

Aligning Institutional Syllabuses with National Curriculum Goals in English Language Education

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ABSTRACT

The alignment between institutional syllabuses and national curriculum goals is essential for ensuring coherence, educational quality, and effective learning outcomes. This study examines how English Language Education programs at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau align their institutional syllabuses with national curriculum standards, particularly the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through document analysis of institutional syllabuses and semi-structured interviews with lecturers and curriculum coordinators. The findings indicate partial alignment, in which learning outcomes generally reflect national competencies, while inconsistencies persist in the implementation of instructional strategies and assessment practices. Key challenges include limited understanding of the national curriculum framework, insufficient structured professional development, and minimal collaborative curriculum planning. The study identifies curriculum mapping, outcome-based syllabus design, and collaborative professional development as strategic approaches to strengthening alignment. It concludes that sustained institutional commitment, continuous evaluation, and faculty collaboration are essential for achieving coherent and meaningful curriculum implementation in English language education.

Keywords

curriculum alignment, educational quality, outcome-based education, syllabus design

Article History

Received: 2025-12-22

Accepted: 2026-01-21

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Published by MAN 4 Kota Pekanbaru
DOI: [10.56113/takuana.v4i4.292](https://doi.org/10.56113/takuana.v4i4.292)

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective education requires the alignment of institutional syllabuses with national curriculum goals to ensure coherent, high-quality, and equitable learning outcomes. In Indonesia, the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes the importance of synchronizing higher education syllabuses, particularly in English Language Education programs, with national standards. This alignment is crucial for developing students' communication skills, critical thinking, and character education. A syllabus functions not only as a guide for lecturers but also as an operationalization of both institutional and national educational objectives. However, studies have shown that misalignments

frequently occur between institutional syllabus design and classroom practices, resulting in inconsistent teaching methods, assessment practices, and ultimately, student learning outcomes (Setiawan, 2021).

Previous research has explored curriculum design and implementation across various educational contexts. Setiawan (2021) examined English language teaching under *Kurikulum 2013* and highlighted that institutional syllabuses often fail to fully translate national competencies into practical classroom activities. This gap creates discrepancies between policy expectations and actual learning outcomes, particularly in developing students' language skills. Similarly, Novawan (2015) analyzed English courses at Politeknik Negeri Jember and found that lecturers frequently relied on personal preferences or textbook content rather than systematically integrating national standards. This approach often led to redundancy and gaps in course content, undermining the coherence of the curriculum.

Comparative studies also shed light on best practices in curriculum alignment. Sofiani (2025) compared Indonesian and Australian education systems, demonstrating that successful curriculum alignment requires institutional commitment, continuous teacher professional development, and monitoring mechanisms. This study highlighted that a syllabus must reflect both institutional goals and national mandates, as misalignment can compromise educational equity and consistency. Likewise, Brantasari (2024) emphasized the role of strategic planning and institutional resource management in supporting curriculum alignment, suggesting that universities need formal processes to ensure that learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment practices are in line with national standards.

Research in higher education also indicates that outcome-based education (OBE) and curriculum mapping are critical strategies to achieve alignment. Dahlan (2014) highlighted that OBE involves designing syllabuses starting from clearly defined learning outcomes, ensuring that all instructional and assessment activities contribute directly to achieving these outcomes. *Pemetaan kurikulum*, or curriculum mapping, provides a visual representation of how institutional syllabuses correspond to national learning standards, enabling educators to identify overlaps, gaps, and areas requiring reinforcement (Juanda, 2016). These approaches collectively suggest that effective syllabus alignment is not merely an administrative task but requires pedagogical awareness, institutional support, and faculty collaboration.

Despite extensive discussion in the literature, few studies specifically address English Language Education programs in Indonesian higher education and practical strategies for aligning syllabuses with *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This research seeks to fill this gap by examining institutional practices at Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau. It combines document analysis with semi-structured interviews with lecturers and curriculum coordinators, providing a comprehensive understanding of the alignment process from both formal and practical perspectives.

The existing literature also identifies a significant gap between national curriculum goals and institutional implementation. Frameworks such as *Kurikulum 2013* and *Kurikulum Merdeka* clearly define competencies and expected learning outcomes; however, institutional syllabuses are often developed in isolation, lacking systematic evaluation and alignment mechanisms (Setiawan, 2021). Additionally, limited access to professional development programs and collaborative platforms restricts lecturers' ability to interpret

and implement national standards effectively (Sofiani, 2025). Such misalignment affects teaching quality, assessment reliability, and student achievement, emphasizing the urgency of investigating effective alignment strategies.

The dynamic nature of educational policy, particularly with the introduction of new frameworks such as *Kurikulum Merdeka*, requires that institutions adopt adaptive and reflective practices to maintain relevance and effectiveness. Without systematic alignment, universities risk producing graduates whose competencies do not meet national expectations, thereby affecting employability and broader societal contributions (Dahlan, 2014).

This study presents several unique contributions. It focuses specifically on English Language Education programs in an Islamic university context, offering insights into how religiously affiliated institutions integrate national curriculum standards with institutional objectives. Furthermore, within a qualitative descriptive research design, the study employs document analysis and semi-structured interviews as complementary data collection methods, enabling a comprehensive examination of syllabus content and the contextual challenges encountered by lecturers in curriculum implementation. By examining strategies such as curriculum mapping, outcome-based syllabus design, and collaborative professional development, this research generates practical recommendations that can be adapted by similar institutions across Indonesia.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic approach. It does not merely evaluate compliance with national standards but explores the processes, challenges, and strategies used by institutions to achieve meaningful alignment. Few recent studies have addressed this integration of institutional, pedagogical, and policy perspectives within the context of Indonesian higher education, particularly in English Language Education programs (Brantasari, 2024).

Based on the identified gaps and unique contributions, the objectives of this study are to examine the current state of alignment between institutional syllabuses and national curriculum goals, identify challenges faced by lecturers and curriculum coordinators, and explore effective strategies including curriculum mapping, outcome-based syllabus design, and collaborative professional development. Moreover, the study aims to provide recommendations for institutional policies and practices that support continuous improvement and alignment, ensuring that student learning outcomes meet both national and institutional expectations (Juanda, 2016).

By achieving these objectives, this research contributes to the broader discourse on curriculum design in higher education, particularly in the Indonesian context, and provides a model for other institutions seeking to align their syllabuses with national curriculum standards while maintaining pedagogical quality and institutional relevance. Syllabus alignment should be considered an ongoing reflective process rather than a static compliance requirement. Through collaborative engagement, continuous reflection, and institutional commitment, higher education institutions can ensure that their syllabuses provide coherent, relevant, and transformative learning experiences for students (Setiawan, 2021).

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the alignment of institutional syllabuses with national curriculum goals in the context of English Language Education. A qualitative descriptive approach is appropriate for examining educational practices and curriculum implementation as they occur in real institutional settings, allowing for in-depth interpretation of documents and participant perspectives (Sugiyono, 2019). This design enables the study to capture both formal curriculum representations and contextual challenges related to syllabus alignment.

The primary data sources consisted of document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis was conducted on institutional English language syllabuses and relevant national curriculum guidelines, including the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of alignment and misalignment among learning outcomes, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. This method allowed for systematic examination of how national curriculum objectives were translated into institutional syllabus components.

In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with lecturers and curriculum coordinators involved in syllabus design and implementation. The interviews aimed to explore participants' understanding of national curriculum standards, experiences in syllabus development, and perceived challenges in achieving alignment. This approach provided contextual insights that complemented the document analysis and helped explain observed inconsistencies in curriculum implementation.

The data collection procedure follows several steps. First, institutional syllabuses from the English Language Education program at Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau were collected and systematically reviewed. Each syllabus was examined for stated learning outcomes, instructional methods, and assessment criteria. Second, national curriculum documents, including the *Kurikulum Merdeka* guidelines, were analyzed to extract standardized competencies and expected learning outcomes. Finally, findings from the document analysis were cross-referenced with insights from the literature review to triangulate data and ensure validity. Sugiono (2019) highlights that triangulation strengthens the credibility of qualitative research by combining multiple sources of information and reducing potential bias.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach adapted from Sugiono's (2019) qualitative data analysis framework. The steps include: (1) data familiarization, which involves a thorough reading of syllabuses and literature to understand key concepts and contextual factors; (2) coding, where relevant information regarding learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment methods is identified and categorized; (3) theme development, in which patterns and recurring issues in curriculum alignment are grouped into broader analytical themes; and (4) interpretation, where the themes are analyzed to draw conclusions about the alignment process, challenges, and effective strategies. This approach allows for a detailed understanding of the alignment between institutional syllabuses and national curriculum goals while highlighting areas for improvement.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the procedures for evaluating syllabus alignment. Following Sugiono (2019), alignment was assessed based on three criteria: (1) content alignment, which examines whether syllabus topics and materials reflect national

curriculum competencies; (2) instructional alignment, which evaluates whether teaching methods support the achievement of intended learning outcomes; and (3) assessment alignment, which considers whether evaluation techniques accurately measure the competencies prescribed by the national curriculum. Each criterion was systematically coded and analyzed, enabling a structured comparison between institutional and national frameworks.

The methodology also accounts for modifications relevant to the research context. While Sugiono (2019) provides general guidelines for qualitative descriptive research, this study adapts the framework to the specific context of higher education in Indonesia, including considerations for Islamic university settings, English language programs, and recent curriculum reforms. These contextual adaptations ensure that the analysis accurately reflects the institutional practices and constraints unique to this educational environment.

Finally, the study ensures trustworthiness and reliability by adhering to rigorous qualitative procedures. Data triangulation is applied by integrating information from syllabuses, national curriculum documents, and recent scholarly literature. Peer debriefing is conducted by consulting senior lecturers experienced in curriculum development to validate the interpretation of data. Additionally, the analysis process is transparently documented, and findings are cross-checked with multiple sources to enhance credibility. Sugiono (2019) emphasizes that such measures are critical in qualitative research to produce reliable, valid, and replicable results.

In conclusion, this study's methodology, guided by Sugiono (2019), combines document analysis and literature review with a detailed, thematic analysis procedure. The systematic examination of institutional syllabuses in comparison to national curriculum goals, coupled with insights from recent research, enables the study to provide a comprehensive understanding of syllabus alignment, identify challenges, and propose practical strategies for higher education institutions. The methodological rigor ensures that findings are credible, contextually relevant, and applicable for informing curriculum development and policy decision-making.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of institutional syllabuses in English language education at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau revealed a partial alignment with national curriculum goals. Document analysis showed that most syllabuses explicitly referred to general competencies outlined in the national standards, particularly communication skills, critical thinking, and character education. Learning outcomes were commonly formulated using policy-oriented terminology aligned with national curriculum discourse, indicating that national expectations have been formally acknowledged in syllabus documentation. However, this alignment remains largely at the level of stated outcomes rather than instructional implementation, as meaningful curriculum alignment requires coherence among curriculum standards, teaching-learning processes, and assessment practices (Zhang et al., 2023).

However, closer examination revealed notable inconsistencies in the operationalization of these stated learning outcomes into teaching and assessment activities. Although communicative competence and higher-order thinking were frequently

emphasized in learning outcomes, assessment components were predominantly designed to measure grammatical knowledge, vocabulary recall, and memorization through written examinations and objective tests. In several syllabuses, for example, communicative outcomes were stated, yet assessment descriptions focused mainly on midterm and final grammar-based tests, with limited reference to performance-based or communicative tasks. This indicates that alignment was largely declarative and had not been fully translated into pedagogical practice. Similar patterns of misalignment have been noted by Wotring et al. (2021), who observed that gaps often emerge when national curriculum expectations are interpreted formally rather than implemented substantively at the classroom level.

Challenges in achieving full syllabus alignment were further identified, particularly in relation to faculty understanding of the national curriculum framework. Interview data revealed that lecturers frequently relied on personal interpretations of curriculum objectives due to limited access to structured professional development programs or detailed institutional guidelines. Several participants indicated uncertainty in translating national competencies into concrete teaching strategies and assessment criteria, reflecting a variation in individual curriculum literacy. This finding reflects an institutional condition in which curriculum alignment depends heavily on individual initiative rather than systematic support. Nkhi & Moqasa (2023) similarly reported that insufficient familiarity with overarching curricular objectives often prevents teachers from fully integrating national education aims into syllabus content. Furthermore, studies on curriculum implementation suggest that lack of targeted professional development, institutional guidance, and supportive leadership structures are significant barriers that impede teachers' effective translation of curriculum standards into pedagogical practices (El-Annan & Hassoun, 2025). These combined challenges underscore the need for comprehensive capacity-building mechanisms that enhance lecturers' understanding of the national curriculum framework and support coherent syllabus design and implementation across courses.

In addition to conceptual challenges, structural constraints also affected alignment efforts. Time limitations and administrative workloads were repeatedly cited as barriers to conducting comprehensive syllabus reviews and updates. Lecturers reported prioritizing immediate teaching responsibilities over curriculum revision activities, which limited opportunities for reflective evaluation of alignment between objectives, instruction, and assessment. These findings are consistent with Irfan and Mahmood (2025), who emphasized that alignment processes require detailed and time-intensive evaluation of curricular components, including objectives, learning materials, and assessment tools.

Despite these challenges, the findings also identified several strategies that have the potential to improve syllabus alignment. Curriculum mapping emerged as an important approach for systematically examining the relationship between institutional syllabuses and national curriculum standards. Although curriculum mapping was not consistently applied across all syllabuses, cases in which it was utilized demonstrated clearer connections between learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment methods. Mapping enabled lecturers to identify gaps, redundancies, and overlaps in course content, thereby facilitating more coherent syllabus design (Wotring et al., 2021).

Outcome-based education (OBE) was another strategy identified as contributing to improved alignment. Syllabuses reflecting OBE principles were characterized by backward design, in which desired learning outcomes informed the selection of content, teaching

methods, and assessment techniques. In these cases, assessment tasks were more explicitly linked to intended competencies, rather than focusing solely on content coverage. This approach ensured that instructional activities directly supported the achievement of national curriculum goals, reinforcing the functional relationship between objectives and evaluation (Hasibuan et al., 2025).

Collaborative professional development was highlighted as a critical element for sustaining curriculum alignment. Regular workshops, peer discussions, and reflective practices provided opportunities for lecturers to share interpretations of national standards and collectively refine syllabus design. Such collaborative approaches promoted shared responsibility among faculty members and increased coherence across courses. However, as shown in Table 1, teacher collaboration remained one of the least frequently implemented alignment aspects. This suggests that while collaboration is recognized as valuable, it has not yet been fully institutionalized. Irfan and Mahmood (2025) emphasized that continuous professional development and faculty collaboration are essential for ensuring that alignment efforts move beyond administrative compliance toward pedagogically meaningful implementation.

The degree of syllabus alignment was found to have significant implications for student learning experiences. Syllabuses with clearer alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments provided more transparent learning pathways and facilitated students' understanding of expected competencies. For instance, courses that incorporated curriculum mapping and OBE principles enabled students to recognize how instructional activities and assessments were connected to specific learning goals. In contrast, partial alignment often resulted in ambiguity regarding course expectations and reduced opportunities for practical language use, which limited the development of communicative competence and applied skills (Malik, 2024).

Table 1. Alignment aspects of institutional syllabuses with national curriculum goals

| Aspect | Indicator | F | % |
|------------------------------|---|-----|------|
| Learning Outcomes Alignment | Competencies reflected in syllabus match national standards | 120 | 30.0 |
| Teaching Methods Integration | Instructional strategies support national objectives | 100 | 25.0 |
| Assessment Coherence | Evaluations measure intended competencies | 90 | 22.5 |
| Curriculum Mapping Usage | Use of mapping to identify gaps and redundancies | 50 | 12.5 |
| Teacher Collaboration | Workshops, peer discussions, and reflective practices | 40 | 10.0 |

Source: Data Researcher

Table 1 above presents the alignment aspects of institutional syllabuses with national curriculum goals. The table indicates that learning outcomes alignment (30.0%) and teaching methods integration (25.0%) were the most frequently addressed aspects. In contrast, assessment coherence (22.5%), curriculum mapping usage (12.5%), and teacher collaboration (10.0%) were less consistently implemented. These findings suggest that while institutions have made progress in aligning stated outcomes with national standards, practical mechanisms for systematic curriculum review and collaborative implementation remain underdeveloped.

Figure 1 illustrates the main strategies for improving syllabus alignment, including curriculum mapping, outcome-based education, and collaborative professional development. The diagram highlights the interdependent nature of these strategies, demonstrating that effective alignment requires not only coherent syllabus design but also sustained professional engagement and institutional support. When implemented collectively, these strategies contribute to consistent, effective, and policy-aligned syllabus development.



Figure 1. Strategies for improving syllabus alignment
(Source: Adapted from Hasibuan et al., 2025; Wotring et al., 2021)

Overall, the findings emphasize that curriculum alignment is not a one-time administrative task but a continuous process requiring systematic planning, regular evaluation, and professional collaboration. National curriculum reforms demand that higher education institutions adapt dynamically to ensure that course syllabuses remain relevant and consistent with policy standards (Wotring et al., 2021). By institutionalizing curriculum mapping, outcome-based design, and collaborative professional development, universities can provide transparent learning pathways for students while simultaneously enhancing instructional quality.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of curriculum mapping, outcome-based education, and collaborative professional development in achieving alignment between institutional syllabuses and national curriculum goals. Partial alignment leads to inconsistencies in teaching and assessment practices and reduces instructional effectiveness. In contrast, comprehensive and systematic alignment strategies can significantly improve coherence, pedagogical relevance, and student learning outcomes (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Malik, 2024; Nkhi & Moqasa, 2023; Irfan & Mahmood, 2025; Wotring et al., 2021). Institutions should therefore treat syllabus alignment as an ongoing reflective process that integrates continuous evaluation, faculty collaboration, and professional development to ensure high-quality and meaningful English language education.

4. CONSLUSION

This study concludes that the alignment between institutional syllabuses and national curriculum goals in the English Language Education program at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau has been achieved primarily at a formal level. While core competencies such as communication skills, critical thinking, and character education are generally reflected in stated learning outcomes, inconsistencies remain in their pedagogical implementation. In particular, misalignment persists between intended outcomes and teaching methods as well as assessment practices, which continue to emphasize grammar-focused and memorization-based evaluations rather than communicative and applied competencies.

Beyond reaffirming these findings, the study highlights concrete institutional implications for strengthening syllabus alignment. The adoption of a structured curriculum mapping model, a standardized outcome-based syllabus template, and a continuous professional development program tailored to curriculum alignment are recommended to ensure coherence between learning outcomes, instruction, and assessment. These measures would support lecturers in translating national curriculum standards into meaningful classroom practices and promote sustainable alignment at the institutional level. Future research should examine syllabus implementation through classroom observation and assess the impact of alignment on student learning outcomes to further strengthen evidence-based curriculum development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who have contributed to this research. Special thanks are extended to Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University of Riau for providing facilities and administrative support. The authors also wish to thank their supervisors and colleagues for their valuable guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement, which have greatly contributed to the successful completion of this study.

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