an essential part of this design, as diagnostic information about learner readiness and needs can guide teachers in determining appropriate learning processes and differentiation strategies (Wulandari et al., 2023).

Previous studies demonstrate that the Merdeka Curriculum offers several promising possibilities for secondary-school learning but that these possibilities are not automatically realized in classroom practice. Kause et al. (2025) found that implementation at the junior secondary level provides greater space for flexible instruction and project-based learning that can support critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Similar tendencies were reported at the senior secondary level, where curriculum reform was associated with stronger opportunities for teacher creativity and twenty-first-century competency development, although teacher readiness and school resources continued to influence implementation quality (Sitorus & Nasution, 2025). Indonesian language learning also benefits from the growing availability of digital resources, multimedia, and technology-mediated activities, which can diversify students' experiences in engaging with texts and producing language. Dewi (2025), however, demonstrates that technological opportunities remain uneven because differences in access, infrastructure, and teacher capability continue to shape the extent to which digital learning can be meaningfully incorporated into instruction. These findings show that curriculum flexibility produces both pedagogical opportunities and new professional demands.

Evidence from Indonesian language classrooms further reveals a gap between formal instructional planning and its classroom enactment. Febianti & Ariffin (2025) found that teachers had developed text-based learning plans by analyzing Learning Outcomes, formulating objectives, arranging learning sequences, and preparing assessments, yet the implementation of learning activities was not always consistent with the plans, particularly in the use of instructional media and teaching methods. Nurfadilah (2025) likewise indicates that the development of Indonesian language teaching modules at the senior secondary level requires teachers to connect curriculum outcomes, learning objectives, learning activities, and

assessments while adapting these components to the characteristics of the school and learners. Such findings suggest that the quality of instructional design cannot be assessed solely from the completeness of teaching documents. Its quality also depends on how teachers interpret curriculum expectations, select meaningful language-learning experiences, use assessment information, and modify instruction when classroom conditions differ from what was initially planned.

Teacher capacity therefore becomes a critical issue in understanding the relationship between curriculum flexibility and instructional quality. Greater freedom in curriculum design can support contextual and differentiated learning, but autonomy may become an additional burden when teachers lack sufficient curricular literacy, collaborative support, instructional resources, or time for continuous development. Recent research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has also highlighted the relevance of teacher agency and professional resilience when educators respond to changing policy demands and practical constraints (A. S. Dewi & Kuswandono, 2025). This issue is consistent with the broader argument that curriculum autonomy becomes meaningful only when teachers possess the professional capacity and organizational conditions required to exercise informed judgment (Priestley et al., 2016). Indonesian language teachers therefore need to be understood not as passive recipients of Learning Outcomes but as curriculum actors who interpret those outcomes, connect them with learners' linguistic and social experiences, and transform them into classroom practices.

The existing literature has provided valuable insights into particular dimensions of the Merdeka Curriculum, including teacher readiness, contextual learning, project-based instruction, digital technology, differentiated learning, assessment, and teaching-module development. Most studies, however, tend to examine these dimensions separately or focus primarily on curriculum implementation rather than systematically explaining how Indonesian language instructional design develops from nationally prescribed Learning Outcomes into sequences of learning objectives, teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment practices at the secondary-school level. Research also remains limited in connecting the opportunities and challenges of such design with the concept of curriculum enactment, which views teachers as active interpreters of curriculum rather than mechanical implementers of policy (Ball et al., 2012; Remillard & Heck, 2014). The novelty of the present study therefore lies in integrating the structural process of Indonesian language instructional design with a systematic mapping of its pedagogical opportunities and implementation

challenges across secondary education. Such integration provides a more comprehensive perspective on how curriculum flexibility, teacher agency, contextual conditions, and national curriculum expectations interact in shaping instructional design.

This study focuses on Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary-school level. It aims to conceptually examine how nationally prescribed Learning Outcomes are translated into sequences of learning objectives and teaching modules, while identifying the major opportunities and challenges encountered in designing and implementing Indonesian language learning. The study is expected to contribute to the literature on competency-based curriculum and curriculum enactment by clarifying the role of teachers as active curriculum agents, while also providing practical insights for teachers, schools, teacher-education institutions, and policymakers seeking to strengthen the quality and contextual relevance of Indonesian language learning under the Merdeka Curriculum.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research design to examine Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary-school level. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to interpret concepts, policy directions, and patterns of findings presented in textual documents rather than to measure relationships among variables statistically. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research is appropriate when a study aims to understand meanings, processes, and contextual interpretations derived from textual or narrative data. The library research design was considered suitable because the research questions focused on conceptualizing instructional design and identifying its opportunities and challenges through the systematic examination of policy documents and relevant scholarly literature. Unlike field-based studies that obtain data directly from teachers or students, this study relied entirely on publicly accessible documentary sources. The literature search, source selection, and analysis were conducted from January to March 2026.

The research corpus consisted of primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the official curriculum policy document, particularly Decree of the Head of the Board of Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment No. 046/H/KR/2025 concerning Learning Outcomes for Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education. Supporting

policy documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum were also consulted when necessary to clarify regulatory developments. Secondary sources consisted of scholarly articles addressing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, Indonesian language learning, instructional design, teaching modules, differentiated instruction, assessment, project-based learning, teacher readiness, and related issues in secondary education. The sources were selected purposively on the basis of thematic relevance, publication recency, consistency with the research focus, and publisher credibility. Purposive selection was used because the study required documents that could provide information directly related to the conceptual categories being examined rather than a statistically representative sample (Sugiyono, 2019). The researcher served as the primary research instrument and used a structured data-recording sheet to document information on curriculum components, instructional design, opportunities, challenges, assessment practices, teacher roles, and contextual conditions. Data collection was conducted through documentation by repeatedly reading each selected source, identifying relevant information, and recording key arguments and findings systematically.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Content analysis enables researchers to interpret textual data systematically by identifying meaningful categories, patterns, and relationships within documents (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis proceeded through several stages: familiarizing the researcher with the selected documents, identifying relevant units of information, coding recurring concepts, grouping similar codes into categories, comparing findings across sources, and synthesizing them into broader themes. The resulting categories were organized around the conceptual structure of Indonesian language instructional design, including Learning Outcomes, sequences of learning objectives, teaching modules, and assessment, followed by the identification of recurring opportunities and challenges associated with their implementation. The analytical process followed the principles of qualitative data condensation, organization, comparison, and interpretation described by Miles et al. (2014). No statistical software was employed because the study did not involve quantitative data; coding, categorization, and synthesis were conducted manually using structured documentary notes. As the research relied exclusively on publicly available documents and did not involve human participants, institutional ethical approval and informed consent were not required. Research ethics were nevertheless maintained through accurate citation, transparent interpretation, and careful avoidance of misrepresenting the meanings contained in the original sources.

RESULTS

The analysis of curriculum policy documents and relevant scholarly literature identified three major groups of findings concerning Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary-school level. The first concerns the structure of instructional design, particularly the relationship among Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran* or CP), learning objectives, sequences of learning objectives (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* or ATP), teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment. The second concerns the opportunities created by curriculum flexibility for Indonesian language instruction, while the third concerns the challenges that influence its implementation across different school contexts.

The findings indicate that Indonesian language instructional design under the Merdeka Curriculum follows a structured but adaptable process. Nationally established Learning Outcomes provide the main reference for instructional planning, while teachers retain professional space to determine how these outcomes are translated into learning objectives, instructional sequences, teaching modules, classroom activities, and assessment practices. Assessment also emerged as an integral part of this process because information about students' readiness and learning progress influences subsequent instructional decisions.

The synthesis further identified five major opportunities: flexibility in organizing learning objectives, contextual and experience-based learning, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and professional collaboration among teachers. At the same time, five recurring challenges were identified: teacher readiness, limited facilities and infrastructure, the continuous development of teaching materials, curriculum policy changes, and disparities in instructional capacity across schools and regions. These findings are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Summary of Opportunities and Challenges in Indonesian Language Instructional Design

Category	Theme	Synthesis of Findings
Opportunities	Flexibility in sequencing learning objectives	Learning Outcomes can be translated into varied and integrated instructional activities according to students' readiness, learning needs, and educational contexts.
Opportunities	Contextual and experience-based learning	Indonesian language instruction can be connected with students' everyday, academic, social, cultural, and vocational experiences to strengthen the relevance of learning.

Category	Theme	Synthesis of Findings
Opportunities	Project-based learning	Project-based activities provide opportunities to develop critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration through meaningful language-learning tasks.
Opportunities	Differentiated instruction	Information about students' readiness and learning needs can be used to adjust learning content, processes, forms of support, grouping strategies, and learning products.
Opportunities	Teacher collaboration	Collaborative instructional planning enables teachers to examine the consistency among Learning Outcomes, learning objectives, instructional activities, teaching materials, and assessment.
Challenges	Teacher readiness	Teachers require adequate curriculum literacy, pedagogical competence, and instructional-design skills to translate flexible curriculum expectations into operational learning plans.
Challenges	Limited infrastructure and facilities	Unequal access to learning facilities, digital technology, instructional media, and other learning resources affects the implementation of innovative instructional designs.
Challenges	Continuous development of teaching materials	Teaching modules and learning materials require continuing adaptation to curriculum expectations, learner characteristics, and specific learning contexts.
Challenges	Regulatory changes	Changes in curriculum policies require teachers to regularly review and update learning objectives, teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment practices.
Challenges	Disparities across schools and regions	Differences in professional development, infrastructure, technology, institutional support, and instructional resources create unequal capacities for implementing instructional design.

Note. The themes presented in the table were generated from the synthesis of the documents analyzed in this study. The statements represent synthesized findings rather than verbatim quotations from individual sources.

As shown in Table 1, Summary of Opportunities and Challenges in Indonesian Language Instructional Design, curriculum flexibility creates considerable space for teachers to design instruction that is more contextual, adaptive, and responsive to students. However, the realization of these opportunities remains closely associated with teachers' professional competence, the availability of instructional resources, and the institutional conditions of individual schools.

1. Structure of Indonesian Language Instructional Design

The analysis of curriculum policy documents indicates that Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum begins with nationally established Learning Outcomes. These outcomes are organized according to educational phases. At the secondary-school level, Phase D applies to junior secondary education, whereas Phases E

and F apply to senior secondary and vocational education. The phase-based structure provides a common national direction while allowing teachers to determine the sequence, depth, and progression of learning according to students' characteristics, readiness, and educational contexts.

The findings show that Learning Outcomes are translated into increasingly operational components consisting of learning objectives, sequences of learning objectives, teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment. Rather than functioning as isolated documents, these components form an interconnected instructional structure. Learning Outcomes establish the broader competencies to be achieved, learning objectives specify the competencies addressed within particular learning units, and sequences of learning objectives organize their progression across the learning process. Teaching modules subsequently translate these objectives into classroom activities, materials, learning experiences, and assessment practices.

Indonesian language instruction encompasses four interconnected language domains: listening, reading and viewing, speaking and presenting, and writing. The analysis indicates that these domains are intended to be developed through integrated learning experiences rather than treated as completely separate competencies. An instructional unit may therefore involve students in listening to information, interpreting written or multimodal texts, exchanging ideas through discussion, producing written responses, and presenting their work orally. Such integration allows language competence to develop through authentic communicative activities.

Teaching modules were also identified as an important operational component connecting curriculum expectations with classroom practice. The documents analyzed consistently emphasize several elements of instructional planning, including learning objectives, learning activities, teaching materials, assessment, and contextual adaptation. The recurring pattern identified in the documents begins with Learning Outcomes, continues through the formulation of learning objectives and sequences of learning objectives, and is subsequently translated into teaching modules, classroom activities, and assessment. This structure demonstrates that instructional planning develops progressively from broad competency expectations toward more specific and contextualized learning experiences.

Differences were also identified in the complexity of Indonesian language competencies across secondary-school phases. Phase D places greater emphasis on

developing functional language and literacy competencies that enable students to understand, interpret, and produce texts related to familiar and everyday contexts. Phases E and F involve more advanced analytical and communicative demands, including evaluating information from multiple sources, constructing structured arguments, producing increasingly complex texts, and communicating ideas persuasively.

These differences influence the formulation of learning objectives and the selection of instructional activities at each educational level. Junior secondary instruction requires gradual strengthening of literacy foundations and functional communication, while senior secondary and vocational instruction requires a stronger integration of linguistic competence with academic reasoning, critical literacy, argumentation, and professional communication. The findings therefore indicate that instructional design needs to account for the developmental progression of language competencies across educational phases.

2. Role of Assessment in Instructional Design

Assessment emerged as an integral component of Indonesian language instructional design rather than an activity conducted only at the end of instruction. The findings indicate that assessment is connected with instructional planning, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment. Its function extends beyond determining whether students have achieved the expected competencies because assessment information can also be used to guide teachers' subsequent instructional decisions.

Diagnostic assessment occupies an important position at the beginning of the learning process. It provides information concerning students' prior knowledge, readiness, learning characteristics, and other needs that may influence their participation in classroom activities. Such information enables teachers to determine whether students require different levels of support, variations in learning materials, or different ways of participating in instructional activities.

The findings demonstrate that diagnostic information provides an important basis for differentiated instruction. Rather than assuming that all students begin learning with the same level of ability or readiness, teachers can use assessment evidence to recognize differences among learners and make more appropriate instructional decisions. Learning activities can consequently be organized according to actual learner conditions while maintaining the same general competency expectations.

Formative assessment also has an important function during the learning process. Evidence obtained from students' performance enables teachers to identify progress and learning difficulties as instruction develops. Teachers can use this information to adjust text complexity, instructional methods, student grouping, learning tasks, and the amount of guidance provided to individual students or groups.

These findings indicate that instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum is adaptive rather than completely fixed at the beginning of instruction. Initial planning establishes the direction of learning, while evidence generated during the learning process provides a basis for necessary adjustments. Instructional decisions can therefore be modified according to students' progress without losing alignment with the Learning Outcomes established for the relevant educational phase.

3. Opportunities for Indonesian Language Instructional Design

Five major opportunities for Indonesian language instructional design were identified from the data synthesis.

The first opportunity concerns flexibility in developing sequences of learning objectives. Teachers have greater professional space to determine the sequence, depth, and pace of competency development while remaining aligned with the Learning Outcomes established for each phase. This flexibility allows teachers to organize learning according to students' readiness, classroom conditions, and the characteristics of the competencies being developed rather than relying on a single uniform instructional sequence.

Such flexibility is particularly important in Indonesian language learning because language competencies develop through interconnected experiences. Teachers can determine when particular competencies need to be introduced, reinforced, integrated, or revisited according to students' progress. The instructional sequence can therefore be designed with greater sensitivity to classroom realities while maintaining the expected competency standards.

The second opportunity is contextual and experience-based learning. The curriculum provides room for teachers to select texts, issues, communicative situations, and learning activities that are closely connected with students' lives and educational environments.

Indonesian language learning can be associated with everyday communication, academic situations, social issues, cultural experiences, and vocational contexts.

This contextual orientation allows language activities to be situated within circumstances that students can recognize and understand. Reading, speaking, presenting, and writing activities can consequently be designed around issues and experiences that have relevance beyond the classroom. The findings indicate that this flexibility strengthens the possibility of designing language learning as a meaningful communicative experience rather than merely as the completion of predetermined exercises.

The third opportunity concerns project-based learning and the development of twenty-first-century competencies. Indonesian language projects can involve information gathering, discussion, problem solving, text production, presentation, and collaborative work. These activities create opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration while simultaneously strengthening their language competencies.

Digital resources further broaden the possible forms of project-based activities. Students can engage with multimedia texts, develop digital presentations, produce videos, prepare online publications, and create other forms of multimodal communication. The findings therefore show that project-based learning provides considerable potential for integrating language competence with authentic tasks and contemporary forms of communication.

The fourth opportunity is differentiated instruction. Curriculum flexibility enables teachers to respond to differences in students' readiness, abilities, interests, and learning needs. Differentiation may be applied to learning content, learning processes, levels of support, grouping strategies, and student products.

Diagnostic and formative assessment provide the information required to make these adjustments more systematically. Students may consequently follow different learning pathways or receive different forms of instructional support while working toward common competency expectations. This approach allows Indonesian language instruction to accommodate learner diversity without lowering the intended learning standards.

The fifth opportunity is professional collaboration among teachers. The analysis indicates that instructional planning does not necessarily have to be undertaken individually. Teachers can collaborate in interpreting Learning Outcomes, formulating learning objectives,

developing sequences of learning objectives, preparing teaching modules, selecting instructional materials, designing assessments, and reviewing classroom practices.

Collaborative planning also provides space for teachers to exchange experiences, identify practical problems, share instructional resources, and examine the consistency of instructional components. Such collaboration can contribute to more coherent instructional planning within schools and professional subject-teacher communities.

4. Challenges in Indonesian Language Instructional Design

The synthesis identified five recurring challenges that influence the design and implementation of Indonesian language instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum.

The first challenge concerns teacher readiness to interpret Learning Outcomes and transform them into operational instructional plans. Curriculum flexibility gives teachers greater responsibility for determining learning objectives, instructional sequences, learning activities, teaching materials, differentiation strategies, and assessment procedures. The effectiveness of this process depends on teachers' curriculum literacy, pedagogical knowledge, instructional-design skills, and confidence in making professional decisions.

The findings indicate that flexibility can become difficult to implement when teachers have limited experience in translating broad curriculum expectations into coherent classroom practices. Teachers need to understand not only the intended competencies but also how these competencies can be organized progressively, assessed appropriately, and adapted to the characteristics of their students.

The second challenge concerns limited facilities and supporting infrastructure. Contextual, project-based, differentiated, and technology-supported instruction requires access to adequate learning resources. Differences in internet connectivity, digital devices, instructional media, library resources, and classroom facilities affect the range of learning activities that can realistically be implemented.

The availability of infrastructure therefore shapes the extent to which schools can take advantage of curriculum flexibility. Instructional designs that depend heavily on digital resources or diverse learning media may be easier to implement in schools with adequate facilities than in schools with limited technological and instructional resources.

The third challenge involves the continuous development of teaching materials and the provision of more personalized learning experiences. Teaching modules and instructional materials need to remain responsive to learner characteristics, curriculum developments, and local contexts. This requirement creates an ongoing need for teachers to review, revise, and develop appropriate learning resources.

Differentiated instruction may further increase the complexity of this work because teachers may need to prepare different materials, tasks, forms of assistance, or learning products for students with varying levels of readiness. Such responsibilities require sufficient preparation time, access to relevant resources, and professional competence in instructional development.

The fourth challenge is the need to respond to curriculum policy changes. Curriculum regulations and Learning Outcomes may be revised as educational policy develops. These changes require teachers to review the continuing alignment of learning objectives, instructional sequences, teaching modules, classroom activities, and assessment practices with current requirements.

Continuous adjustment consequently becomes part of instructional planning. Teachers and schools need to remain informed about policy developments and determine whether existing instructional documents remain appropriate. The findings indicate that regulatory changes influence not only administrative documents but also the organization of competencies and learning experiences at the classroom level.

The fifth challenge concerns disparities in instructional-design capacity among schools and regions. Differences in access to professional development, internet connectivity, digital technology, teaching materials, institutional support, and other educational resources create unequal conditions for curriculum implementation.

Schools with stronger resources and professional support may have greater capacity to develop contextual, differentiated, project-based, and technology-supported instruction. Schools operating with more limited resources may have fewer possibilities for implementing the same range of instructional approaches. These findings demonstrate that the quality of Indonesian language instructional design is shaped not only by individual teacher competence but also by the broader institutional and educational environment in which teaching takes place.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum combines a nationally defined competency framework with considerable flexibility at the level of classroom planning. Learning Outcomes provide the common direction, while learning objectives, instructional sequences, teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment allow teachers to adapt instruction to learner and contextual conditions. The opportunities created by this flexibility are substantial, particularly for contextual learning, project-based activities, differentiated instruction, and teacher collaboration. Their implementation, however, is influenced by teacher readiness, resource availability, continuing material development, regulatory adaptation, and differences in instructional capacity across schools and regions.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum is characterized by a structured yet flexible relationship among Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran*), sequences of learning objectives (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran*), teaching modules, and assessment. This pattern shows that curricular flexibility does not imply the absence of national direction. Rather, teachers are given greater professional space to interpret nationally prescribed competencies and translate them into learning experiences that are appropriate to students' characteristics, learning pace, and educational contexts. Such flexibility reflects a humanistic orientation to education because students are not positioned as a homogeneous group expected to progress in exactly the same way. The findings are consistent with the educational principle that learning should guide the development of learners according to their potential and circumstances rather than impose uniform instructional experiences. From the perspective of curriculum enactment, this process also positions teachers as active curriculum agents who interpret and reconstruct policy in classroom practice rather than merely reproduce curriculum documents mechanically (Ball et al., 2012; Remillard & Heck, 2014).

The central role of assessment identified in this study further suggests that instructional design under the Merdeka Curriculum should be understood as an adaptive and cyclical process. Diagnostic assessment provides information about students' readiness and learning needs before instruction begins, whereas formative assessment offers continuing evidence that teachers can use to adjust instructional decisions during the learning process.

This interpretation is supported by Wulandari et al. (2023), who found that diagnostic assessment can provide a basis for differentiated Indonesian language instruction, particularly by identifying differences in students' cognitive and non-cognitive conditions. Assessment, therefore, should not be separated from instructional planning or treated merely as a mechanism for assigning final scores. Its more important function lies in providing feedback that enables teachers to modify text complexity, learning activities, grouping strategies, and forms of support as students progress. This finding strengthens the view that instructional design in the Merdeka Curriculum is not static but continuously shaped by evidence emerging from the learning process.

The flexibility identified in the present synthesis is closely related to the opportunity for contextual and differentiated Indonesian language learning. Pratiwi (2023) reported that the Merdeka Curriculum allows Indonesian language teachers to adjust learning to students' characteristics and needs, while Utari & Gafari (2023) demonstrated the relevance of contextual approaches in developing negotiation-text materials for vocational secondary students. Similar tendencies have been reported in differentiated-learning studies, although several were conducted at the elementary-school level. (Fauzia & Hadikusuma Ramadan, 2023) and (Sofiah & Hikmawati, 2023), for example, show that differentiated instruction provides opportunities to accommodate variation in students' readiness and learning characteristics. The consistency of these findings across educational levels suggests that flexibility and personalization are not confined to a particular school level. Their implementation, however, becomes increasingly complex in secondary education because Indonesian language learning involves more advanced textual, analytical, argumentative, and communicative demands.

Project-based learning represents another opportunity identified in the reviewed literature. Kause et al. (2025) found that the Merdeka Curriculum creates room for project-based learning that can support critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration at the junior secondary level. The present study extends this perspective by positioning project-based learning as part of the broader design of Indonesian language instruction, particularly when language competencies are developed through authentic communication, text production, presentation, and collaborative tasks. Digital technology may further expand these opportunities by enabling students to work with multimodal texts and diverse forms of communication. Dewi & Kuswandono (2025) notes that digital resources can enrich Indonesian language learning, while Sitorus & Nasution (2025) identify broader

opportunities for developing twenty-first-century competencies within curriculum transformation at the senior secondary level. These opportunities, however, depend strongly on the availability of infrastructure, teacher competence, and institutional support. Thus, project-based and technology-supported learning should not be viewed as universally accessible strategies without considering the conditions in which schools operate.

The findings also reveal that the opportunities and challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum are closely interconnected. Greater flexibility can support creativity, contextualization, differentiation, and professional collaboration, but the same flexibility places greater responsibility on teachers to make informed curricular and pedagogical decisions. Pratiwi (2023) identifies teacher readiness as one of the major difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, while Daga (2021) emphasizes the changing role of teachers as active designers of learning. This relationship is consistent with the concept of teacher agency, which views professional action as dependent not only on individual competence but also on experience, institutional culture, resources, and opportunities for professional collaboration (Priestley et al., 2016). Consequently, curriculum flexibility cannot be separated from professional capacity. Providing teachers with greater autonomy without sufficient training, collaborative time, access to quality resources, and institutional support may create additional workload rather than meaningful pedagogical freedom.

Differences in school resources constitute another important issue emerging from the synthesis. Kause et al. (2025) identify limited infrastructure as a significant obstacle to curriculum implementation, while Dewi (2025) highlights unequal technological access in Indonesian language learning. These findings suggest that the capacity to benefit from curriculum flexibility is not evenly distributed across schools. Schools with stronger digital infrastructure, professional learning opportunities, and collaborative teacher communities may be better positioned to design project-based, differentiated, and technology-supported instruction. Schools operating with more limited resources may face difficulties even when teachers understand the intended curriculum. The issue therefore cannot be reduced to individual teacher readiness alone. Institutional and regional conditions also influence the quality of curriculum enactment, meaning that efforts to improve instructional design require attention to equity in access to training, infrastructure, teaching resources, and professional support.

Changes in curriculum regulations add another layer of complexity to teachers' work. The transition from BSKAP Decree No. 032/H/KR/2024 to BSKAP Decree No. 046/H/KR/2025 illustrates that teachers must continually review the alignment of their learning objectives, teaching modules, and assessment practices with current policy. Rohmatika (2023) argues that the adaptive nature of the Merdeka Belajar policy requires continuous institutional and professional adjustment. The present findings reinforce this argument by showing that regulatory change is not merely an administrative matter. Changes in Learning Outcomes may influence the way teachers sequence competencies, select learning materials, construct assessments, and organize learning experiences. Policy updates therefore need to be accompanied by clear communication, sufficient transition periods, and practical professional development so that teachers can respond to curriculum changes without compromising instructional quality.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discussion of competency-based instructional design by linking curriculum structure with the concept of curriculum enactment. The five opportunities and five challenges identified in the review can be understood as two dimensions of the same shift: greater responsibility for translating curriculum policy has moved closer to classroom practice. This shift creates room for teachers to make learning more contextual and responsive, but it also increases the professional knowledge required to ensure that flexibility remains aligned with national competencies. The findings therefore support the argument that instructional quality under the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the clarity of curriculum documents but also on the capacity of teachers to interpret them responsibly. This perspective extends previous studies that have tended to examine teacher readiness, differentiated learning, technology use, or teaching-module development as separate issues by placing them within a more integrated instructional-design framework.

The practical implications are relevant to several educational stakeholders. Indonesian language teachers need opportunities to strengthen their ability to translate Learning Outcomes into coherent sequences of learning objectives, contextual learning activities, teaching modules, and assessments. Subject-teacher associations, school-based learning communities, and collaborative planning among Indonesian language teachers may reduce the burden of designing instructional materials individually and provide opportunities for professional dialogue. Nurfadilah (2025) suggests that collaborative discussion among teachers can support the development and verification of teaching modules. Schools and

educational authorities should therefore provide not only training but also adequate time, access to resources, and sustained mentoring. Teacher-education institutions also have an important role in preparing prospective Indonesian language teachers to work with competency-based curriculum documents, diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, and contextual learning design before they enter professional practice.

Several limitations need to be considered when interpreting these findings. The study was conducted as library research and did not collect empirical data directly from Indonesian language teachers, students, or schools. Consequently, the opportunities and challenges identified represent a conceptual synthesis of policy documents and previous studies rather than direct evidence of practices across all Indonesian secondary schools. The reviewed studies also vary in educational level, research setting, and subject context, and several supporting studies were conducted in elementary education. Generalization to all junior secondary, senior secondary, and vocational schools should therefore be made cautiously. Future research should examine the conceptual findings empirically through multi-site case studies, teacher surveys, classroom observations, or mixed-method studies across different regions and school characteristics. Further studies could also develop and validate instruments for measuring teachers' readiness to translate Learning Outcomes into sequences of learning objectives, teaching modules, and assessment practices, allowing the relationships among teacher capacity, school resources, curriculum flexibility, and instructional quality to be examined more systematically.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, Indonesian language instructional design within the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary-school level is structured around nationally established Learning Outcomes, which are subsequently translated by teachers into sequences of learning objectives, teaching modules, learning activities, and assessment practices that respond to students' characteristics and learning contexts. The findings show that the curriculum provides several important opportunities, including greater flexibility in instructional planning, stronger contextual and experience-based learning, broader use of project-based learning, space for differentiated instruction, and increased collaboration among teachers. At the same time, these opportunities are accompanied by several challenges, particularly teacher readiness in interpreting Learning Outcomes, limited facilities and infrastructure, the continuous need to develop relevant teaching materials, ongoing

adaptation to curriculum policy changes, and disparities in instructional capacity across schools and regions.

This study contributes to the discussion of language curriculum design by viewing teachers as active curriculum agents who interpret and enact policy rather than merely implement curriculum documents mechanically. The findings also emphasize that curriculum flexibility can be meaningful only when it is supported by adequate professional development, sustained mentoring, collaborative planning, and equitable access to instructional resources. Such support is necessary to ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum can be translated into Indonesian language learning that is responsive, contextual, and relevant to students' needs. Future research should examine these conceptual findings through empirical studies involving Indonesian language teachers and schools in diverse settings, including cross-regional surveys, classroom-based case studies, and mixed-method research, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how instructional design is actually enacted in secondary education.

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