

Emotional Dynamics and Potential Burnout of Indonesian EFL Teachers Amid Uncertainty in Curriculum Change in Private Schools

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Abstract: This study examines the emotional dynamics and burnout among EFL teachers in Indonesian private schools facing curriculum reform uncertainty. Employing a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, this research involved 12 EFL teachers from private schools in West Nusa Tenggara. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires measuring emotional responses, professional performance, and burnout, followed by open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The findings reveal that teachers simultaneously experienced negative emotions (anxiety, frustration) and positive emotions, with hope and optimism recording the highest average scores ($M=18.17$). Curriculum uncertainty significantly impacted professional performance, particularly in lesson planning, teaching effectiveness, and motivation. Although a statistically significant correlation between curriculum uncertainty and burnout was not established ($\rho=0.177$, $p>0.05$), qualitative data unveiled substantial emotional strain, including mental fatigue, administrative overload, and considerations of leaving the profession. This study concludes that curriculum reform is a profound emotional experience affecting teacher well-being, underscoring the need for clear policy communication, institutional support, and training programs focused on emotional resilience.

Keywords: Emotional dynamics, teacher burnout, EFL teachers, private schools, curriculum change.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian education system has undergone significant transformations in recent years, with a primary focus on curriculum reform aimed at aligning national standards with global demands. In 2022, the "Merdeka Curriculum" was implemented to replace the 2013 Curriculum, emphasizing learning freedom to develop student character and skills (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). More recently, the introduction of a "Deep Learning" approach by the new Minister of Primary and Secondary Education has added another layer of change, focusing on meaningful and immersive learning experiences (Putri, 2022). This perpetual state of flux presents profound challenges for teachers as the primary agents of curriculum implementation.

Curriculum change is a complex process involving modification, development, and renewal of the educational structure to meet societal needs and contemporary developments (Law, 2022). However, for educators who have navigated multiple policy shifts, each transition demands significant professional and personal adaptation. Teachers may perceive these changes as opportunities for innovation, fostering positive emotions like hope and optimism. Conversely, a lack of clarity, insufficient training, and inadequate support can lead to negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and stress (Haryono, 2021; Rahmawati et al., 2022). Wati (2015) noted that the shift to the 2013 Curriculum created uncertainty as many teachers had not fully

understood its concepts, highlighting the need for training and school support.

The emotional well-being of teachers is inextricably linked to their professional performance and the quality of student learning (Amin & Saukah, 2015; Fredrickson, 1998). According to Gross (1998), emotion regulation refers to how individuals influence the emotions they have, when they feel them, and how they experience or express those emotions (Sari, 2015). Positive emotions such as enjoyment, pride, and hope can provide motivation and support in the learning context (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017), while negative emotions like anxiety, frustration, and shame can hinder performance and lead to stress or disengagement (Garcia, 2016).

Prolonged exposure to work-related stress, especially when coupled with systemic uncertainty, can culminate in burnout, a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2007). Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021) emphasized that persistent stress and burnout in teachers can have wide-ranging negative impacts on students, schools, and the broader educational system. Teachers experiencing burnout often exhibit decreased motivation, less positive interactions with students, and diminished classroom effectiveness.

This issue is particularly acute for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in private schools. Unlike their public-school counterparts who may receive more direct

government support, private school teachers often operate with greater independence but also face unique pressures related to resource limitations, high stakeholder expectations, and job security (Hendrajany, 2017). Private schools are institutions managed by non-governmental parties such as individuals, foundations, or religious organizations, relying on funds from tuition and donations (Noor, 2017). The ambiguity of curriculum directives can exacerbate these pressures, creating a fertile ground for emotional distress.

Previous research has shown that EFL teachers adapting to curriculum changes experience increased levels of stress and burnout, often caused by lack of support from school administrations (Haryono, 2021). Rahmawati et al. (2022) observed that teachers with more than ten years of experience found it difficult to implement new curricula and often experienced emotional problems impacting their classroom performance. Despite the prevalence of curriculum reforms in Indonesia, there is a paucity of research specifically exploring the emotional dynamics and burnout of EFL teachers within the distinct context of private schools.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the emotional experiences and burnout potential of Indonesian EFL teachers in private schools amidst curriculum change uncertainty. It seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do Indonesian private school EFL teachers emotionally respond to uncertainty in curriculum reform? (2) How does this uncertainty affect their professional performance? (3) Is there a significant relationship between curriculum reform uncertainty and teacher burnout among these teachers?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2011). This design was chosen to first obtain a broad, quantitative overview of the phenomenon, followed by qualitative data collection to deepen and explain the statistical findings. The research began with quantitative data collection and analysis, which then informed the subsequent qualitative phase.

The participants were 12 EFL teachers (6 males, 6 females) from various private junior and senior high schools in West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. They were selected using purposive sampling based on their experience teaching through the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum. These teachers provided valuable insights into how EFL teachers respond to pedagogical and technological demands within this dynamic educational context.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two main parts. The first part was a closed-ended questionnaire with items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never/Strongly Disagree to 5 = Always/Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was divided into seven sections measuring: (1) Anxiety and Worry, (2) Frustration and Anger, (3) Hope and Optimism, (4) Professional Confidence, (5) Impact on Teaching and Learning, (6) Motivation, and (7) Curriculum Change and Teacher Burnout. Items in the burnout section were partially adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-

Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and other validated instruments measuring emotional dynamics and stress.

The second part consisted of four open-ended questions designed to capture teachers' in-depth reflections on their emotional experiences, coping strategies, and the impact of curriculum uncertainty on their practice and career intentions: (1) What aspects of curriculum change most strongly affected your emotional condition as a teacher? (2) How do you usually manage feelings of uncertainty related to curriculum change? (3) How has curriculum-related uncertainty specifically affected your classroom teaching practices? (4) Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession due to curriculum reform uncertainty?

Quantitative data from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum) were calculated for each dimension. Due to the small sample size and non-normal distribution of data (tested using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests), a non-parametric Spearman's rho correlation test was used to examine the relationship between curriculum uncertainty and teacher burnout. The strength of the correlation was interpreted based on Alendra (2022), with values below 0.20 categorized as very weak.

Qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Emotional Response to Curriculum Uncertainty

The descriptive analysis revealed a complex interplay of emotions among EFL teachers facing curriculum uncertainty. As shown in Table 1, the dimension of Hope and Optimism recorded the highest mean score (M = 18.17, SD = 3.950), followed by Frustration and Anger (M = 16.17, SD = 4.549), and Anxiety and Worry (M = 14.42, SD = 3.704). This indicates that despite the challenges, teachers predominantly responded with positive emotions, demonstrating professional agency and emotional readiness to engage in educational reform.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Responses

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety and Worry	12	7	21	14.42	3.704
Frustration and Anger	12	5	23	16.17	4.549
Hope and Optimism	12	10	23	18.17	3.950

An item-level analysis of the Hope and Optimism dimension showed that teachers were most optimistic about

the opportunity for creativity and innovation. The statements "I am passionate about exploring different teaching approaches within the adaptable part of the curriculum" and "Uncertainty in the curriculum allows me to be creative in my teaching approach" both scored a mean of 3.92, reflecting that teachers view curriculum uncertainty as an opportunity to innovate and experiment in learning approaches.

However, qualitative data provided a more nuanced picture. While some teachers demonstrated optimism, many expressed significant frustration and confusion. Recurring themes included the lack of clarity in implementation, excessive and shifting administrative burdens, and a perception that change prioritized paperwork over meaningful teaching. One teacher noted, "I feel frustrated with the lack of clarity in the implementation of the new curriculum." Another added, "Too rapid and frequent changes cause stress and a sense of inability to cope with this situation."

These findings support the emotional dynamics theory proposed by Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia (2014), which explains that emotions are influenced by perceptions of control over the work environment. Despite experiencing negative emotions, most teachers maintained hopeful attitudes, reflecting their ability to interpret change as an opportunity for growth. This aligns with research by MacIntyre and Vincze (2017), who found that positive emotions are associated with higher motivation to learn and tend to show resilience and optimal functioning in the learning process.

To manage feelings of uncertainty, teachers employed various coping strategies including discussing with peers in teacher forums (MGMP), independent learning through digital media, and maintaining a positive mindset. As stated by respondents, communication through professional forums and the spirit to continue learning were keys in facing uncertainty, reflecting a solution-oriented approach to addressing structural challenges.

Impact of Uncertainty on Professional Performance

The analysis of how curriculum uncertainty affects teachers' professional performance focused on three key components: Professional Confidence, Impact on the Learning Process, and Motivation to Carry Out Teaching Responsibilities. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for these dimensions.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Professional Performance

Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Professional Confidence	12	12	25	18.75	3.769
Impact on the Learning Process	12	13	31	20.58	6.156
Motivation to Carry Out Duties	12	7	26	15.58	7.103

The Impact on the Learning Process dimension had the highest mean score (M = 20.58, SD = 6.156), suggesting that curriculum uncertainty most significantly disrupts teachers' instructional practices. This indicates that many teachers perceived significant disruptions or influences on how they conduct lessons, manage classroom routines, and engage with students. The relatively high standard deviation also reflects variability in how these impacts were experienced across different teaching contexts.

Professional Confidence showed a moderately high average score (M = 18.75, SD = 3.769) with the lowest standard deviation, suggesting that while many teachers maintain a solid sense of self-efficacy and professional competence, their responses were generally consistent. This alignment may indicate shared resilience among teachers in navigating challenges, even when external factors such as policy shifts are present.

However, the Motivation to Carry Out Duties dimension obtained the lowest mean score (M = 15.58, SD = 7.103), highlighting a potential decline in enthusiasm and drive among teachers in fulfilling their professional roles. This is concerning as decreased motivation can influence not only instruction quality but also broader aspects such as innovation, collaboration, and commitment to continuous improvement.

Item-level analysis of the Impact on Learning dimension revealed specific areas of difficulty. Teachers reported challenges in planning effective lessons (M=2.08), assessing student work due to unclear standards (M=2.67), maintaining classroom management (M=2.25), and conveying clear learning objectives (M=2.33). The quality of teaching materials was also affected (M=2.08), and teacher confidence in answering student questions decreased (M=2.00).

These findings support Fullan's (2007) theory of curriculum change which emphasizes the importance of training, guidance, and clear expectations for successful reform. When these factors are not met, teachers tend to experience decreased confidence and effectiveness in the learning process. Qualitative responses corroborated these results, with teachers stating, "I find it difficult to design a consistent and structured lesson plan" and "I became a little hesitant to set boundaries for the material I should teach in class."

Correlation Between Curriculum Uncertainty and Teacher Burnout

The mean score for the "Curriculum Uncertainty and Teacher Burnout" dimension was notably high (M = 32.42, SD = 4.87), suggesting a considerable level of emotional strain and psychological fatigue related to ongoing curriculum changes. This elevated score suggests that frequent or unclear reforms in curriculum policy have significantly affected teachers' emotional well-being, leading to feelings of overload, frustration, and disengagement.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Curriculum Uncertainty and Teacher Burnout

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation

Coping Strategies	12	13	28	21.08	4.602
Curriculum Uncertainty and Burnout	12	23	40	32.42	4.870

A frequency analysis of burnout levels showed that the largest proportion of teachers (29%) scored at the highest level (score of 6), indicating significant stress and exhaustion. Scores of 2, 3, 4, and 5 each had 14%, reflecting an even distribution in the middle burnout rate. This pattern suggests a strong tendency towards higher burnout, indicating increased work pressure and lack of support felt by teachers.

Despite these high levels of reported burnout, the Spearman's rho correlation test revealed a very weak and statistically insignificant positive relationship between curriculum uncertainty and teacher burnout ($\rho = 0.177, n = 12, p = 0.583 > 0.05$). According to interpretation guidelines, correlation values below 0.20 are categorized as very weak, and the high p-value indicates that the findings may have occurred by chance rather than representing a real relationship.

Table 4. Spearman's Rho Correlation Test

Spearman's rho	Uncertainty	Correlation Coefficient	Burnout	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.177	.583
		N	12	12
	Burnout	Correlation Coefficient	Burnout	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.177	1.000
		N	12	12

This statistical finding contrasts with the rich qualitative data, which revealed profound emotional distress among teachers. Prominent themes from the open-ended responses included mental and physical fatigue, frustration, difficulty concentrating, feeling overwhelmed by workload, and even considering leaving the profession. One teacher shared, "I feel emotionally exhausted every time I get home from work." Another stated, "I have considered quitting as a teacher due to work-related stress."

The discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative findings suggests several possibilities. First, the small sample size ($n=12$) limits statistical power, making it difficult to detect a true relationship. Second, burnout is a multi-faceted phenomenon influenced by a complex interplay of factors, not solely by curriculum uncertainty. Variables such as school

leadership, collegial support, personal life circumstances, and individual personality traits likely mediate or moderate the impact of policy changes.

This aligns with research by Amin and Saukah (2015), who revealed that English teachers who do not get support from principals and peers tend to experience professional burnout. Dissatisfaction with the work environment and unmet psychological needs such as self-esteem and actualization can trigger burnout. The qualitative data supports this, as some teachers cited administrative overload and student issues, not just the curriculum itself, as sources of stress.

Therefore, while the correlation test suggests that curriculum uncertainty alone may not be a direct, linear cause of burnout, the qualitative narratives powerfully illustrate that it is a significant contributing factor within a broader ecosystem of workplace stress. It acts as a chronic stressor that, when combined with other pressures, can push teachers toward emotional exhaustion. The fact that nearly a third of the sample scored at the highest burnout level is a red flag that cannot be ignored, regardless of the correlation result.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the emotional dynamics and burnout of EFL teachers in Indonesian private schools facing curriculum change uncertainty. The findings reveal that teachers experience a dual emotional reality, balancing significant hope and optimism with notable anxiety and frustration. While this optimism fuels professional agency and a desire to innovate, the uncertainty and lack of clarity inherent in curriculum reform have a tangible and negative impact on their professional performance, disrupting lesson planning, teaching effectiveness, and assessment practices. Although a direct statistical correlation between curriculum uncertainty and burnout was not established, the qualitative data uncovered significant emotional strain, including mental fatigue, stress, and thoughts of leaving the profession. This suggests that curriculum uncertainty is a critical stressor that contributes to a broader climate of pressure, which, when combined with other factors, can lead to burnout. The study concludes that curriculum reform is not merely a technical or structural process but a deeply human and emotional experience with profound implications for teacher well-being and the quality of education.

For teachers, it is vital to proactively build emotional resilience by engaging in reflective practice, joining professional learning communities like MGMP for support and collaboration, and continuously developing pedagogical skills to adapt with confidence. For policymakers and school administrators, this study underscores the urgent need to humanize curriculum reform by providing clear, consistent, and timely communication about policy changes, reducing non-essential administrative burdens, and investing in comprehensive support systems including mentoring and training programs that address both technical and emotional aspects of change. For future researchers, larger-scale studies are needed to quantitatively verify the relationship between uncertainty and burnout with greater statistical power. Longitudinal research could track how teachers' emotions

evolve throughout a reform cycle and identify critical intervention points. Further exploration is also needed into the specific coping strategies that protect teachers from burnout and how schools can foster these protective factors.

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