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# Curriculum as Compliance, Not Competence: Epistemic Fragmentation in Indonesia's Underserved Schools

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**ABSTRACT**
This study examines how curriculum implementation in Indonesia's underserved frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged (3T) schools is shaped more by compliance with centralized mandates than by the development of pedagogical competence. Drawing on curriculum studies and epistemic justice perspectives, this condition is conceptualized as epistemic fragmentation, in which teachers are positioned as procedural implementers rather than as epistemic agents. Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with national-level education experts and senior teachers working in 3T regions. Data were analyzed using thematic coding, supported by NVivo, to examine the epistemic, affective, and instructional dimensions of curriculum enactment. The findings show that rigid curricular standardization, assessment-driven accountability, and credential-oriented policy logics marginalize local knowledge and contextual pedagogical judgment. Rather than strengthening instructional capacity, curriculum compliance fosters adaptive practices that prioritize administrative compliance over meaningful learning. This condition weakens teacher agency and undermines curriculum coherence in structurally constrained contexts. This article contributes to curriculum studies by highlighting the unintended consequences of compliance-oriented governance and by advancing a context-sensitive understanding of curriculum reform in marginalized education systems.

**KEYWORDS**
Epistemic; affective; conative; deep learning; educational equity.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia faces a growing tension between national curricular aspirations and classroom realities. Recent reforms emphasize Deep Learning, higher-order thinking, and labor market readiness (Fitrah et al., 2025). Deep Learning promotes conceptual understanding, knowledge transfer, and engagement with complex problems (Sliwka et al., 2024). However, schools rely heavily on memorization, test rehearsal, and content-driven instruction (Pamungkas et al., 2025). International assessments rank Indonesian students low in literacy and numeracy (Darmawan & Dharmapatni, 2024). BPS-Statistics Indonesia notes youth disengagement from schooling and work (Faizah et al., 2025). Classroom conditions fail to foster transferable competencies (Samala et al., 2024), and inequities are worsening in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions due to inadequate infrastructure, teacher preparation, and support (Fitrah et al., 2025; Samala et al., 2024).

Policy-level concerns portray curriculum documents as administrative burdens rather than instructional tools (Pamungkas et al., 2025). Lesson plans serve as formal submissions rather than learning guides. Remediation relies on repetitive worksheets that boost test scores without fostering conceptual gains (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025). Teachers face time poverty, scarce professional development, and limited industry exposure (Yoto et al., 2024). These factors disconnect school learning from workforce needs. Challenges extend beyond policy to teachers' interpretations, emotional responses, and daily decisions.

Research on Indonesian curriculum implementation has expanded, documenting structural barriers, policy shifts, and teacher competencies (Ishartono et al., 2024; Samala et al., 2024). Studies show that teachers struggle with Deep Learning and with linking objectives to engagement (Rosanawati et al., 2025). Pedagogical competence, learning communities, and school readiness prove essential (Ren et al., 2024). Remote-area research emphasizes resource, technological, and isolation barriers (Dwi Rosita Sari et al., 2024). Prior work focuses on structural factors, overlooking epistemic beliefs, emotional orientations, and volitional choices (Castellví, 2024; Kartal et al., 2024). This study integrates Epistemic, Affective, and Conative dimensions.

This study examines how policy experts and teachers conceptualize and enact curriculum goals across Epistemic, Affective, and Conative dimensions through interviews with three national experts (senior officials at the Ministry of Education and a UNESCO affiliate) and two remote-region teachers. Findings reveal policy-practice fragmentation affecting workforce competencies. Research questions address epistemic beliefs, affective influences, and volitional choices in underserved regions, developing an integrated EAC theoretical framework with implications for teacher development and equitable policy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum implementation in Indonesia is shaped by teachers', leaders', and policy actors' epistemic beliefs, emotional orientations, and volitional choices (Castellví, 2024; Kheir-Farraj &

Orland-Barak, 2025). Despite multiple reforms, challenges persist beyond structural or administrative factors (Ajani, 2024; Puspitasari, 2024). This chapter reviews four key areas of literature: curriculum interpretation and teacher literacy; Deep Learning and pedagogical reform; Epistemic, Affective, and Conative processes in teaching; and inequities in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions.

***Curriculum Interpretation and Teacher Curriculum Literacy***

Curriculum documents aim to guide instructional decisions, but teachers often view them as administrative burdens rather than frameworks for learning (Ross, 2024; Tran & O'Connor, 2024). In Indonesia, many interpret the curriculum as a set of content requirements rather than as tools for developing competencies or meaningful processes (Ramli et al., 2025; Ratri et al., 2025). Merdeka Curriculum implementation shows that teachers focus on content completion and assessments, narrow practice, and limit higher-order thinking (Kusumawati & Umam, 2025). Misunderstandings of terminology, outcomes, and pathways lead to inconsistencies in the classroom (Qolamani et al., 2026).

Recent empirical evidence also points to similar patterns of curriculum misinterpretation. Policy experts note misinterpretations, such as viewing lesson plans as supervisor documents rather than pedagogical tools (Ho et al., 2025). Teachers produce compliant plans, thereby widening the gap between planning and implementation (Darcie et al., 2025; Dwi Rosita Sari et al., 2024). These align with global views on curriculum literacy as key to reform success (Demirtaş & Karakış, 2025). Literate teachers interpret standards, choose pedagogies, and sequence learning effectively; without it, reforms fail in classrooms (Ross, 2024; Tran & O'Connor, 2024)

***Deep Learning and Pedagogical Reform***

Deep Learning is a key focus of global curriculum reform, emphasizing conceptual understanding, knowledge transfer, and engagement with real-world problems (Kovač et al., 2025; ; Palmer et al., 2023; Pietersen et al., 2023; Sliwka et al., 2024). In Indonesia, reforms are pushing Deep Learning to prepare students for future challenges (Fitrah et al., 2025; Kusumawati & Umam, 2025). However, teachers struggle to move from content transmission to Deep Learning practices (Puspitasari, 2024). Classrooms stick to procedural tasks that limit understanding.

Stott and Guthrie (2024) highlight pedagogical reductionism, which reduces learning to exercises and worksheets. Remediation copies test questions, faking progress without mastery (Valcea et al., 2024). Teachers confuse joyful learning with superficial activities rather than with deep cognitive or emotional involvement (Camfield, 2025). Deep Learning requires meaningful tasks, collaboration, and reflection (Kovač et al., 2025), but also demands teacher confidence, design skills, and time. Time poverty and admin load push reversion to basics (Zhou et al., 2025), worse in unsupported schools.

***Epistemic, Affective, and Conative Processes in Teaching and Learning***

Teaching involves cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions beyond technical skills. Research on teacher cognition shows that epistemic beliefs about knowledge, learning, and intelligence guide instructional choices (Soysal, 2025). Fixed mindsets, deficit views of students, and rigid assumptions about learning hinder the adoption of conceptual, student-centered methods (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). Growth-oriented beliefs foster experimentation, reflection, and learner responsiveness (Kartal et al., 2024).

To date, relatively few studies have integrated the Epistemic, Affective, and Conative dimensions as an interrelated system that shapes curriculum decisions (Dominguez Romero & Bobkina, 2026; Romero & Bobkina, 2024). Prior work examines them separately, limiting insight into their interactions and curriculum enactment (Romero & Bobkina, 2024). A holistic framework is needed to explain psychological intersections in practice.

Affective processes critically influence teaching (AlTwijri & Alghizzi, 2024). Emotions shape responses to student struggles, interpretations of roles, and experiences with policy (Kheir-Farraj & Orland-Barak, 2025). Moral purpose, empathy, and investment sustain effectiveness (Jelovac, 2025). Affective orientations range from moral alarm to detachment and resignation (Fitrah et al., 2025; Ho et al., 2025). Some teachers feel isolated or overwhelmed, disconnected from students' futures (Smala et al., 2025), while some attitudes focus on hope, commitment, and positive understanding to foster deeper engagement with knowledge.

Conation involves volition, intention, and agency (Ye & Cao, 2025). Agency drives reform through deliberate action, goal-setting, and alignment with educational aims (Cong-Lem, 2024). Volitional factors such as planning, collaboration, and industry engagement determine the realization of the curriculum (Seiberling & Kauffeld, 2025). Orientations include bridging, intentionality, compliance, and moral agency (Muñoz-Losa et al., 2025). Strong volition spurs innovation and reflection; compliance yields superficial routines (Sesoane et al., 2025).

These processes often play a more decisive role than structural factors in shaping curriculum enactment. Their interplay forms the Integrated EAC Model, thereby addressing a key research gap (Dominguez Romero & Bobkina, 2026; Ye & Cao, 2025).

***Educational Inequity and Implementation Challenges in Underserved Regions***

Educational inequality persists in Indonesia, particularly in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions. These areas face limited teaching resources, poor connectivity, inadequate teacher development, and high teacher turnover. Schools struggle with national reforms due to infrastructure limits and weak support (Dwi Rosita Sari et al., 2024; Fitrah et al., 2025). Teachers endure time pressures and lack collaboration and ongoing learning opportunities.

Teachers in underserved regions report challenges with materials preparation, time management, and the implementation of advanced models such as cooperative or problem-based learning (Ngwenya, 2025; Rodrigues et al., 2025; Yan & Dai, 2025). They face emotional strain due to the diverse levels of student readiness. These experiences stress context-specific

curriculum enactment over uniform application. Rural and remote education research underscores the importance of teacher agency and community involvement for equity. Local practices, sustained support, and flexible curriculum approaches are vital for better outcomes in underserved areas.

***Synthesis and Theoretical Positioning***

Curriculum reform cannot succeed through structural or procedural requirements alone (Dalseg et al., 2024). Its effectiveness depends on teachers' understanding of knowledge, emotional engagement with learners, and agency in instructional design (Dalseg et al., 2024). Existing studies further show that Epistemic, Affective, and Conative processes intersect across policy reasoning and classroom practice (Tran & O'Connor, 2024).

Drawing on scholarship in curriculum literacy, deep learning, the psychological dimensions of teaching, and education in disadvantaged contexts, this study proposes the Integrated EAC Model as an analytical framework for explaining how curriculum intentions are interpreted, emotionally mediated, and enacted through teacher volition. The model provides an analytical perspective on how curriculum intentions are understood, emotionally influenced, and carried out through teacher choice.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative interpretive approach to explore how policy experts and teachers in Indonesia understand and enact curriculum intentions. It captures Epistemic, Affective, and Conative dimensions from interview data (Yanow, 2017). Curriculum enactment is framed as meaning-making through beliefs, emotions, and volitional decisions, rather than as mere procedure (Gordon et al., 2025). Qualitative design examines articulations of curriculum principles (Fossey et al., 2002) and emotional demands plus agency in institutional contexts.

***Research Design***

The study employs a qualitative interpretive research design to explore how individuals construct meaning around curriculum goals and classroom practices (Stake, 2010). This approach assumes that curriculum implementation stems from subjective interpretations and personal beliefs, rather than from policy documents alone (Annie Zeng, 2024). It suits the examination of the deep layers of cognition, emotion, and volition influencing teaching. The design enables rich insights into teachers' and policy experts' experiences, their views on reform purposes, and navigation of daily demands.

Guided by constructivist epistemology, knowledge is understood as socially and contextually produced (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study traces curriculum intentions from policy to practice through the perspectives of engaged participants. Purposeful sampling was used to select five information-rich participants: three national-level education experts and two senior teachers working in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged (3T) regions. The experts included senior officials and advisors affiliated with the Ministry of Education and an international organization, each with more than 15 years of experience in curriculum policy,

reform design, and teacher development. The teacher participants had more than 10 years of classroom experience in remote public schools and were actively involved in implementing the national curriculum under conditions of limited resources and infrastructure. Participants were selected for their direct engagement with curriculum policy or classroom enactment, ensuring depth of insight into both policy-level intentions and practice-level realities in underserved contexts. Their perspectives provide critical insight into interpretive gaps and tensions between policy design and classroom enactment (Achinstein, 2002). Given the study's interpretive aims, this small, information-rich sample prioritizes depth and conceptual insight over statistical generalization. Although the sample size is limited, it aligns with qualitative interpretive research that prioritizes depth over breadth. The participants were selected as information-rich cases with direct experience in curriculum policy and practice, enabling in-depth exploration of complex Epistemic, Affective, and Conative processes. Therefore, the aim is not statistical generalization but analytical and theoretical insight.

Theory-building elements integrate in-depth interviews and NVivo coding to identify patterns in discussions of curriculum, teaching, and learning (Maher et al., 2018). These patterns underpin the Integrated EAC Model, synthesizing findings and interpretations into a multidimensional enactment framework.

***Data Collection Procedures***

Data collection comprises semi-structured interviews with five participants to explore interpretations of curriculum goals, implementation challenges, and the emotional and volitional demands of professional practice (Kallio et al., 2016; Rabionet, 2011). Interview questions prompted reflection on curriculum principles, lesson planning, student engagement, remediation, and responses to instructional or policy pressures (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018).

Interviews were conducted in private settings. Participants received information about the study's purpose and procedures, and informed consent was obtained for recording, transcription, and analysis (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Stuckey, 2014). The study adhered to established ethical research standards, with procedures designed to protect participants' autonomy, confidentiality, and well-being. Audio recordings ensured accuracy, and verbatim transcripts served as the primary dataset (Williamson et al., 2015).

Transcripts were imported into NVivo for systematic analysis (Dhakal, 2022). In vivo coding was applied to preserve participants' language, capturing expressions such as curriculum misunderstanding, emotional detachment, pedagogical reductionism, and volitional surrender. These codes informed broader Epistemic, Affective, and Conative themes. Iterative coding and close transcript review generated thematic clusters that informed the development of the conceptual model and grounded theoretical insights in participants' lived experiences (Allsop et al., 2022). To improve the trustworthiness of the analysis, the study used iterative coding, ongoing comparison, and careful transcript reviews to ensure consistent and in-depth interpretation. Analytical choices were recorded throughout to maintain transparency and rigor.

## FINDINGS

NVivo visualizations, beyond thematic coding, explored structural links among the epistemic, affective, conative, and integrative domains, thereby informing subsequent thematic explanations. Analysis of interviews with three experts and two senior teachers from frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions revealed five key themes that explain how the curriculum is intended, interpreted, and implemented in Indonesian schools: epistemic misalignment, emotional disengagement, constrained volition, emergent innovation, and emerging moral purpose. These themes illustrate how Epistemic, Affective, and Conative processes intersect in everyday decision-making.

A Matrix Coding Query in NVivo deepened analysis beyond treemap density (Rosen et al., 2023). It compared Integrated EAC Model domain expressions by policy experts and teachers, enabling structured cross-domain review and revealing distinct manifestations across groups.

**Table 1.**

*Matrix Coding Query*

| Informant Group | Cognition | Affection | Conation | Integration |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Policy Experts (n = 3) | 20 | 14 | 13 | 14 |
| Teachers (n = 2) | 5 | 2 | 9 | 1 |

Source: compiled by the authors

Table 1 shows distinct EAC domain patterns: cognition dominates policy experts' epistemic critiques; affection codes cluster among experts (moral alarm); conation is balanced across groups, with teachers emphasizing time constraints; integration emerges mainly from experts. These frame five themes, beginning with epistemic fragmentation.

**Table 2.**

*Cross-Informant Summary*

| Informant | Epistemic (Cognition) | Affective (Emotion) | Conative (Agency) | Integration |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| IF1 | Literacy gaps, need for innovation | Boredom, pressure | Collaboration, time poverty | Early-grade developmental fit |
| IF2 | Epistemic clarity, content overload | Limited affective themes | Teacher readiness, intentional reform | Ecological alignment |
| IF3 | Growth mindset, neuroplasticity, play-based epistemology | Hope, emotional harm | Guided play, purposeful scaffolding | Play as developmental design |
| IF4 | Collaboration as epistemic tool | Care, positive affect | Accountability, reflective routines | Collaborative learning pathways |
| IF5 | Misinterpretation, reductionism, literacy gaps | Moral alarm, detachment | Compliance vs intentional planning | Developmental continuity, coherence |

Source: compiled by the authors

Table 2 synthesizes cross-informant Epistemic, Affective, and Conative manifestations, followed by a consolidated thematic summary.

The analysis, synthesizing cross-informant patterns, shows that epistemic problems primarily hinder curriculum enactment. These include curriculum misconceptions, literacy deficits, and content overload, as summarized in Table 2. These issues are shaped by affective orientations ranging from moral alarm and hope to emotional detachment and pressure. Conative factors further determine how teachers act on their knowledge and emotions.

**Table 3.**

*Consolidated Themes Across Informants*

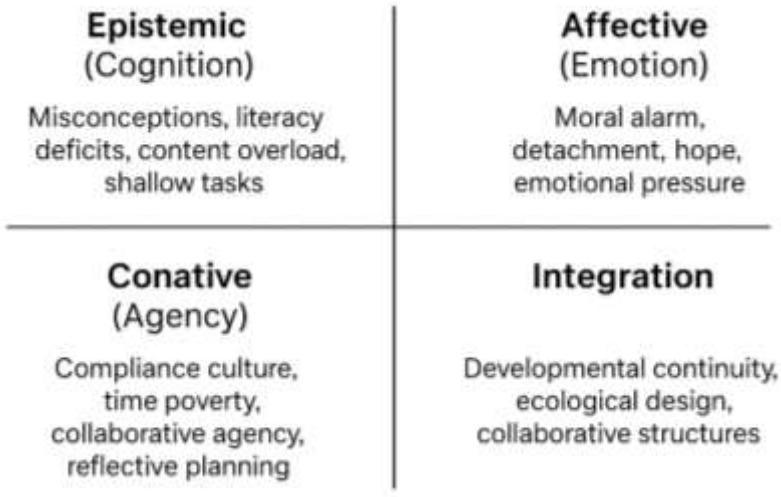
| Domain | Key Patterns |
|---|---|
| Epistemic | Misconceptions, literacy deficits, content overload, shallow tasks |
| Affective | Moral alarm, detachment, hope, emotional pressure |
| Conative | Compliance culture, time poverty, collaborative agency, reflective planning |
| Integration | Developmental continuity, ecological design, collaborative structures |

Source: compiled by the authors

As illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 1, some teachers demonstrate reflective and collaborative agency, but many are constrained by a lack of time and by routines focused on compliance. Integration across different areas is generally weak, occurring mainly when there is developmental continuity, ecological alignment, or collaborative frameworks in place. Overall, these observed patterns help connect to the thematic insights discussed below.

**Figure *1*.**

*Integrated EAC Model*



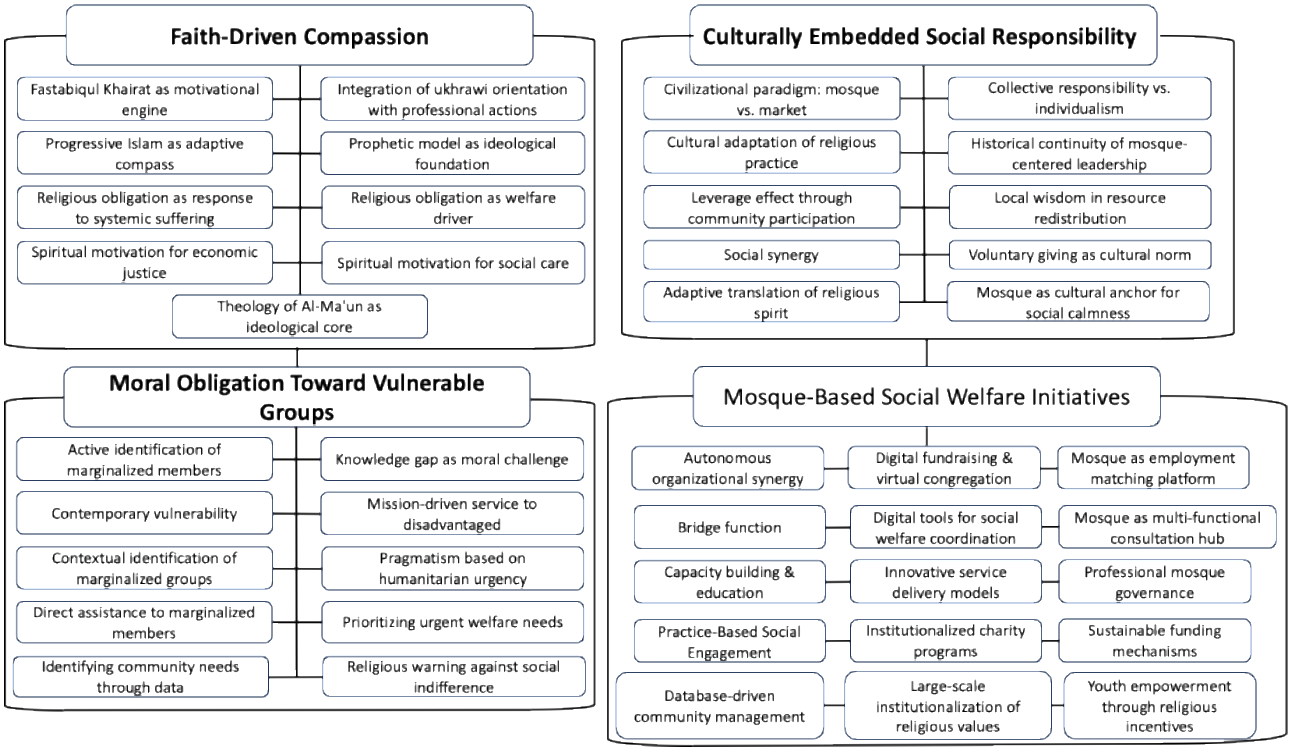

Source: compiled by the authors

The NVivo treemap (Figure 2) confirms the Integrated EAC Model, showing cognition as the most prominent narrative pattern—covering curriculum literacy deficits, misconceptions, reductionism, and fixed beliefs—thereby highlighting epistemic fragmentation as the main challenge in implementation. The second-ranked affective cluster captures moral alarm, fatigue,

boredom, and hope-driven motivation mediating pedagogical decisions. The size and coherence of affective processes position emotions as active forces that can reinforce misunderstandings or spur corrections, supporting EAC's view of emotional investment as essential for meaningful enactment.

**Figure 2.**

*The NVivo Treemap*




Source: compiled by the authors

The conative cluster covers a broad but scattered region in the treemap. Smaller nodes represent varied patterns of volitional agency, performative compliance, transparent intentionality, collaboration, and surrender of volition. This fragmentation reflects the volatility of volitional behavior in the data. Educators seek purposeful action, but structural factors such as time scarcity, role overload, and strict expectations lead to inconsistent agency. The treemap highlights conation as the 'activation dimension' of the Integrated EAC Model, translating epistemic understanding and emotional commitment into practice, though it remains highly context-sensitive.

The smaller integration cluster holds conceptual weight, linking ecologically embedded design, unquantifiable competencies, intentional pathways, and developmental alignment. It shows some participants envisioning cross-domain coherence with epistemic clarity, emotional purpose, and volitional strength. Its modest size signals emerging integrative thinking while supporting the development of a coherent moral and developmental framework for practice. Epistemic fragmentation dominates structurally, affective dynamics amplify or inhibit engagement, and conative processes actualize intent.

***Epistemic Fragmentation and Curriculum Misinterpretation***

A pervasive pattern among all participants is a persistent misunderstanding of curriculum principles. Informants frequently noted that many teachers equate the curriculum with teaching material rather than with a competency-based learning pathway. This misunderstanding produces a narrow view of instructional responsibility and reinforces practices that prioritize content delivery over conceptual development. One expert explained this misconception succinctly: "*Curriculum is not teaching material*." This highlights how foundational misunderstandings distort teachers' interpretations of their instructional responsibilities. Another added, "RPP is not merely an offering to the principal or to the supervisor." This underscores that lesson plans are often reduced to administrative submissions rather than used as pedagogical tools to structure meaningful learning. This administrative orientation turns lesson planning into a procedural ritual, weakening its role as a framework for intentional instruction.

Participants also described a widespread cycle of memorization, test rehearsal, and examination mistaken for cognitive development. Several experts observed that remediation practices often reproduce test questions. This creates an appearance of improvement without supporting genuine understanding. As one expert noted, "*Remediation consists of more test practice… seemingly indicating that the student is now thinking better, whereas in reality they are only memorizing answers*." These observations align with the NVivo codes related to pedagogical reductionism and epistemic illusion. Fixed mindset beliefs further intensify epistemic fragmentation. These frames student difficulty as a reflection of permanent ability rather than the result of ineffective instructional strategies. This belief weakens teacher agency and narrows opportunities for students to develop deeper competencies.

***Moral Disengagement and Affective Detachment***

The second theme concerns the affective dimension of teaching. Several informants noted that emotional disengagement has become common across schools. Teachers sometimes describe student outcomes as problems belonging to others. One expert recounted interactions with teachers who believed that students' employment prospects were not their responsibility. This expert quoted a teacher saying, "*I teach elementary school, my students will not get jobs; that is the Ministry's responsibility, not mine*." Such statements reveal affective distancing from long-term learner development. This attitude illustrates a form of moral disengagement.

Affective detachment also affects parents and communities. Instances were shared where students displayed genuine interest in learning, such as reading during breaks. However, such expressions of curiosity went unnoticed by families and were not communicated through school practices. This disconnect reduces opportunities to nurture intrinsic motivation. Informants also criticized the use of diagnostic labeling. They noted that low test scores or IQ measurements were interpreted as permanent indicators of ability. Such labeling reinforces emotional detachment, diminishes student confidence, and reduces teacher expectations for growth. One participant described this dynamic: "*When children take an IQ test, those with*

*lower scores might believe that is their permanent ability*." This illustrates how diagnostic labels can become emotionally damaging narratives.

Teachers in disadvantaged regions reported feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and resignation. They noted that lengthy preparation demands and limited support often result in hurried lessons that do not meaningfully engage students. When students become bored or inattentive, teachers often interpret this as inevitable rather than a sign of instructional misalignment. These findings correspond to the NVivo codes for affective detachment, moral weighting, and misdiagnosed emotional engagement.

***Volitional Fragmentation and Systemic Barriers***

A third theme concerns volitional processes and the structural conditions that shape them. Teachers across contexts reported significant time poverty and administrative pressure. Informants stated that these conditions often force teachers to engage in superficial planning, such as copying lesson plans from previous years or from colleagues. This pattern represents a form of volitional surrender, where teachers comply with procedural requirements without integrating them into meaningful instructional design. Teachers described this pattern in practical terms, with one admitting, "*We can just copy-paste, ma'am, you know*," reflecting how procedural pressure diminishes authentic planning.

Participants also described persistent silo thinking among teachers. Many educators identify strongly with their subject area and fear losing professional identity if curricular structures change. This belief inhibits collaboration and limits the interdisciplinary approaches needed for competency-based learning. This anxiety was captured by one expert's recounting of a teacher's concern: "*What will I teach if not science or social studies? Later, I will not get assigned classes,"* demonstrating how subject-bound identity shapes volitional behavior. Even when teachers express interest in collaborative work, systemic barriers often prevent implementation, including rigid scheduling, lack of support, and limited opportunities for joint planning.

The interviews revealed a tension between teachers' desire to innovate and the systemic constraints that inhibit volitional agency. Deadlines, target requirements, and administrative routines create a culture of compliance rather than purposeful action. These observations are reflected in NVivo codes related to structured intentionality, performative compliance, fragmented moral responsibility, and volitional fragmentation.

***Emergent Intentionality and the Promise of Integrated Pedagogical Design***

Despite significant constraints, the data also reveal substantial potential for pedagogical transformation. Expert informants consistently described Deep Learning as a viable approach to improve student understanding and motivation when implemented with clear intention. Teachers in underserved regions provided examples of how cooperative learning and problem-based learning promote collaboration, responsibility, and active engagement. These approaches help students develop critical thinking and social skills that extend beyond the classroom. One teacher described this effect through a cooperative learning activity, saying, "*Students work*

*together, express ideas, and take responsibility*," highlighting how structured collaboration nurtures intentional engagement.

Playful learning emerged as a powerful component of integrated design. Informants emphasized that play is not merely entertainment but a meaningful cognitive and social process. Through play, students develop a sense of agency, negotiate roles, think critically, and engage emotionally with learning materials. An expert reinforced this point by noting, "*During play, children learn… when playing marbles, you must calculate distance, angle, and force*," illustrating how guided play merges cognitive, affective, and conative processes. Teachers who intentionally design guided play activities reported observable improvements in understanding and confidence.

Methodological flexibility is another important insight. Participants argued that effective pedagogy does not rely on a single model but requires the thoughtful selection of methods aligned with specific learning objectives. Preparation and intentional design are therefore essential. This finding aligns with NVivo codes for integrated epistemic-affective engagement, pedagogical intentionality, and scaffolding collaboration.

**Toward Moral Architecture of Professional Practice**

The final theme identifies a significant shift in thinking about the purpose of curriculum implementation. Participants expressed a desire for a more transparent, accountable, and morally grounded approach to teaching. Several experts argued that lesson plans should be public documents clearly stating learning purposes, activities, and reflections. One expert emphasized this shift by asserting, "[RPP should be a public document, accessible to anyone… the purpose is this, activity one is this]", underscoring the importance of transparency for moral accountability. Such transparency would strengthen trust among teachers, administrators, students, and families. This vision reflects what can be described as the Moral Architecture of Professional Practice. It consists of four key components that emerged across the interviews. First, transparent intentionality encourages teachers to articulate their goals and make them accessible to others. Second, iterative moral agency highlights the role of daily reflection and continuous improvement. A teacher illustrated this iterative process by explaining, "*Below, there is reflection for today… that is what I believe should be done*," showing how daily practices reinforce moral intentionality. Third, ecologically embedded design emphasizes the need for professional development that draws on existing digital platforms where teachers already interact and learn. Fourth, unscored competencies recognize the importance of dispositions such as efficiency, perseverance, and responsibility, which are essential for future work but are not captured by traditional assessments.

These elements represent a shift from a compliance-driven culture toward one centered on meaningful learning, moral purpose, and collective improvement. They also demonstrate how Epistemic, Affective, and Conative processes can be integrated to support deeper forms of curriculum enactment.

Further analysis of interview narratives revealed recurring patterns linking curriculum implementation to policy instability, administrative compliance, and uncertainty regarding instructional expectations. Participants frequently described curriculum enactment as a process of navigating successive policy changes, ambiguous interpretations of curriculum documents, and pressures associated with reporting and procedural accountability. At the same time, teachers expressed aspirations toward meaningful learning, professional growth, and stronger student engagement. These tensions suggest that curriculum enactment is shaped not only by technical understanding of curriculum policies but also by the interaction of emotional commitment and professional agency.

Consistent with the Integrated EAC Model, the findings indicate that epistemic clarity, affective investment, and conative capacity must operate in alignment for curriculum intentions to be translated into meaningful classroom practice. When such alignment is absent, implementation tends to become procedural and compliance-oriented rather than pedagogically purposeful. The proposed Moral Architecture of Professional Practice therefore offers a framework for strengthening curriculum enactment through transparency, reflective practice, ecological professional learning, and recognition of broader competencies that support long-term educational development.

## DISCUSSION

This study shows that curriculum enactment in Indonesia is shaped by the Integrated Epistemic-Affective-Conative processes (Ramli et al., 2025; Tran & O'Connor, 2024). The Integrated Epistemic-Affective-Conative (EAC) Model offers a coherent framework for these dynamics. This chapter relates findings to existing literature, highlighting new theoretical insights and practical implications for reform, particularly in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions.

### *Epistemic Interpretation and Curriculum Literacy*

Epistemic fragmentation aligns with scholarship identifying curriculum literacy as key to reform success (Oner Sunkur & Yilmaz, 2025). Indonesian studies on the Merdeka Curriculum and Deep Learning reveal that teachers view goals as coverage rather than as conceptual progression or transfer (Fitrah et al., 2025; Wijayanti et al., 2024). This matches global patterns of struggles translating competencies into sequences (Duong et al., 2022; Graf & Rasmussen, 2025).

This study confirms these but advances understanding. Participants confused curriculum documents, materials, and plans, lacking coherent schemas. Issues trace to fixed mindsets about student ability, reducing the design of challenging tasks (Lutovac et al., 2023; Heyder & Pegels, 2025). Such beliefs intersect with emotional and volitional processes, sustaining memorization, test rehearsal, and shallow remediation. The Integrated EAC Model advances theory by situating epistemic challenges within interconnected emotional and volitional systems, rather than as isolated deficits (Goldstein, 2022). Misalignments drive rehearsal routines and low-level tasks (Dominguez Romero & Bobkina, 2026; Stott & Guthrie, 2024).

### *Affective Orientations and Moral Engagement*

Recent scholarship emphasizes the emotional dimension of teaching, noting that teachers' affective orientations shape their motivation, identity, and responsiveness to reform (Lai et al., 2024; Namaziandost et al., 2024). The findings support this claim, as moral disengagement, emotional fatigue, and diagnostic labeling frequently emerged in participants' narratives.

A study by Nigar and Kostogriz (2025) indicates that affective engagement is a prerequisite for sustaining innovative practice. Teachers who express moral purpose tend to adopt student-centered pedagogies and remain committed to professional learning (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). Conversely, emotional detachment creates cycles of disengagement that undermine instructional quality, as evidenced in the study by Wang and Burić (2023).

This study adds nuance to existing scholarship by showing that affective orientations do not operate in isolation. Hope, moral alarm, boredom, and emotional detachment all interact with epistemic beliefs and volitional agency. Teachers who misunderstand curriculum intentions often struggle to find emotional meaning in their work; likewise, teachers experiencing emotional fatigue may be less inclined to design intentional instruction. These findings affirm the Integrated EAC Model's emphasis on emotion as a central mediating process in curriculum enactment.

### *Volitional Agency and Intentional Teaching*

Teacher agency is broadly acknowledged as essential in curriculum reform. Past studies emphasize intentionality, reflective practice, and proactive decision-making as ways teachers tailor reforms to their local settings (Cong-Lem, 2024; Dimmock et al., 2021). While these findings support existing research, they also highlight structural constraints that limit volitional expression. Teachers in underserved regions often show a deep commitment to student-centered pedagogy. However, they report that time poverty, rigid accountability demands, and fragmented professional support systematically erode their capacity to implement these intentions. This echoes findings from Cong-Lem (2024) and Jang (2024) on the contextual vulnerability of teacher agency.

Teachers in this study described time poverty, heavy administrative pressure, and limited professional support. These factors are well documented in studies on disadvantaged regions (Djidu et al., 2025; Tripon, 2025). These constraints lead to performative compliance, such as copying lesson plans, and weaken teachers' sense of intentional action.

Importantly, the data also show that volitional capacity can be strengthened. Teachers who engaged in cooperative learning, problem-based learning, or guided play showed greater intentionality and a willingness to innovate, consistent with the findings of Thomas et al. (2025). These cases illustrate that volitional agency is dynamic and can be cultivated through supportive structures, coherent models, and collaborative learning opportunities.

The Integrated EAC Model contributes to the literature by conceptualizing volition as the operational link that translates knowledge and emotion into action. Without volitional capacity, curriculum understanding and emotional commitment remain unrealized in practice.

### *Integration and Emerging Moral Architecture*

The most original contribution of this study is its identification of an emerging moral architecture within professional practice. The call for public and transparent lesson plans, reflective routines, and recognition of unscored competencies signals a shift toward relational accountability and collective purpose.

These findings are consistent with global movements toward values-based education and humanistic curriculum design (Bosio & Schattle, 2023; Fahma et al., 2025). The notion of Moral Architecture of Professional Practice is conceptually grounded in existing scholarship on teacher moral purpose, professional agency, and values-based education (e.g., Bosio & Schattle, 2023; Jelovac, 2025). Rather than introducing an entirely new construct, this concept synthesizes these strands into an integrated framework that captures how the Epistemic, Affective, and Conative dimensions converge to shape ethically grounded and intentional teaching practice. However, the Integrated EAC Model extends this literature by theorizing the integration of Epistemic, Affective, and Conative processes as the basis of moral architecture. Rather than treating these elements as separate domains, the model shows how coherence across them supports authentic and meaningful curriculum enactment.

This theoretical contribution addresses a gap in existing research in which epistemic, emotional, and volitional dimensions are often studied independently (Dominguez Romero & Bobkina, 2026). The Integrated EAC Model provides a unified framework for understanding how teachers interpret, care about, and act on curriculum intentions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that meaningful curriculum enactment requires more than technical knowledge or procedural compliance. It depends on the alignment of epistemic clarity, emotional investment, and volitional agency. The Integrated EAC Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these relationships and serves as a basis for designing reforms that assist teachers in various challenging contexts. The following chapter outlines practical implications and policy recommendations based on this integrated analysis.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### *Conclusion and Theoretical Contributions*

This study investigated how curriculum intentions in Indonesia are interpreted and enacted by senior policy actors and teachers, including educators in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions. Using in-depth interviews and a structured NVivo coding process, the study identified a range of factors that influence curriculum implementation. These factors are organized into three interconnected domains: Epistemic, Affective, and Conative. The findings show that curriculum enactment is not a technical procedure but a meaning-making process. This process is shaped by beliefs about knowledge, emotional orientations toward teaching, and volitional capacities that support or constrain intentional pedagogical action, as recent studies indicate (Kheir-Farraj & Orland-Barak, 2025; Tran & O'Connor, 2024; Ye & Cao, 2025).

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the development of the Integrated Epistemic–Affective–Conative Model of Curriculum Enactment. This model conceptualizes curriculum implementation as the dynamic interaction of three internal processes. The epistemic domain concerns curriculum literacy, conceptual understanding of learning, and beliefs about students' abilities. The affective domain encompasses emotional engagement, moral purpose, and dispositions that shape how educators relate to students and to their professional responsibilities. The conative domain concerns volition, intention, agency, and the effort invested in planning, collaboration, and instructional design. Meaningful curriculum enactment emerges when these domains function coherently; fragmentation in any domain leads to superficial implementation, administrative compliance, or instructional stagnation.

This contribution expands on existing research by showing that epistemic understanding alone is not enough for successful reform. Emotional significance and volitional strength are equally crucial in turning policy into action. The Integrated EAC Model, therefore, shifts curriculum scholarship toward a more integrated and human-centered explanation of how teachers engage with educational change. It aligns with global calls for holistic professionalism and advances the field by offering a model grounded in empirical evidence from a developing-country context.

***Practical Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research***

The findings provide actionable insights for policymakers, school administrators, and teacher trainers. Firstly, enhance curriculum literacy via ongoing, context-aware professional development initiatives, especially in frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged (3T) areas, by incorporating mentoring programs, locally tailored teaching materials, and collaborative lesson planning that address infrastructural limitations and teacher isolation. Teachers require ongoing chances to interpret objectives, track competency progressions, and craft deep-learning lessons. Second, strengthen emotional engagement by implementing reflective training that promotes moral purpose, empathy, and a growth mindset about student potential. Third, improve volitional capacity, which is often limited by lack of time and administrative burdens. These recommendations are derived directly from the empirical findings, particularly the identified constraints of time poverty, administrative burden, and limited professional support in underserved regions. Addressing these challenges requires reducing administrative workload, promoting collaborative planning structures that strengthen teacher agency, and reconceptualizing lesson planning as a transparent, integrative tool that aligns instructional intentions across grade levels. In addition, recognizing unscored competencies such as perseverance and collaboration is essential for developing more holistic and context-responsive assessment practices.

Limitations include a small sample that does not reflect Indonesia's diversity, reliance on interviews without classroom observations, and incomplete coverage of remote challenges. These spur further inquiry without undermining theory. Future research could test the

Integrated EAC Model in larger, diverse samples or varied settings. A mixed-methods approach using observations, surveys, and student data would validate EAC impacts. Underserved region studies might explore community, resources, and cultural influences on EAC interactions.

In conclusion, Indonesian curriculum enactment transcends compliance, rooted in beliefs, emotions, and choices. Supporting these through aligned policies and practices enables their meaningful enactment for thriving students.

**AI Use Declaration:** This study used AI-assisted tools solely for language editing. The authors conducted all analyses and interpretations.

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