



Contrasting English Pedagogies in Indonesian and Thai Private Schools: A Comparative Literature Review

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Abstract

English has become a crucial language in Southeast Asia, particularly in the context of ASEAN integration, where communication, education, and regional cooperation heavily rely on English proficiency. This study aims to compare English teaching approaches in private upper secondary schools in Indonesia and Thailand, an area of comparison that remains underexplored. The research employs a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA protocol, selecting 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2024 from Scopus, Google Scholar, and ThaiJo databases. A qualitative thematic analysis and basic quantitative mapping were used to identify trends and divergences across the two countries. The findings reveal similarities in the widespread adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), with a mutual emphasis on learner-centered and communication-oriented pedagogies. However, the review also reveals significant differences in the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), teacher training systems, and the extent of national policy implementation. Deeper challenges include a mismatch between curriculum policies and classroom realities, a lack of teaching resources, and uneven teacher readiness. The novelty of this article lies in its comparative ASEAN-focused lens and its integration of CEFR-based instructional analysis. The implications are substantial for curriculum designers, policymakers, and educators, particularly in enhancing regional collaboration, promoting continuous professional development, and integrating technology to improve the quality of English language teaching across Southeast Asia.

Keywords: English language teaching; Private secondary schools; Comparative study; Systematic review; CEFR.

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INTRODUCTION

English has become a globalized lingua franca for education, economic collaboration, and international movement, particularly in the context of ASEAN integration (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Within the Southeast Asian context, Indonesia and Thailand strongly consider English proficiency as a marker of competitiveness and a prerequisite for international integration; therefore, English is taught as a primary subject in private senior secondary schools (Richards, 2015).

Both countries, however, continue to share the challenges that recurrent English education problems pose. Some of the challenges these countries face include variable implementation of the curriculum, multiple teacher-student ratios, limited teaching materials, and low student motivation due to a focus on rote learning (exam passing) in schools (Saputro & Hima, 2021; Jiraporn et al., 2024). Rural schools face a chronic shortage of teachers trained in communicative and task-based methodologies (Binwang et al., 2021). Learners, however, face exam-oriented systems of education, which, along with these persistent issues, inhibit the attainment of communicative competence.

Numerous studies have explored English teaching in Indonesia and Thailand individually. For instance, Sabaruddin and Melati (2022) emphasize how Indonesia's 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) promotes the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) to enhance students' text production skills. Meanwhile, Thai researchers, such as Jiraporn et al. (2024), emphasize the integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum, which enables greater teacher autonomy in lesson planning. However, most of these studies are country-specific and focus narrowly on curriculum or methodology within a single context.

Critically, few comparative studies have been conducted that examine how different pedagogical approaches operate across similar socio-cultural and policy environments. While both countries share characteristics such as centralized curriculum design, multilingual societies, and a growing reliance on the CEFR as a reference, their approaches to English teaching diverge in both theory and practice. However, a systematic comparison of these approaches, especially in the context of private secondary schools, remains underexplored. This research gap is particularly relevant as ASEAN nations increasingly seek to align their language education policies and teacher training programs.

Research Problem and Purpose

Given the lack of comparative research and the recurring pedagogical challenges in both countries, this study aims to analyse and compare English teaching approaches in private senior high schools in Indonesia and Thailand. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2024, sourced from Scopus, Google Scholar, and ThaiJo, this study explores three main themes: curriculum design, instructional strategies, and classroom challenges. The analysis is guided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and informed by three major teaching approaches: CLT, TBLT, and GBA.

Contribution and Significance

By synthesizing insights from both countries, the study not only highlights pedagogical similarities and differences but also uncovers practical challenges and offers evidence-based recommendations for cross-border teacher development and policy alignment. The findings aim to support educational stakeholders in designing more context-sensitive, communicative, and competency-oriented English instruction throughout Southeast Asia.

Literature Review

English Curriculum Development

Both Thailand and Indonesia have reformed their secondary-level English curricula to emphasize communicative competence. Thailand implements the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008, which focuses on real-life language use and promotes learner-centered instruction. Similarly, Indonesia employs

the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013 or K13), which shares similar features by integrating the four language skills alongside character education and desirable learner traits.

Although both countries aim to align students' language proficiency with CEFR levels B1–B2, challenges persist in actual implementation. These include limited teaching resources, insufficient teacher preparedness, and a lack of deep understanding of learner-centered pedagogy at the school level.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely adopted in private schools in both countries, particularly those with sufficient resources and qualified staff. Among the 20 articles reviewed, 55% reported the active use of CLT in classrooms. This approach emphasizes real-world interaction, purposeful communication, and active student participation. However, challenges remain: some teachers still misunderstand key principles of CLT, and some students lack the confidence or readiness to engage in authentic communicative tasks.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained increased attention in recent years, particularly in Thailand, where it aligns with experiential learning and the integration of life skills. Approximately 30% of the reviewed studies mentioned TBLT, highlighting its use in designing learning tasks based on real-world scenarios such as tourism simulations, brochure design, or mock business activities. This approach supports the development of language skills in conjunction with teamwork, planning, and critical thinking. However, implementing TBLT still faces challenges, such as limited classroom time and the difficulty of appropriately assessing task outcomes.

Genre-Based Approach (GBA)

Although the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) is not yet widely implemented, approximately 15% of studies, mainly from Indonesia, discuss its integration, particularly in writing instruction. GBA focuses on developing genre awareness and understanding the structure of various text types, such as reports, news articles, and opinion pieces. Research suggests that GBA helps learners apply language appropriately in social contexts. However, effective implementation requires more in-depth knowledge of teachers and sustained professional development through hands-on training.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been increasingly adopted as a benchmark for setting learning goals and evaluating learners' language proficiency, especially in urban private schools. These schools often target B1–B2 levels as the expected English proficiency, where students should be able to write emails, express opinions on familiar topics, and engage in everyday conversations. However, CEFR-based instruction remains limited in rural areas, and many schools still lack appropriate assessment tools aligned with CEFR descriptors.

RESEARCH METHODS

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of English teaching approaches in private senior high schools in Indonesia and Thailand.

Data Collection

Primary data for this research were obtained through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). A total of 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2024 were selected. These articles were retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, SINTA, and ThaiJo, to ensure coverage of relevant sources from both countries.

Inclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and academic quality of the selected literature, articles were screened based on the following inclusion criteria: the study focuses on English language teaching in private senior high schools in either Indonesia or Thailand, and was published between 2018 and 2024. Clearly presents the use of one or more recognized English teaching approaches: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), or the Genre-Based Approach (GBA). The article must be peer-reviewed and published in a recognized academic journal.

Article Selection Procedure (PRISMA Framework)

The selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), ensuring transparency and replicability. The steps are outlined as follows:

Table 1 Article Selection Procedure	
Selection Step	Number of Articles
Total records identified	87 articles
Duplicates removed	12 articles
Excluded after title/abstract screening	35 articles
Excluded after full-text reading	20 articles
Final articles included for complete analysis	20 articles

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: A frequency count was conducted to determine the distribution of the teaching approaches (CLT, TBLT, and GBA) used in the selected studies. The findings are presented in the form of a pie chart to visualize the relative popularity of each approach. Qualitative Analysis: Thematic content analysis was performed using thematic coding to extract key themes across the literature. These themes include instructional strengths and weaknesses, classroom challenges, and the contextual adaptation of teaching methods within each country’s private education system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analysed 20 selected articles, highlighting the similarities and differences in English teaching approaches in private secondary schools in Indonesia and Thailand, including shared challenges and practical recommendations.

Distribution of Teaching Approaches

A quantitative analysis reveals the distribution of teaching methods as follows: CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), 9 articles; TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching), 7 articles; and GBA (Genre-Based Approach), 4 articles.

Use of English as the medium of instruction: Both countries emphasize the use of English as the primary language of instruction to enhance students’ speaking and listening skills. Learner-centered focus: Teaching methods in both contexts prioritize student engagement through group work, role-playing, and problem-solving. Practical learning activities: Teachers in both countries use creative and hands-on tasks such as presentations, creative writing, and real-life simulations

Table 2. Differences in ELT Practices Between Indonesia and Thailand		
Aspect	Indonesia	Thailand
Main approach	Integrated GBA and TBLT	Dominant use of CLT and TBLT
Content development	Aligned with local context and CEFR framework	Focused mainly on speaking activities

Aspect	Indonesia	Thailand
The teacher's role	Acts as both a facilitator and a language model	Serves as a learning guide, giving more learner autonomy
Assessment methods	Integrative assessment and outcome reflection	Clear rubrics with a focus on individual feedback

Common Challenges

Teachers' proficiency: Some teachers lack in-depth knowledge of CLT, TBLT, and GBA approaches. Large class sizes: These hinder the effective implementation of communicative and group activities. Learning material development: There is a lack of resources aligned with CEFR levels and contextual needs. Institutional/government support: Insufficient in terms of training, time allocation, and instructional resources.

Practical Recommendations

Develop in-depth teacher training programs focused on CLT, TBLT, and GBA. Provide instructional materials that are aligned with the CEFR and local contexts. Integrate educational technology to manage large classrooms more effectively. Promote blended assessment using rubrics, portfolios, and formative feedback.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study has revealed both similarities and differences in English teaching approaches in private secondary schools in Indonesia and Thailand. Both countries have incorporated the CEFR framework and communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches into their national education policies. However, differences remain in teacher training, resource availability, and the level of policy implementation.

Key challenges faced by teachers include limited resources, insufficient English proficiency, and differences in learning environments. On the other hand, enabling factors include national policy support, professional development exchanges, and the adoption of learner-centered pedagogies.

Promoting continuous professional development for English teachers. Developing flexible teaching content and materials tailored to learners' contexts. Encouraging regional collaboration in English education under the ASEAN framework

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