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# LETS

**Journal of Linguistics and English Teaching Studies**

ISSN (print) : 2715-4408

ISSN (online) : 2715-4416

Homepage : [stainmajene.id/index.php/lets](http://stainmajene.id/index.php/lets)

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## **The Implementation of English Curriculum at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal: An Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities**

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### **Abstract**

*English proficiency has become an essential skill that significantly influences academic achievement, professional opportunities, and cross-cultural communication. This study investigates the implementation of the English Curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, focusing on the challenges and opportunities inherent in the current pedagogical framework. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, involving two lecturers, and thirty students. The analysis revealed that traditional, lecture-based teaching methods, resource limitations of material, and fragmented curriculum delivery pose significant challenges to effective language instruction. Conversely, the study identified promising opportunities, such as the integration of interactive teaching strategies, enhanced use of digital tools, and ongoing professional development for educators, which could bridge the gap between theoretical content and practical application. The findings suggest that targeted curriculum reforms are essential to create a more engaging and effective learning environment, ultimately enhancing students' English language proficiency and preparing them for academic and professional success.*

**Keywords:** *English curriculum, challenges, opportunities*

### **1. Introduction**

English has become the dominant language of international communication, academic discourse, and professional engagement. In response to globalization and the increasing necessity for English proficiency, higher education institutions worldwide are

continually revising and improving their English curricula to meet evolving demands. With the expansion of these empires, English emerged as the dominant language for governance, trade, and education in various parts of the world (Molate & McKinney, 2024; Rana & Shaikh, 2024; Smith & Samuell, 2024). State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, face unique challenges and opportunities in implementing English courses within their curriculum. The integration of English within an Islamic academic setting must balance linguistic competence with religious and cultural values while ensuring students acquire the necessary skills to participate in both local and global academic communities. Muluk (2019) stated that developing a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum development process is essential, particularly with regard to identifying and analyzing the roles of key stakeholders such as educators, curriculum specialists, religious authorities, and policymakers in shaping the Islamic religious education curriculum (Muluk et al., 2019).

The inclusion of English in the curriculum of Islamic schools reflects a broader dedication to equipping students with the skills needed to participate in an ever more interconnected global community. Serving as the main language of global interaction, English plays a central role in international communication by enabling students to access worldwide knowledge, participate in intercultural exchanges, and consider a variety of perspectives (Budianto et al., 2022). The decision to implement English as a medium of instruction in Indonesian Islamic schools is driven by both short-term practical needs and long-term educational aspirations (Çelik & Baturay, 2024; Emir & Yangın-Ekşi, 2024; Pun et al., 2024; Shi & Cheung, 2024). The emergence of English teaching in Indonesian Islamic schools' dates to the colonial period under Dutch administration. At that time, English was predominantly taught as a foreign language in distinguished educational institutions, including certain Islamic schools that served the nobility and urban upper classes (Elmas et al., 2023). English instruction has been part of Islamic education in the archipelago since its early stages, though its official integration into school curricula only gained broader prominence and importance toward the end of the 20th century (Nasakina & Maiev, 2023; Rudolph, J., 2023).

The incorporation of English language instruction promotes inclusivity and diversity in Islamic schools, enabling students from various backgrounds and linguistic proficiencies to succeed and actively participate in the learning environment. By using English as a medium of instruction, students gain access to a wider array of educational materials, including literature, scientific studies, and advancements in technology (Oishi et al., 2024; Sahan & Şahan, 2024; Zheng & Qiu, 2024). In the post-colonial era, English increasingly became a dominant global language, reinforcing its role as a primary medium of instruction. As newly independent nations sought to establish their educational systems, many chose to retain English due to its high status, global significance, and the economic advantages linked to English proficiency. In numerous multilingual societies, English played a crucial role in bridging linguistic divides, enabling effective communication, and promoting national unity (Alam, 2023; Kemaloglu-Er & Lowe, 2023; Kim, 2020; Macalister & Akoyt, 2024).

The role of English in education has significantly expanded over the years, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries where proficiency in the language is seen as a gateway to academic and professional success. Curriculum development occupies a central position in the discourse of educational quality and relevance, particularly within higher education institutions tasked with preparing graduates for both national and global challenges. At the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal (STAIN Madina), efforts to enhance the English curriculum especially within teacher education programs reflect a strategic commitment to equipping students with the linguistic and pedagogical competencies necessary for 21st-century teaching and learning contexts.

According to Richards, curriculum development in language teaching should be responsive to learners' needs, institutional goals, and external factors such as technological advancements and globalization (Richards, 2017). In the case of Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, the English curriculum is designed to equip students with linguistic and pedagogical competencies that align with both Islamic studies and general academic skills. However, the effectiveness of the curriculum depends on multiple factors, including faculty expertise, teaching strategies, available learning materials, and student engagement. A curriculum serves as a framework that outlines the philosophy, goals, instructional materials, teaching methodologies, and evaluation methods of a particular educational program (McFadden & Roehrig, 2017).

The implementation of the English curriculum at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal was situated within a broader framework of curriculum reform aimed at integrating Islamic values with contemporary educational demands. As such, this study seeks to investigate the practical realities of curriculum enactment, highlighting both the challenges and the potential opportunities it presents. Key issues under consideration include the adequacy of instructional materials, the preparedness of lecturers, institutional support mechanisms, and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. At the same time, this inquiry identifies significant opportunities, such as the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies, capacity-building for department members, and the integration of technology to support language learning. Through a critical examination of these dynamics, this paper contributes to the ongoing conversation on curriculum development in Islamic higher education, offering insights that may inform future policy and practice in similar institutional contexts.

In order to examine these dimensions comprehensively, the study adopted a qualitative case study approach, which is recognized as an appropriate methodological framework for investigating multifaceted educational phenomena within their authentic institutional contexts. According to Yin (2018), the case study method facilitates an in-depth and context-sensitive exploration of a particular instance namely, the implementation of the English curriculum within the specific environment in which it operates (Yin, 2018). By concentrating on this program, the study seeks to capture the experiential perspectives of both lecturers and students, thereby enabling a nuanced interpretation of the interplay between policy directives and classroom-level practices.

Several key challenges affect the successful implementation of the English curriculum. Nation & Macalister (2019) emphasize that curriculum effectiveness is highly dependent on the adaptability of teaching approaches, accessibility of learning resources, and alignment with learners' needs (Nation, I.S.P., & Macalister, 2019). According to Magloire, the primary goal of general education is to equip students with essential knowledge, skills, and experiences that will support their success in their careers, personal lives, and roles as responsible citizens (Magloire, 2010). At State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, limited resources such as up-to-date teaching materials, language laboratories, and exposure to authentic English-speaking environments may hinder students' language development. Moreover, Hutchinson & Waters argue that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula should be tailored to students' professional aspirations to make learning more meaningful and relevant (Hutchinson, T., & Waters, 1987). It is crucial to integrate English language learning with Islamic educational contexts to ensure relevance and applicability.

Furthermore, lecturers play a critical role in the successful implementation of the curriculum. Brown (2007) highlights that an effective English curriculum should not only focus on language proficiency but also incorporate interactive and communicative teaching methodologies that engage students actively (Brown, 2007). Traditional lecture-based methods may not be sufficient to develop students' communicative competence, making it necessary to incorporate student-centered approaches such as task-based learning, collaborative projects, and the use of digital learning platforms.

Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of the English curriculum at Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. Advances in technology-assisted language learning provide new possibilities for interactive and engaging learning experiences. Richards (2021) suggests that blended learning approaches that combine traditional classroom instruction with online resources can enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes (Richards, 2021). Additionally, international collaborations, faculty development programs, and curriculum reviews can further strengthen the curriculum and ensure its alignment with global educational standards.

This research is connected to the previous study conducted by Sakkir on *The Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching English in the Current Curriculum Change*. Their findings reveal that teachers encounter numerous obstacles when teaching English amid curriculum transitions — spanning the periods before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Sakkir et al., 2021). The challenges arise from various factors, including student conditions, teacher preparedness, school infrastructure, environmental influences, material availability, the learning and administrative processes, as well as the integration of technology.

Another relevant study was carried out by Kelch, titled *Curriculum Development in English Language Teaching: Innovations and Challenges for the Asian Context*. This paper highlights recent developments in curriculum innovation aimed at enhancing English learning success in EFL environments (Kelch, 2011). The research presented offers a

glimpse into the initiatives underway, with the broader goal of encouraging support for these efforts—not only within academic circles but also across all sectors of society, including government, industry, and the public, to ensure their sustained advancement.

This study seeks to examine the effectiveness of the English curriculum at Islamic College of Mandailing Natal by investigating the current implementation strategies, identifying the key obstacles faced by educators and students, and exploring potential solutions. By doing so, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on English language teaching in Islamic higher education institutions, offering recommendations to improve curriculum effectiveness.

By analyzing both the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the English curriculum, this study aims to provide insights that can contribute to more effective language instruction at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. Addressing the identified challenges and leveraging available opportunities will help improve students' English proficiency and better prepare them for academic and professional endeavors.

## **2. Method**

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a case study design to examine the implementation of the English Curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. The qualitative approach is particularly well-suited for capturing the complexities of curriculum implementation by exploring in-depth experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders (Creswell, 2014). The case study design, as outlined by Yin (2018), enables a focused examination of the phenomenon within its real-life context, thereby providing nuanced insights into both the challenges and opportunities present. A case study design allows the researcher to investigate the interactions among lecturers, students, and administrators in a comprehensive manner. This method facilitates an in-depth analysis of how the curriculum is implemented, considering the contextual factors that influence educational practices (Kim, 2020; Seixas et al., 2017; Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that those involved have direct and substantial experience with the curriculum implementation process (Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, 2016). The participants included two Lecturers: Responsible for delivering the material and providing insights into teaching challenges and successes. Thirty students are enrolled in the English curriculum, whose experiences highlight the curriculum's effectiveness and areas for improvement.

This study employed a multi-method approach to data collection to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the English curriculum implementation process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholder that including lectures and students to gather in-depth insights into their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Each interview was recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim, preserving nuanced details and contextual information that are critical for



subsequent analysis (Creswell, 2014). In addition to interviews, classroom observations played a pivotal role in the data collection process. By directly observing the teaching sessions, the researchers were able to document how lecturers implemented the curriculum, the level of student engagement, and the practical application of pedagogical strategies in real time. Detailed field notes were taken during these observations, captured behaviors and interactions that did not emerge in interview settings. The data analyzing explaining the Challenges and the Opportunities of implementation of English curriculum at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. Data analysis involved a systematic process of identifying patterns, themes, and categories in textual data. This method is particularly useful in qualitative research where the researcher seeks to retain close engagement with the data and develop deep, context-sensitive interpretations. the analysis followed six key stages adapted from Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework; Familiarization with the Data, Generating Initial Codes, Searching for Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining and Naming Themes and Interpreting and Reporting Findings (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2006).

### **3. Results**

This study reveals several key challenges in implementing the English curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. A major issue is the mismatch between curriculum goals and classroom practices. Although the curriculum aims to develop students' English proficiency, teaching remains traditional lecture-based and focused on memorization for offering limited opportunities in term of interactive language use. As a result, students struggle with practical skills like speaking and listening. Another significant finding is the lack of resources. Lecturers reported difficulties accessing updated teaching materials and digital tools, while students noted that classes often lacked engaging and interactive components. The absence of technology, such as language labs and multimedia resources, limits students' ability to practice real-life English communication.

The study also highlights the need for improved teaching methods and ongoing professional development. Many lecturers still rely on outdated, teacher-centered approaches and lack training in modern, student-centered techniques like communicative and task-based learning. Lecturers expressed a desire for more training, especially in using digital tools and creating interactive lessons. Despite these challenges, the study identifies opportunities for improvement. Both faculty and students support the integration of technology and interactive content into the curriculum. There is also a strong interest in offering English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to better prepare students for academic and professional settings. These opportunities suggest that with the adequate support and curriculum adjustments, the English program can evolve into a more effective and engaging learning environment.

#### **3.1. Findings**

The findings of this study reveal both challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the English curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. Through observations, interviews, and focus group discussions with students and lecturer

members, key themes emerged regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum and the areas in need of improvement. The following sections highlight these challenges and opportunities, supported by data collected during the research process.

### **3.1.1. Challenges**

#### **a. Misalignment Between Curriculum Objectives and Classroom Practices**

One of the primary challenges identified in the study was the misalignment between the curriculum's objectives and actual classroom practices. Observations in the classroom showed that the teaching approach was primarily lecture-based, focusing on the delivery of content through lengthy explanations and rote memorization. For example, in one observed session, the lecturer spent most of the class time explaining grammar rules, with very few opportunities for students to actively engage in speaking or listening exercises. A student from the focus group expressed:

*"Most of the time, we just listen to lectures and take notes. We don't get many chances to speak or practice English with our classmates" (Student 2).*

This teacher-centered approach significantly limited opportunities for students to actively use English in authentic and communicative contexts. Instruction was primarily focused on grammar explanation, vocabulary memorization, and translation exercises, with minimal emphasis on interactive or task-based learning. As a result, students had fewer chances to engage in spontaneous dialogue, negotiate meaning, or apply language skills in practical situations reflective of real-world communication. This lack of exposure to communicative language use not only reduced student engagement and confidence but also hindered the development of essential skills such as speaking fluency, listening comprehension, and intercultural competence. Over time, this pedagogical model risked reinforcing passive learning habits and undermining the communicative objectives of the English curriculum.

#### **b. Lack of Interactive and Communicative Activities**

A related challenge is the lack of interactive and communicative activities in the classroom. Many students reported that the lessons were predominantly passive and did not involve collaborative tasks that could promote language use. For example, in the focus group discussions, students revealed that they rarely participated in group discussions or role-play activities, which are essential for developing speaking and listening skills. One student noted:

*"We don't have enough activities where we speak in English or work in groups. It's mostly just the teacher talking, and we write down what they say" (Student 5).*

Classroom observations provided direct evidence to support this finding, as students were frequently observed sitting passively, focused on transcribing notes or following lectures, rather than actively participating in interactive or communicative tasks. The activities largely centered around rote memorization and teacher-led instruction, with little to no opportunity for students to engage in real-time conversations or collaborative

language exercises. As a result, students were not involved in dynamic language tasks that encourage them to practice speaking, problem-solve in English, or negotiate meaning in real-world contexts. This passive learning environment limited their chances to develop critical aspects of communicative competence, such as fluency, accuracy, and the ability to adapt language use to diverse situations.

### **c. Resource Constraints**

Resource limitations were another significant challenge observed in the study. Both lecturers and students reported difficulties in accessing up-to-date teaching materials and technological tools that could enhance language learning. In the classroom, outdated textbooks were commonly used, and there were no digital resources available for interactive learning. One lecturer shared:

*“We still use old textbooks. The materials are not interactive, and we don’t have access to digital resources like videos or language apps that could make learning more engaging” (Lecture 1).*

The lack of sufficient resources posed a significant challenge to lecturers in creating engaging and dynamic lessons. Without access to essential teaching tools, such as multimedia equipment, language laboratories, or interactive software, lecturers were constrained in their ability to design lessons that incorporate diverse and interactive language practices. The absence of such resources, particularly those that facilitate the development of listening and speaking skills, further hindered students’ opportunities to engage in communicative language use. These skills are critical components of language acquisition, as they enable students to practice real-world communication, enhance their auditory comprehension, and develop speaking fluency. Consequently, the limitations in available resources directly impacted the effectiveness of the language learning process, reducing the scope for immersive, student-centered activities that are essential for fostering proficiency in English.

### **d. Lecturer Readiness and Pedagogical Challenges**

Another challenge identified was the gap in lecturer preparedness to adopt modern, student-centered teaching methods. Many lecturers acknowledged that their teaching practices were rooted in traditional methods, focusing on grammar instruction and lecture-based delivery. In focus group discussions, some lecturers expressed a desire for more professional development opportunities:

*“I want to learn more about communicative language teaching and task-based learning, but there aren’t enough workshops available for us to improve our skills” (Lecture 2).*

The lack of adequate training and institutional support created substantial barriers for lecturers in integrating more interactive, student-centered teaching methods into their instructional practices. Without ongoing professional development or access to pedagogical resources, lecturers were often confined to traditional, teacher-centered



approaches that emphasized content delivery over student engagement. This gap in support not only hindered the ability of lecturers to adopt innovative teaching strategies, such as task-based learning or collaborative group work, but also resulted in a disconnect between the curriculum's intended outcomes and the actual teaching methods employed. Consequently, students were deprived of opportunities for active learning, critical thinking, and meaningful interaction with the language, ultimately impeding the development of their communicative competence and diminishing the overall effectiveness of the curriculum.

### **3.1.2. Opportunities**

#### **a. Incorporating Technology and Blended Learning**

Despite the challenges, there was a clear opportunity to enhance the curriculum through the integration of technology and blended learning. Both students and lecturers expressed interest in using digital tools to facilitate learning. One student explained:

*"I think we would learn better if we could use online platforms and apps. It would make the lessons more interesting, and we could practice more outside of class" (Student 10).*

Lecturers also recognized the potential of blended learning models, which combine face-to-face instruction with online resources. By incorporating multimedia content, online discussion forums, and language-learning applications, the curriculum could become more interactive and engaging. Observations also revealed that some students were more motivated when multimedia content, such as short videos or audio recordings, was used during the lesson.

#### **b. Curriculum Revision and Alignment with Professional Needs**

The study found that students desired a curriculum that aligns more closely with their real-world needs and professional aspirations. In focus group discussions, students expressed a need for specialized courses, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), to better prepare them for careers in business, education, or Islamic studies. One student noted:

*"We need more courses that teach us how to use English in our future jobs. For example, business communication or academic writing would be helpful" (Student 15).*

This expressed desire for more practical English skills indicates a significant opportunity for the institution to reconsider and revise its existing curriculum. By incorporating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, the institution can tailor language instruction to address the specialized vocabulary, communication strategies, and real-world applications most relevant to students' chosen fields of study. Such a revision would not only enhance students' ability to use English effectively in professional contexts but also align language instruction with the demands of their academic and career paths.

Moreover, offering ESP courses would allow students to engage more meaningfully with the language, fostering both linguistic proficiency and professional competence in their areas of expertise, ultimately enhancing their employability and readiness for global professional environments.

### **c. Project-Based and Real-World Learning**

Another opportunity for curriculum improvement is the integration of project-based learning and real-world case studies. Students indicated that they would benefit from activities that allow them to apply their language skills in practical scenarios. In the focus group discussions, several students shared:

*“We learn a lot of theory, but we don’t get to use English in real-life situations. If we had projects or case studies, we could improve our speaking and problem-solving skills” (Student 18).*

By incorporating real-world tasks into the curriculum, students would not only have the opportunity to hone their language skills but also enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Engaging in tasks that reflect authentic situations such as case studies, simulations, or collaborative projects would enable students to apply their English language knowledge in meaningful contexts, fostering deeper comprehension and retention. These activities also encourage students to think critically, analyse complex information, and work collaboratively, all of which are essential skills in both academic and professional settings. This approach moves beyond rote memorization, empowering students to use English as a tool for creative and analytical thinking, while also preparing them to navigate challenges they may encounter in real-world scenarios.

### **d. Professional Development for lecturers**

There was a strong desire among lecturers for professional development to help them adopt modern teaching methods. Many lecturers expressed interest in learning more about task-based learning, communicative language teaching, and the use of technology in language instruction. One lecturer stated:

*“I want to improve my teaching methods, but I need more training in using modern techniques and digital tools to engage students” (Lecture 2).*

Providing lecturers with ongoing professional development and training in student-centered teaching strategies is crucial for enhancing the overall quality of instruction. Such training would equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to incorporate more interactive and engaging teaching methods, including collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and the use of technology to facilitate communication and critical thinking. By fostering a deeper understanding of how to promote active student participation, lecturers would be better positioned to create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. This, in turn, would not only increase student motivation and

engagement but also improve learning outcomes by ensuring that students are actively involved in their language acquisition process, rather than passively receiving information.

The findings from this study highlight the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the English curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. The misalignment between curriculum objectives and classroom practices, resource constraints, and gaps in lecturer readiness are key challenges that need to be addressed. However, there are significant opportunities to improve the curriculum, particularly by incorporating technology, revising the curriculum to meet students' professional needs, and enhancing lecturer professional development. By leveraging these opportunities, the institution can create a more student-centered, interactive, and effective English language learning environment, ultimately better preparing students for academic and professional success.

### **3.2. Discussion**

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within the English curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal (STAIN Madina). These results are discussed in relation to existing research and theoretical perspectives on curriculum development in higher education, especially in the context of Islamic institutions.

#### **3.2.1. Challenges**

##### **a. Misalignment Between Curriculum Objectives and Classroom Practices**

One of the main challenges highlighted in this study is the misalignment between the curriculum's objectives and classroom practices. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on curriculum implementation. According to Richards and Rodgers, effective language curriculum development requires aligning instructional methods with the intended learning outcomes (Richards, J.C., & Rodgers, 2014). In many instances, curricula designed to enhance students' English proficiency fail to translate into classroom practices that foster real-world language use. In the case of State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, the observed teacher-centered approach, where lectures focus on content delivery rather than interactive learning, reflects the misalignment between theory and practice. As Nation and Macalister argue, the reliance on traditional lecture-based methods is insufficient for language acquisition, particularly when students are expected to develop communicative competence (Nation, I.S.P., & Macalister, 2019). They emphasize the importance of curricula that incorporate interactive and communicative language teaching methods, which the current curriculum at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal lacks.

##### **b. Resource Constraints**

Another major challenge identified is the lack of resources, which significantly impedes the effectiveness of English language instruction. The use of outdated textbooks and the absence of modern technological tools in the classroom limit opportunities for dynamic, interactive language learning. Research supports the importance of resources in

shaping effective language teaching. According to Kurzer, the integration of digital resources such as online platforms, multimedia, and language-learning applications can enhance the language learning experience by making it more interactive and engaging (Kurzer, 2018). In the context of State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, the absence of such resources restricts students' ability to practice language skills in diverse ways, which hinders language acquisition.

### **c. Pedagogical Practices and lecturer Readiness**

A significant challenge identified in the study is the need for continuous professional development for lecturers. Many lecturers at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal still rely on traditional pedagogical approaches, such as grammar-based instruction and rote memorization. This gap in pedagogical practices has been highlighted in the literature as a critical issue in language education. According to Brown, the effectiveness of language teaching is closely linked to an lecturer's ability to adapt and implement student-centered, communicative teaching methods (Brown, 2007). In the case of State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal, the absence of professional development opportunities limits lecturers' ability to incorporate task-based learning (TBL), communicative language teaching (CLT), and other modern approaches that emphasize active student participation. As Brown notes, language teachers need ongoing training to effectively engage students and promote language acquisition.

### **d. Opportunities for Curriculum Enhancement**

Despite these challenges, the study also identified several opportunities for improving the English curriculum at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. One of the key opportunities lies in the integration of technology into the curriculum. The positive response from both students and lecturers regarding digital tools and blended learning suggests that incorporating these resources could enhance the learning experience. Research by Thorne supports this opportunity, emphasizing that technology in language education can provide students with authentic language exposure and foster greater engagement (Thorne, 2013). The use of multimedia resources, virtual simulations, and AI-powered language applications could create a more interactive and immersive language-learning environment at State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal.

Moreover, the students' demand for courses tailored to their professional aspirations such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) indicates an opportunity for curriculum revision. ESP has been widely acknowledged as an effective approach in meeting the specific language needs of students. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), ESP courses are designed to teach the language skills necessary for professional contexts, making them highly relevant for students preparing for careers in fields such as business, education, and Islamic studies. In response to students' needs, State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal could benefit from incorporating more ESP courses that focus on academic writing, business communication, and specialized vocabulary (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

In conclusion, this study highlights the gaps and opportunities in the English curriculum at State Islamic College of Mandailing Nata, with a clear need for aligning curriculum objectives with effective classroom practices, integrating technology, and

providing professional development for lecturers. These recommendations align with broader discussions in language education, where the shift toward communicative, student-centered methodologies and the incorporation of digital tools have been shown to improve student engagement and language proficiency. By addressing these challenges and seizing the opportunities identified in this study, State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal can create a more dynamic, engaging, and effective English language learning environment, ultimately preparing students for academic and professional success in a globalized context.

### **3.2.2. Opportunities**

The findings of this study highlight several promising opportunities to enhance the English curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal. These opportunities are rooted in lecturers' insights and supported by established language education theories. They include the integration of technology and blended learning, curriculum revision aligned with professional needs, project-based instruction, and professional development for lecturers.

#### **a. Integrating Technology and Blended Learning**

Both students and lecturers showed enthusiasm for incorporating technology into English instruction. As one student remarked, "I think we would learn better if we could use online platforms and apps." This reflects a global trend in language education that values the use of digital tools to promote learner autonomy, engagement, and access to authentic language input. Warschauer and Healey argue that technology supports second language development by facilitating communication, collaboration, and multimedia exposure—elements that are particularly effective in blended learning environments (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Furthermore, Graham emphasizes that blended learning models can provide flexibility and extend learning beyond the classroom, creating a more personalized and accessible experience for students (Graham, 2006).

A significant constraint in the integration of technology and the implementation of blended learning at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal lies in the inadequate internet connectivity across campus facilities and surrounding student areas. Although the adoption of blended learning models is increasingly promoted to enhance instructional flexibility and engagement, the effectiveness of such approaches is highly dependent on stable and accessible digital infrastructure. In this context, limited network access has emerged as a critical impediment, affecting not only the delivery of online instructional content but also students' capacity to fully participate in virtual learning environments. The inconsistency of internet connectivity has compelled both lecturers and students to revert to conventional, offline modes of instruction, thereby undermining the pedagogical advantages that blended learning is intended to offer. This infrastructural challenge highlights the urgent need for institutional investment in reliable digital infrastructure to ensure that the integration of technology into teaching and learning processes can be implemented effectively and equitably.

#### **b. Curriculum Revision Aligned with Professional Needs**

The call for curriculum revisions—particularly the inclusion of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a key opportunity for institutional development. As one student pointed



out, "We need more courses that teach us how to use English in our future jobs." This aligns with Hutchinson and Waters' theory that ESP should be driven by learners' specific academic or professional goals, enabling them to acquire relevant language skills for their career paths (Hutchinson, T., & Waters, 1987). Developing courses in business communication, academic writing, and English for Islamic studies would enhance the practical relevance of the curriculum and improve students' employability. Basturkmen supports this view, noting that well-designed ESP programs bridge the gap between general language instruction and context-specific communication demands (Basturkmen, 2010).

The disconnect between current curricular practice and theoretical best practices. While students clearly express a demand for more targeted, practical language instruction, the existing curriculum does not yet reflect the principles advocated in ESP literature. This gap underscores an urgent need for curriculum reform, to translate theory into practice by integrating ESP courses that are grounded in the actual linguistic needs of students' chosen fields. Thus, the discussion not only supports the findings with relevant theoretical frameworks but also highlights how the institution's current practices fall short of those frameworks. Bridging this gap will require deliberate institutional efforts to design and implement ESP-based modules that align educational outcomes with both student expectations and the professional realities they will face post-graduation.

### **c. Project-Based and Real-World Learning**

Another significant opportunity lies in adopting project-based learning (PBL) and case-based instruction, which encourage students to apply English in real-life contexts. A student's comment "If we had projects or case studies, we could improve our speaking and problem-solving skills" echoes the core principle of PBL: learning through doing. According to Beckett and Slater, project-based learning fosters meaningful use of language and develops critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving—all essential competencies for academic and professional success (Beckett, 2005). When embedded into the curriculum, such experiential learning strategies can transform passive learners into active language users.

The contrast between student-identified needs and the current curriculum's is lack of experiential engagement. While students are calling for more practical, real-world learning experiences, the curriculum has yet to evolve to include these evidence-based methodologies. The discussion provides a strong theoretical justification for integrating PBL into the curriculum, yet this remains an aspirational goal rather than a current reality. Addressing this gap requires the institution to move from recognizing the value of PBL in theory to actively embedding it within course design, assessment, and classroom practice. Doing so would not only meet students' expectations but also align instructional practices with research-backed strategies for language acquisition and professional readiness.

### **d. Professional Development for lecturers**

Lecturers' desire for professional growth particularly in communicative and task-based methods reveals another crucial opportunity. The need for training in using digital tools and adopting student-centered approaches underscores a systemic gap in pedagogical readiness. Brown stresses that the success of any curriculum reform is



contingent upon teachers' ability to implement it effectively (Brown, 2007). Similarly, Richards and Farrell highlight that ongoing professional development is essential for fostering reflective teaching practices and innovation (Richards, J. C., & Farrell, 2005). Equipping lecturers with training in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and digital pedagogy will allow for more engaging, interactive, and relevant instruction.

Taken together, these opportunities underscore the need for institutional commitment to innovation, responsiveness to learners' needs, and investment in teaching capacity. With thoughtful implementation, State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal can transform its English curriculum into a more modern, practical, and learner-focused program that prepares students for the demands of both local and global contexts.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the implementation of the English Curriculum at the State Islamic College of Mandailing Natal reveals a dual narrative of challenges and opportunities. The study finds that traditional, lecture-based teaching methods and limited access to modern digital tools contribute to a learning environment that is not fully conducive to the development of communicative competence. Both lecturers and students noted that while the curriculum is designed to enhance language proficiency, its current execution characterized by passive note-taking and fragmented content delivery hampers the practical application of language skills.

Despite these challenges, the research highlights several promising opportunities for reform. There is a strong consensus among lecturers that integrating interactive teaching strategies, such as group discussions, role-playing, and the use of multimedia resources, can significantly enhance classroom engagement. Additionally, investing in technological infrastructure and providing continuous professional development for lecturers are seen as pivotal steps toward modernizing the curriculum. Such reforms could bridge the gap between theoretical content and practical language application, creating a more dynamic and responsive educational environment (Richards, 2017).

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single Islamic higher education institution, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other contexts with different resources, faculty capacities, and student backgrounds. The research also relied mainly on qualitative data from observations and focus group discussions, without including quantitative analysis of student outcomes. Future research could involve comparative studies across multiple institutions, explore the long-term effects of curriculum reforms, and examine students' attitudes toward English learning, particularly in relation to their religious identity and the use of culturally responsive teaching methods.

#### **Acknowledgements**

I sincerely extend my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who has provided support and contributed to the completion of this research project.

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