Aligning Student Needs with English Curriculum in Indonesian Junior High School

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Abstract

The alignment between students' learning needs and the English curriculum in an Indonesian junior high school context. This response concerns the degree to which students' target needs and learning needs match with the teacher's views, she said, followed by debate on how this aligns to actual practices of English in classroom settings. This study uses a descriptive qualitative design involving an English teacher and a group of junior high school students. Three instruments were used for data collection: a student questionnaire on necessities, lacks, wants and activities; a semi-structured teacher interview and classroom observation. The data were systematically categorized, interpreted to identify patterns and mismatches. The results reveal that students' competence in English is still at a low level, especially in vocabulary mastery and speaking confidence, whilst the majority of students have strong proclivities to interactive, communicative and technology-supported learning activities. The study also finds a partial misalignment between the goals of lesson plans overall and actual classroom practices. This reminds us that relevant implementation of a curriculum should be based on the actual learning needs of students—it realistically allows: enhanced vocabulary support, use of language in practice and engaging methods being implemented – leading to more responsive and student-focused English teaching practices as a whole.

Keywords: *Curriculum Alignment; Learning Needs Analysis; English Teaching Practices; Junior High School; Communicative Learning.*

Introduction

Considering that English has assumed the role of a global lingua franca, its importance in education, interaction and access to different forms of knowledge is essential across diversified contexts. As in many other countries, English is placed as a prominent subject in formal education especially for junior high school level

students who shall develop basic communicative competence (Saefurrohman et al. 2024). Yet, notwithstanding its central role, English language instruction often falls short in addressing students' real learning needs relative to the effectiveness of current teaching practices.

In Indonesia, curriculum reforms have highlighted a shift towards competency-based, student-centered/learning oriented paradigm, but the realities in classroom often indicate gaps between intended curriculum aims versus actual experiences of learners (Indrayadi & Alta, 2025) Such a mismatch can lead to poor learner engagement, inadequate levels of language proficiency and ineffective learning outcomes and so it is both pedagogical and practical problem (Karim & Harwood, 2025).

Central to all this is the notion of needs analysis, which in language education, refers to any systematic collection of information about the areas that learners require (namely their needs, deficiencies and wants) when it comes to learning a language (Daar, 2024). Because target needs are about what learners need to be able to do in a given context, and learning needs relate to how learners like or learn best. The following is an example: students in a junior high school may feel the need for basic vocabulary and speaking skills (necessities), their strong pronunciation of words and weak confidence when communicating with others can be seen as lack, and they definitely want interactive activities such as games or digital tools (want) (Zhang et al., 2025). These dimensions help teachers in designing more responsive and meaningful instruction. Without this alignment, even the best curricula may not prepare people for their actual life conditions (Khodabandelou et al., 2025).

(emphasis added) Since then, a body of research has emerged that looks into needs analysis in the context of English language teaching. For example, in a survey-based study conducted with students from secondary schools the researchers explored learning needs and revealed that learners showed preference for activities of communicative nature rather than grammar-focused ones (Maftuna 2025). Higher levels of student engagement were found when instructional approaches matched students' preferences, suggested the study. Likewise, a third study utilized mixed methodologies with the use of questionnaires and interviews to obtain both student and teacher perspectives on (the learning of) English (Fang, 2025). Its findings showed discrepancies between what teachers planned and needed students to do, especially in terms of skills emphasized or instruction strategies employed. These findings suggest that curriculum implementation requires the inclusion of poly-views (Rahman et al., 2024).

Another study involved classroom observations that helped researchers examine how English curricula were implemented in practice. In contrast, while the curriculum claimed to promote communicative competence, the actual teaching approach was mostly teacher-centered and did not promote active use of language (Muchie et al., 2025). This implies that treadmill (structural, contextual) constraints limit the aspiration of curricular goals.) Conversely, one study on English teachers'

technology integration showed that students exhibited increased motivation and engagement during digital-based learning activities (Celeste & Osias, 24). The results underscore the need for educational institutions to consider modern students' learning preferences.

Moreover, vocabulary knowledge has also been viewed as one of the main sources of obstacle for junior high school learners to reach a higher proficiency level (Muthusamy et al., 2025). Many of these studies used experimental or quasi-experimental designs and found that explicit teaching of vocabulary significantly increases comprehension and speaking ability. However, these studies mostly address specific components of language learning rather than addressing the overall details regarding learners' needs within a particular curricular context (Dhuli & Guduru, 2025).

Collectively, existing studies suggest that students' needs, teacher practices and curriculum expectations are the three key factors in English language learning. Existing research indicates that interactive and communicative approaches are generally favored by students, that gaps commonly exist between teaching methods and learning needs, and that vocabulary and speaking skills continue to be major problems (Feng, 2025). But these studies generally look at this factor in isolation rather than together. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to specific local contexts, particularly in Indonesian junior high schools where cultural, institutional and resource-related factors may envisage the implementation of curriculum (Nabilah & Suyanto 2025).

While these contributions advance our knowledge of cohabitation, several gaps still remain. First, there are few integrated studies that explore students' target needs, learning needs, teacher perspectives and actual classroom practices in an all-encompassing manner. Second, a significant number of studies only use one data source (e.g., questionnaires) which are often unable to portray the complexities present in classrooms (Buacokrung et al., 2025). Third, there is a lack of contextualized research on the link between needs analysis and curriculum alignment at particular schools. It is relevant to fore all these gaps because a full-spectrum understanding of these parameters would lead to better instructional design and policy implementation (Yusof & Sulaiman, 2024).

Hence, this study investigates how the English curriculum of an Indonesian junior high school aligns with students' needs. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What are students' target needs and learning needs in English learning? (2) How does the teacher understand and respond to students' needs, while enacting the curriculum in practice? (3) To what degree does the present English curriculum match students' needs? Answering these questions enables the study to take a complete lens on English learning in the context of an actual classroom.

In accomplishing these objectives, the study uses a descriptive qualitative design, employing data from student questionnaires, teacher interviews and classroom observations. This triangulated approach enables a cross-story analysis of

perceived and actual learning conditions. The findings are anticipated to demonstrate the disparity between students' required skills and their application in the curriculum, especially for vocabulary mastery practice, speaking tasks, and preferred learning activities (Aydan & Sarıdemir, 2025). It also predicts that students will strongly prefer interactive, technology-supported learning environments.

The added value of this study was its holistic view of needs analysis, as in aggregate the use of three different data sources provided for a more nuanced understanding of English learning within a particular local context. The results are likely to provide practical implications for teachers in enabling them to plan more responsive and engaging instruction, as well as for curriculum developers ensuring that institutionalized learning is relevant to learners' lives. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the literature on needs analysis as it illustrates that for meaningful interventions to take place, there needs to be consistent alignment between learner needs and teaching practices, as well as curriculum goals which ultimately lead toward more productive and learner-oriented second language education.

Method
1. Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the congruence between students' learning needs and the English curriculum in a junior high school context using a descriptive qualitative design. This design was chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of students' target needs (needs, wants, and lacks), learning needs (preferred activities and learning situations) as well as the teacher's perspectives on curriculum implementation (Putri et al., 2023). Operationalization of these constructs: necessities were defined as (1) skills that need to be learned in order for students to meet the demands of the curriculum, lacks referred to (2) gaps between current and desired levels of English proficiency, while wants described (3) students' preferences for how they would like to learn English.

This study also analysed classroom practices as representations of curriculum enactment (Cano et al., 2023). In order to enhance the comprehensiveness and credibility of findings (Anteneh & Anshu, 2024), a triangulation approach by consolidating data from questionnaires, interviewees as well as observation in the classroom was applied.

2. Participants / Sample

The researcher conducted the research in SMPN 1 Palopo. The participants were one English teacher and one class of junior high school students (n ≈ 30–35). Participants were purposefully sampled who were salient in English learning and teaching processes. The inclusion criteria for students were active registration in the chosen course as well as regular attendance during the data collection period (Tasneem, 2022). The participant teacher was selected based on the fact that he is responsible for teaching English in the observed class. The setting is a typical

Indonesian public junior high school where English is taught as an obligatory subject.

3. Instruments / Materials
3.1 Questionnaire
A face-to-face questionnaire was used to classify the potential target and learning needs of students (Kresin et al., 2024, p. 765). The instrument included four key areas: needs, gaps, desires, and preferred learning activities. Other items were presented in a mixed Likert-scale and multiple-choice format. The questionnaire was adapted from established needs analysis frameworks (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2024) and content validity reviewed. Frequency counts and percentages were used to score responses.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interview
An interview guide semi-structured for the English teacher was created to discuss teaching practices, perceived student needs, challenges related to teaching and curriculum implementation. The semi-structured format afforded that flexibility while providing consistency (Chen et al., p. 43).

3.3 Classroom Observation
A structured observation checklist was used to observe teaching methods, student engagement, interaction patterns and the use of learning media in the classroom. The observation itself was non-participant so as to not disrupt and in the spirit of capturing real classroom practices.

4. Procedure / Data Collection
After establishing a timeline, data is collected in order. In the first instance, we gained formal permission from the school administration. Secondly, the student questionnaire was administered in class and students received instructions on how to fill out the survey. Questionnaires were collected as soon as they were completed. Third, we used a semi-structured interview for the English teacher where recorded audio was utilized for accuracy. 4th, Classroom observations were performed through the normal English classes to record real teaching and learning processes (Muchie et al., 2025, p. 6). Field notes were made to complement the observation checklist when observations of the children in the ECCDs. All data were processed and prepared for analyses immediately upon collection.

5. Data Analysis
Using simple descriptive statistics, data were analysed with a qualitative descriptive approach. A description of students' responses was obtained from questionnaire data by computing frequencies and percentages (Benavides et al., 2023). We derived verbatim transcripts from the recordings of the interviews, which were then examined by means of thematic coding activities outlining data reduction, categorization and interpretation (Nguyen & Habók, 2022). Recurring patterns in teaching practices, as well as student engagement, were extracted from observation data.

The results of the questionnaire, interview and observation was triangulated simultaneously to find out whether they were consistent or not in order to authenticate interpretations. There was no statistical inference testing as the study was aimed at descriptive exploration (Hakim & Muliyah, 2025).

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations Ethical procedures were rigorously adhered to within the study. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the school administrations. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and their voluntary participation. Teacher and students were informed about the purpose of data collection with a consent form. Participants' identities were not revealed in any part of the research report to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. All data were used for research purposes only and stored securely.

Results

1. Students' Target Needs and Learning Needs

From the questionnaire results, it can be concluded that students at SMPN 1 Palopo have a different level of English learning needs in terms of necessities, lacks and wants as well as preferred activities. As far as a necessity, almost all students do require basic English skills such as vocabulary and elementary speaking ability for classroom learning. Students noted that learning common words and expressing simple concepts were the most important goals.

When it comes to lacks, the data show that students are currently rated at a basic proficiency level. Among the common challenges reported by students: a low command of vocabulary and reluctance to speak in English. Many students also stated that they do not know how to frame their sentences or speak during oral activity in the classroom.

Aspect	Percentage
Vocabulary Necessity	82
Speaking Necessity	76
Vocabulary Lack	78
Speaking Confidence Lack	72
Interactive Preference	88
Digital Media Preference	81
Collaborative Learning	79
Lecture Preference (Low)	34

Table 1. Summary of Strengths, Identified Issues, and Suggested Improvements

The table shows how the students' needs are distributed in all aspects of the learning needs and target needs of English. It also emphasizes the view that vocabulary (82%) and speaking (76%) are requirements. At the same time, we are seeing significant learning gaps, especially in vocabulary mastery (78%) and speaking confidence (72%). Also, Students have a stronger preference for interactive learning activities (88%) and integration of digital media content into assessments (81%), confirming that our learning has shifted towards more engaging and supported methods.

Collaborative learning has also emerged as a popular choice (79%), whereas traditional, lecture-based methods are less preferred overall (34%). Most striking from the table is that there is a clear pattern emerging, i.e. high learning demand coupled with low achievement and high preference for active learning environments. In regards to desires, students indicate attempting different types of learning activities and they prefer active, engaging experiences. Games, group discussions and digital media activity are the most selected options. In addition, many students expressed a preference for learning environments where they can be active participants rather than passive listeners.
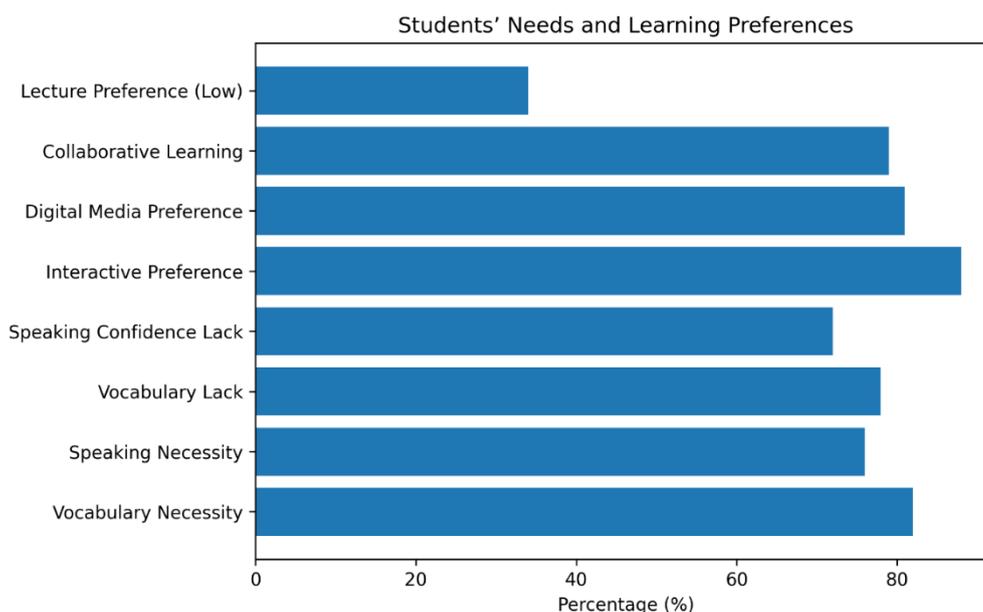

Figure 1. Students' needs and Learning Preferences

Because answers to each of those questions were categorical, we produced a horizontal bar chart comparing students' learning needs and preferences. Interactive learning activities is undoubtedly the most preferred, seconded by digital media and collaborative learning as it clearly reveals. In contrast, though, lecture-based learning seems much less preferred. The chart also shows that vocabulary and speaking both need to be mastered, and they are the areas students most frequently struggle with.

This dual pattern suggests a high need for improvement in instruction in these areas. This visual contrast between high preferences and existing learning challenges highlights the gap between students' optimal outcome expectations versus the actual opportunities available within existing classroom environments.

Learners' notational preferences for communicating findings: The results indicate students prefer communicative and technology-supported orientations to learning. Using multimedia tools, visual aids, and collaborative work were consistently rated as more successful than traditional lecture-based methods.
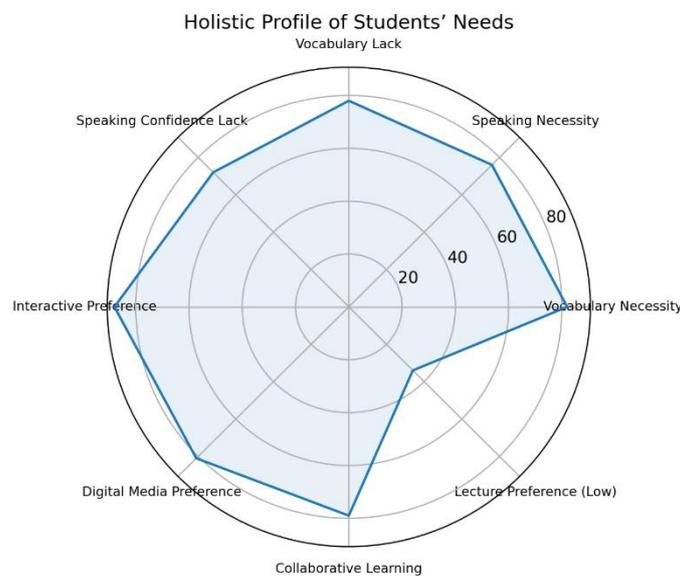

Figure 2. Radar Chart of Students' Target Needs and Learning Preferences

The radar chart provides a broad and multidimensional view of students' needs and learning preferences. These disparities are visually represented in the below chart, where one can see peaks for interactive learning and digital media preferences. But the chart also offers significant gaps in vocabulary mastery and speaking confidence, areas of urgent pedagogical need. The somewhat lower score assigned to lecturing highlights an opposing extreme, which merely reinforces students' preference for more participative modes of learning. The imperfections of the radar chart further mirror the aspects where needs and practices do not fit together, offering a whole reflection of misalignment in English learning.

2. Teacher's Perspectives on Students' Needs and Curriculum Implementation

We will discuss students' needs, their classroom experience based on the semi-structured interview, and general practices regarding the use of technologies through a series of key points established with an English teacher. According to the

teacher, students have limited English ability in general, especially vocabulary and speaking. The teacher reported that students need many re-explanations and supports in order to know the content from lessons.

The teacher said that lessons are driven by the current curriculum, focusing on basic skills. Nevertheless, the teacher acknowledged challenges in fully realizing communicative approaches because of time constraints and unequal student abilities as well as limited classroom resources.

Though the teacher recognizes the need for interactive activities, they are not used successfully in all lessons. The use of technology was qualified as sporadic, not routine, depending much on available facilities and classroom set-up.

3. Classroom Practices Observed

Evidence from classroom observation data indicates that teaching practices are characteristically teacher-centered, with the teacher driving most of the activities in the classroom. Instruction typically consisted of explanations of materials, then individual or written exercises. Students participated in lessons at a very low level of engagement, just a handful actually spoke.

In most of the observed lessons, interaction patterns were primarily unidirectional from teacher to students, with little possibility for peer interaction or collaborative learning. Instructional media was sparingly utilized, and technology integration during sessions was not uniform throughout.

Students seemed more involved when interactive features were added during the sessions (questions and answers or short group work), which provided only a few short moments.

4. Alignment Between Students' Needs and Curriculum Implementation

The triangulation of questionnaire, interview, and observational data reveals trends associated with students needs relative to what is implemented in the classroom. The questionnaire data identified students' preferences for active, interactive, communicative and technology-supported learning activities. In contrast, classroom observations suggested more teacher explanation and individual tasks than had been planned.

The teacher's responses show an awareness of students' needs, especially around vocabulary development and speaking practice. However, observational data suggested that the delivery of such practices in the classroom was not consistently implemented. Overall, the results indicate both alignment and mismatch of data sources in instructional strategies, student engagement, and learning media.

Discussion

This study investigated alignment between the learning needs of students and the way in which English was implemented through a junior high school curriculum (Muslimin & Khan, 2024). Students need support in basic language skills, especially vocabulary and speaking, and show strong preferences for interactive, communicative, technology-supported learning. Simultaneously, classroom practices were found to remain primarily dominated by the teachers (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2024), while opportunities for active use of the language were limited.

The teacher showed awareness of students' needs; but that awareness did not play out in instructional practice on a consistent basis. In general, the results suggest that students' needs and curriculum implementation are somewhat misaligned, as well as that teaching strategies and classroom engagement haven't been properly aligned with students need (Kurejšepi et al., 2025).

With respect to the research questions one stands out, the first question on students' target and learning needs is clearly validated as both a need for communicative language with little passive learning and a desire for a more active forum. The second question related to the teacher is also supported, as the teacher recognized their student's low level of competence and that interactive teaching should be emphasized even more (Pomat et al., 2024). But the last alignment question shows only partial consensus, as students' preference was found to differ from actual practices in their classrooms. These results indicate that, although the curriculum may accommodate student-centered learning on a conceptual level, its translation into practice in the classroom is still limited (Wiklund-Engblom et al., 2025).

The discussed trends can be perceived in accordance to the needs analysis theory and communicative language teaching (CLT) frameworks. As a Component of Addie ModelNeeds analysis targets: instructional design with learners' needs, deficiencies and desires for effective learning (Mansor et al., 2024) Participants' deficiencies in vocabulary and speaking, as well as their affinity for interactive activities exercise, mirror the disparities of current proficiency and what is prescribed by the curriculum; such principles are corroborated with CLT tenets that emphasize authentic communication and instructor-learner participation.

Contextual constraints including time, excessive class sizes, and insufficient resources (Gao & Karanasiou, 2024, p. 8) may explain the prevalence of teacher-centered practices despite awareness of these needs. As a result, teachers often resort to more controlled and manageable instructional strategies, even when they know the benefits of interactive approaches.

The results are in line with previous studies that have pointed to mismatches between what is aimed for in curriculum and what actually happens in practice. For instance, a previous study argued that communicative competence was potentially over-represented in the syllabus but underrepresented within classroom delivery where grammar and teacher explanation predominate (Dennehy et al., 2025, p. 18).

Likewise, previous studies related to student preferences demonstrated that as learners, we prefer working on interactive and collaborative tasks which enhances motivation and engagement (Suherman & Vidákovich, 2025). Through applying the present study does support these results because students can prefer both communicative and technology supported learning environments.

But the results also show some differences from earlier work. Although there are studies on technology integration that show the use of digital tools in English classrooms (Yousofi et al., 2025), its findings revealed limited and inconsistent use of technology. Such disparity could be due to educational disparities in terms of school infrastructure, access to digital resources or even teacher training. Moreover, although several studies have explored and demonstrated that teachers positively adjust their behavior in relation to student need (see for instance: D'Elia et al. 2025).

Theoretically, this study adds to the literature by demonstrating how needs analysis must be complemented with a system of curriculum implementation (Vreuls et al., 2023). This builds on the current knowledge by showing that it is not only based on the way curricula are designed but how they come into realization in practice, through what happens in classrooms (Yusof & Sulaiman, 2024, p. 1010). The study provides some descriptions about how teachers always adjust their teaching practice according to the dynamic nature these three components from language learning perspectives, and emphasizes the need for sensitivity and responsiveness poor effective language teaching.

More practically, the findings provide actionable steps educators and policymakers can take. This supporting evidence laments that teachers need to include more interactive and communicative activities, including group discussion, role plays, and technology-enhanced learning to cater for students' preferences and foster active language use (Ngamsom & Huttayavilaiphan, 2025, p. 279). There should also be a stronger focus on vocabulary development and speaking practice to help target identified learning gaps.

The implications for curriculum developers are that we need to offer clearer guidelines and support for implementing student-centered approaches (Angraeni et al., 2024, p. 223). Teachers may also need to receive professional development programs giving them the skills and resources necessary to effectively integrate interactive percentage of technology-based methods.

Limitations

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, this study was limited to a single school context therefore the findings are not generalizable across settings. Secondly, the small size of participants naturally comes with a common practice where there wasn't only one teacher involved in this study. Third, the results are based on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response bias and students may answer in accordance with social desirability. Fourth, the observed lessons were limited to a small number of classroom sessions that may not reflect over time the full spectrum of instructional

practices. Lastly, the qualitative design does enable in-depth insight diving but it limits statistical generalization or effect size measurements.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should overcome these limitations by using larger and more representative samples across schools and regions to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal designs could be used to study how the fit between students and curriculum changes over time. Furthermore, mixed-methods designs that integrate perspectives from both qualitative and quantitative data could offer more nuanced insights into the interplay between needs analysis and learning outcomes. Future studies could usefully address which specific intervention types (for example, integrating technology into instruction or implementing vocabulary initiatives, etc.) enhance alignment and student achievement more than others." Researching educators' professional learning and school support systems could augment this understanding of how curriculum enacted.

Conclusion of the Discussion

This study sheds light on curriculum implementation in English language education and stresses the need to reconcile students' learning needs with the actual enacted curriculum. The current curriculum emphasizes communicative as well as student-centered activities, but the results also suggest classroom practices are not always fully aligned with those objectives. By linking the needs of students to actual instructional practices, this study provides valuable insights into improving teaching and curriculum. In the end, an alignment that reflects the needs of learners and teaching practices with curriculum expectations will help promote more meaningful English learning opportunities.

Conclusion

This research explored on the convergence of students learning needs and implementation of English curriculum in an Indonesian junior high school. It sought to identify students' target and learning needs, examine the teacher's lens, and analyze how well classroom practices align with these needs.

The results show 3 important things. The first, students show minimal proficiency in English with particular difficulties displayed in mastering vocabulary and speaking confidently. Second, students indicated significant preferences for active learning activity types that involve interaction and communication, supported by technology. Third, the clear awareness of students' needs and the realization of engaging instructional strategies on part of the teacher is maintained. Fourth, classroom practices are still largely teacher-centered and active student engagement with the learning topic is minimal. Finally, there tends to be a partial alignment of students' needs and curriculum implementation, as evident by gaps between instructional practices and learning experiences.

As such, the study makes theoretical and practical contributions regarding the critical importance of needs analysis for curriculum implementation. It illustrates that sound design is not enough to ensure effective English teaching; classroom practices must also adapt to learners' real needs. In practice, the findings imply that teachers ought to place a greater emphasis on vocabulary development, create more opportunities for speaking practice, and incorporate learning activities that are interactive and enhanced by technology. Policymakers and curriculum developers are urged to give the teachers more support and better clarification of how student-centred approaches could be used in the classroom environment.

Further studies with larger samples from more schools and contexts, using mixed-methods approaches, are needed to assess how certain pedagogical implementations can help align needs of students with those of curriculum implementation.

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