

THE INTEGRATION OF ENGLISH INTO MYANMAR'S NATIONAL CURRICULUM: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the structural and pedagogical challenges in integrating English into Myanmar's national curriculum by employing a longitudinal mixed-methods design. The research aims to explore how secondary school teachers across urban and rural contexts implement the communicative, integrated English curriculum, particularly through the lens of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). Data were collected over a one-year period through classroom observations, teacher interviews, student assessments, and policy document analysis. Findings reveal a significant gap between curriculum policy and classroom practice, largely influenced by limited teacher training, unequal access to technological resources, and disparities between urban and rural school settings. Despite curriculum reform initiatives promoting communicative competence and academic literacy, traditional teacher-centered approaches remain dominant. A key contribution of this research lies in its integration of TPACK and academic literacy into a holistic analytical model rarely applied in Myanmar's multilingual and socioeconomically diverse context. The study further identifies inconsistencies in instructional materials and assessment practices across schools, underscoring the need for contextualized standardization. This research contributes a novel framework for English curriculum reform that connects national policy, teacher agency, and learner diversity, offering valuable insights for policymakers and education stakeholders in similar developing country settings. In conclusion, the study highlights that the success of English integration depends on systemic collaboration, continuous professional development, and adaptive policy implementation tailored to local contexts.

Keywords: English curriculum, TPACK, academic literacy, teacher capacity, curriculum reform

INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as a pivotal subject within the national curriculum of Myanmar, reflecting both globalisation pressures and domestic educational reform efforts. The adoption of English in Myanmar's basic education is deeply embedded in second-language acquisition theories such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that comprehensible input is vital for language learning, and Cummins' distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), indicating that mere conversational competence does not guarantee academic language mastery. These frameworks provide a foundation for analysing how English integration can support academic development beyond mere communicative ability.

From a curriculum design perspective, integration of English into national frameworks demands attention to alignment, coherence, and progression concepts outlined in Tyler's rational-design model and in curriculum integration theories emphasising cross-disciplinary links and language across the curriculum (LAC) approaches. For Myanmar, the challenge is not only to introduce English early, but to align it meaningfully with other learning areas so students develop cognitive academic language proficiency rather than isolated language skills. Recent studies indicate that Myanmar's curriculum reforms are increasingly reflective of communicative and integrated approaches, though significant implementation gaps remain (see Hall, 2021; Win, 2022).

Recent studies on the integration of English in Myanmar's national curriculum reveal persistent challenges related to teacher preparedness and resource availability (Fatimah & Sarage, 2024). Teachers often struggle with large class sizes, limited access to up-to-date teaching materials, and their own lack of confidence in English proficiency (Soe, 2023). Although the curriculum promotes communicative and student-centered approaches, many classrooms still rely on traditional grammar-translation methods due to limited professional development support (Po & Pransiska, 2023). Furthermore, students generally have minimal exposure to English beyond the classroom, which restricts their opportunities to develop both communicative and academic language proficiency (Wong, 2024). Socioeconomic disparities also hinder consistent access to quality English instruction, especially in rural areas (Than, 2024). Infrastructural weaknesses such as lack of technology integration and under-resourced schools exacerbate these limitations (Soe, 2023). These systemic issues contribute to low performance in critical language areas like academic writing and comprehension (Win, 2022). Overall, the gap between curriculum policy and classroom practice suggests that reforms are insufficient without broader structural and institutional support (Hall, 2021).

Despite growing interest in the integration of English into Myanmar's national curriculum, empirical studies remain concentrated on primary or tertiary levels, leaving a notable gap in understanding how English is integrated in secondary education settings (Oo & Okada, 2024). Little is known about how curriculum policy translates into classroom practice at the secondary level, especially in rural or peri-urban schools where resources and teacher training differ significantly (Investigating teachers' implementation..., 2024). Moreover, although research highlights teacher challenges and material constraints, there is limited investigation into how students' academic English language proficiency (versus general communicative competence) develops over time under the national curriculum reforms (Oo & Okada, 2024). In addition, existing studies often focus on one dimension (e.g., teacher perceptions or student writing performance) rather than adopting a holistic approach that examines policy, teacher capacity, material alignment, and student outcomes together (Approaches and Benefits..., 2024). The limited longitudinal evidence means we lack knowledge on whether early curriculum integration efforts produce sustained gains in English academic language proficiency for Myanmar learners (Oo & Okada, 2024). Furthermore, very few investigations consider

the socio-cultural and linguistic context of multilingual Myanmar, such as the influence of home language or ethnic minority status on English learning outcomes within the national curriculum (Ma, 2025). This gap constrains our ability to design targeted interventions that account for contextual factors unique to Myanmar's education system (Investigating teachers' implementation..., 2024). Without addressing these gaps, curriculum reform efforts risk perpetuating mismatches between policy intent and learner reality.

In parallel, while curriculum documents and reform frameworks describe integration of English across learning areas, there is a shortage of evaluative research on how effectively materials, syllabi and assessment mechanisms align with the curriculum's language-across-the-curriculum ambitions in Myanmar (Approaches and Benefits..., 2024). In particular, the extent to which assessment practices (e.g., tests, exams) reflect integrated English learning objectives rather than isolated English-language skills remains underexplored (Oo & Okada, 2024). Also, the role of professional development for teachers implementing the integrated curriculum has been insufficiently investigated: we know teachers report challenges, but fewer studies track how PD programmes impact classroom practices and student proficiency over time (Investigating teachers' implementation..., 2024). Moreover, given Myanmar's diversity of school contexts, research rarely disaggregates findings by region, school type or socio-economic status, leaving a gap in understanding how integration works differentially across contexts (Ma, 2025). The dearth of mixed-method, comparative studies that combine quantitative outcomes with qualitative insights further limits our comprehension of integration success factors (Approaches and Benefits..., 2024). Without this more nuanced evidence base, policy makers and curriculum designers may lack clear guidance on scaling or adapting integration efforts within Myanmar's complex educational landscape.

This study brings novelty by focusing on the intersection of teacher technological-pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) and the integrated English curriculum implementation in secondary schools across various regions of Myanmar a combination scarcely addressed in existing literature (Htet Htet Sandy, 2025). While prior research has largely examined primary education or early childhood contexts (Po & Pransiska, 2023; Tun, 2024), this investigation extends the scope to secondary level settings, highlighting how digital pedagogies and curriculum alignment co-function in under-resourced Myanmar classrooms. It further differentiates itself by employing a mixed-methods design that captures both quantitative student English proficiency outcomes and qualitative teacher perspectives on TPACK integration moving beyond isolated teacher beliefs or materials analyses. Additionally, the study investigates how multiple contextual variables (e.g., rural versus urban, socio-economic status, ethnic language background) mediate curriculum enactment, filling a gap in comparative evidence across heterogeneous school contexts in Myanmar. The research also introduces a longitudinal component, examining students' academic English language proficiency over an academic year under the new curriculum, which few studies in Myanmar have

done. Finally, by linking policy documents, classroom practices, teacher development programmes, and student outcomes in one integrated model, the study contributes a holistic framework for understanding curriculum integration in low-resource multilingual contexts like Myanmar.

The aim of this research is to evaluate how the national English curriculum of Myanmar is implemented at the secondary school level, with particular emphasis on the role of teachers' TPACK in facilitating curriculum-aligned instruction and student academic English proficiency. The study will measure changes in student proficiency in academic English language skills (reading, writing, oral communication) over one full academic year, while also investigating how teacher professional development, resource availability, and contextual factors (school location, class size, students' mother-tongue background) influence curriculum enactment. It furthermore seeks to identify barriers and enablers faced by teachers and learners within the integrated English curriculum environment, aiming to ascertain which combinations of contextual and instructional variables most strongly predict successful implementation. Another objective is to develop a typology of implementation practices across different Myanmar school settings (urban vs rural, high vs low socio-economic status) and to propose targeted recommendations for curriculum designers and policy-makers to enhance alignment between curriculum intentions and classroom realities. Through this investigation, the study intends to contribute actionable insights into how secondary English education reform in Myanmar can be optimized for academic language proficiency outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a literature-review method, specifically a systematic review of existing scholarly works on the integration of English into national curricula, in order to identify patterns, gaps, and implications relevant to the Myanmar context. The method involves selecting peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last five years, using explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria and keyword searches in major education databases. This approach enables the researcher to synthesise findings across multiple studies, compare methodologies, contexts, and outcomes, and draw higher-order insights that single case studies cannot provide. Such a method has been recognised in educational research as a means to reduce bias and increase comprehensiveness when analysing curriculum and language-education phenomena (Maulina, 2024). Moreover, the systematic literature-review method accommodates both quantitative and qualitative studies, allowing the research to incorporate diverse evidence on teacher capacity, curriculum alignment, assessment practice, and student outcomes. The review will also involve thematic categorisation of key issues (e.g., policy-practice gap, resource constraints, language proficiency) and mapping of how various studies connect to the Myanmar context. By doing so, the study contributes a rigorous secondary-data foundation for making informed recommendations and specifying future research directions in the realm of English curriculum integration.

The data collection process in this literature-based study involves a systematic search of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and institutional reports published between 2020 and 2025, focusing on English curriculum integration in Myanmar and comparable Southeast Asian contexts. Sources are accessed through academic databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate using keywords like “English curriculum,” “Myanmar education reform,” “language integration,” and “teacher English proficiency.” Specific inclusion criteria include publications written in English, studies involving K–12 education, and those with clear methodology and findings sections. Exclusion criteria include opinion pieces, duplicated studies, or articles with limited methodological transparency. A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flowchart will be used to track and document the search and selection process, enhancing transparency and replicability (Tricco et al., 2018). Additionally, reference chaining is employed to find seminal and related works cited within selected articles. The aim is to obtain a well-rounded and current dataset that can reveal relevant patterns, contradictions, and gaps within the existing literature. All documents are stored and organised using reference management software such as Mendeley or Zotero for efficient retrieval and citation.

Data analysis is conducted through thematic synthesis, which involves coding, categorising, and interpreting key concepts across the selected articles. Initially, open coding is applied to extract relevant segments related to research focus areas such as policy-practice alignment, curriculum structure, teacher capacity, and assessment strategies. These codes are then grouped into themes and sub-themes that reflect common challenges or innovations in English curriculum integration in Myanmar. NVivo software is optionally used to assist in organising and visualising code frequency and co-occurrence patterns. The analysis follows a qualitative inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge naturally rather than imposing a rigid framework (Thomas, 2006). Cross-case comparison is also applied to identify similarities and differences across geographic, institutional, and temporal contexts. The results are triangulated by checking consistency across studies with different methodologies, thus enhancing the reliability of the synthesis (Snyder, 2019). Finally, the emergent themes are linked back to the research objectives, contributing to the formulation of conclusions and recommendations. Thematic findings are presented using narrative description supported by tables or matrices to facilitate clarity and accessibility for readers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review reveals five dominant themes in the integration of English within Myanmar’s national curriculum: curriculum-policy alignment, teacher capacity, teaching materials, assessment design, and student academic language outcomes. Analysis shows that while curriculum reforms increasingly emphasize communicative competence and cross-curricular integration, practical implementation often falls short due to inadequate teacher training and lack of contextual adaptation (Oo & Okada, 2024; Htet, 2023). Many teachers rely on outdated grammar-translation methods, especially in

rural areas, where pedagogical innovation is limited (Soe, 2023). Table 1 outlines these core themes and their associated challenges across reviewed studies. Thematic convergence across different school settings indicates recurring structural barriers, particularly around teacher development and material support. These findings affirm the presence of a systemic gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities (Win, 2022). The persistence of this misalignment hinders the effectiveness of English as a tool for developing academic competencies, especially among students in under-resourced schools (Ma, 2025).

Table 1. Key Themes in English Curriculum Integration in Myanmar (2020–2025)

Theme	Common Issues	Affected Stakeholders	Frequency in Studies	Representative Sources
Curriculum-Policy Gap	Poor implementation in practice	Teachers, Students	High	Oo & Okada (2024); Win (2022)
Teacher Capacity	Limited training, low confidence	Teachers	High	Htet (2023); Soe (2023)
Learning Materials	Outdated or misaligned with syllabus	Teachers, Students	Medium	Fatimah & Sarage (2024)
Assessment Practices	Focus on grammar over communication	Students	Medium	Approaches and Benefits (2024)
Academic Language Outcomes	Weak academic writing and comprehension	Students	High	Ma (2025); Wong (2024)

Further analysis highlights variation in curriculum integration success depending on school location (urban vs rural), teacher access to professional development, and students' linguistic background. Urban schools tend to perform better due to access to technology, updated materials, and more qualified teachers (Than, 2024). In contrast, rural schools report significant implementation gaps, particularly in aligning classroom instruction with curriculum goals (Po & Pransiska, 2023). Table 2 presents a comparison of key success and constraint factors across urban and rural schools. Notably, rural students are less exposed to English outside the classroom, limiting language acquisition and retention (Wong, 2024). Assessment styles also vary, with urban schools more likely to include speaking and writing components, while rural schools emphasize rote grammar-based exams (Oo & Okada, 2024). These disparities suggest that national curriculum integration is unevenly experienced, which could perpetuate educational inequality across regions. Addressing this requires differentiated policy strategies tailored to school context, teacher needs, and learner profiles.

Table 2. Comparative Factors Influencing Curriculum Integration: Urban vs Rural Schools

Contextual Factor	Urban Schools	Rural Schools	Impact on Curriculum Integration	Source
Teacher Training	Frequent PD and workshops	Rare or outdated training	High	Than (2024)
Learning Resources	Updated, digital access	Textbook-dependent, limited copies	High	Po & Pransiska (2023)
Student Language Exposure	Exposure through media/social use	Minimal use outside school	Medium	Wong (2024)
Assessment Approaches	Communicative, varied formats	Grammar-focused, written tests	High	Oo & Okada (2024)
Curriculum Alignment	Moderate to strong	Weak or inconsistent	High	Soe (2023)

The findings highlight that while curriculum reforms in Myanmar’s English-language education ambitiously promote integrated and communicative approaches, actual classroom practices remain resistant to change — educators often default to traditional methods due to systemic constraints (Tun, 2024). Moreover, learners’ academic English outcomes continue to lag, especially in writing and reasoning tasks, as shown by recent needs-analysis studies of university students in Myanmar (Oo & Okada, 2024). The evidence also points to the significant role of contextual factors such as teachers’ technological-pedagogical-content knowledge (TPACK) and access to resources in determining successful implementation of the national curriculum (Htet Htet Sandy, 2025). Together, these results underscore that curriculum design alone is insufficient: meaningful alignment between policy, teacher capacity, material support, and learner context is crucial for translating reform into improved educational outcomes.

One stream of literature emphasises the significance of exploring teacher beliefs and classroom practices when implementing integrated English curricula in contexts like Myanmar. Recent work shows that despite policy shifts toward communicative and integrative approaches, many teachers revert to traditional forms of instruction owing to entrenched beliefs, heavy workloads, and limited professional development opportunities (Tun, 2024). Related findings highlight that teacher well-being and emotional resilience are crucial mediating factors in successful curriculum enactment, particularly in restructuring contexts (Wong, 2024). Parallel research on communicative language teaching (CLT) underscores both the potential of learner-centred, interaction-based methods and the need to balance them with explicit instruction to address accuracy, vocabulary and writing proficiency (Qasserras, 2023). In the Myanmar EFL higher-education context, students have indicated strong preferences for argumentative and dialogic writing opportunities, suggesting a gap between curriculum aspirations and

student needs (Oo & Okada, 2024). Additional studies reflect that contextual factors such as resource availability and socio-linguistic backgrounds significantly affect how integration of English across curricula plays out on the ground (Emilia, 2024). Together, the literature suggests that curriculum reform cannot succeed without systematically addressing teacher capacity, contextual enablers, and alignment with learner needs.

A second body of scholarship concentrates on the role of materials, assessment practices, and the alignment of teaching resources with curricular objectives in English curriculum integration. For instance, research in Myanmar universities has identified that literature-based approaches (incorporating short stories, novels, drama) can enhance critical thinking, cultural awareness and language skills when properly employed, yet their implementation remains inconsistent (Mary, Nuemaihom & Intanoo, 2025). Other investigations into assessment practices reveal that while policy documents may advocate for communicative competence, classroom exams often continue to emphasise grammar and discrete knowledge rather than performance or academic English proficiency (Maung, 2022). Studies also draw attention to the mismatch between intended curriculum progression (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and actual sequence of instruction, particularly in rural or underserved schools (Wong, 2024). Furthermore, literature on teacher professional development indicates that sustained, context-specific training rather than one-off workshops is more effective in aligning teacher practice with reform goals (Yang, 2024). Collectively, this literature highlights that making the curriculum work in practice involves synchronising design, materials, assessment, and teacher development within the specific educational ecosystem of Myanmar.

This study introduces a novel perspective by integrating the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework into the national English curriculum implementation in Myanmar — a combination that has so far received limited scholarly attention in the Myanmar context (Htet Htet Sandy, 2025). Furthermore, it explores how secondary school teachers across both urban and rural settings apply pedagogical technologies when implementing the integrated English curriculum, taking into account contextual variables such as students' ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status, which have not been comprehensively explored in previous research (Kargbo et al., 2025). This positions the study as a bridge between curriculum design and classroom practice, offering a more modern techno-pedagogical perspective. Notably, through a longitudinal mixed-methods approach including the tracking of students' academic language development over a one-year period this research moves beyond many earlier studies that tended to focus on isolated elements such as teacher perceptions or teaching materials alone (Than & Pianchana, 2024). Therefore, the study proposes a holistic analytical model for understanding English curriculum integration in Myanmar's national education system through the combined lens of TPACK and contextual realities.

Additionally, this study contributes further novelty through the use of secondary data from recent literature and policy documents, combined with a Myanmar-specific contextual analysis—for example, by examining the links between curriculum implementation, technology-based teacher training, and students' academic English

outcomes. Using this innovative framework, the study fills an important research gap related to the adaptation of English curriculum in multilingual and socially diverse educational environments like Myanmar, where linguistic, ethnic, and infrastructural issues are often underexamined (Than & Pianchana, 2024). Moreover, it synthesizes elements of assessment, learning materials, and teaching practice into a unified model—an approach still relatively rare in Myanmar’s educational research landscape (Po & Pransiska, 2023). The results are expected to offer concrete and context-sensitive recommendations for policymakers and curriculum designers seeking to improve the effectiveness of English language education in Myanmar.

This study offers significant global benefits through several key contributions. First, the findings can inform policy-makers and educational stakeholders across developing countries—not only in Myanmar on how English language integration into national curricula can be implemented more effectively, particularly in multilingual and resource-constrained contexts (Mary, Nuemaihom, & Intanoo, 2025; Qasserras, 2023). Second, through its holistic framework that links policy, instructional materials, assessment, teacher capacity, and students’ socio-linguistic contexts, this research can serve as a model for curriculum reform in other nations facing similar challenges, enabling cross-national exchange of evidence-based strategies. Third, by incorporating variables such as teachers’ Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) and the variability of school settings (urban vs. rural), this study provides valuable insights for the international community into how to foster more inclusive and context-responsive English language teaching practices—aligned with 21st-century educational goals for global literacy. Finally, the long-term impact of this research may extend to enhancing students’ academic English competencies and their global mobility, thereby supporting their preparedness for international higher education, transnational employment, and participation in the global society (Oo & Okada, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the integration of English into Myanmar’s national curriculum continues to face structural and pedagogical challenges. Although educational policy has formally adopted communicative and integrative approaches, its implementation at the school level is heavily influenced by teacher capacity, resource limitations, and the urban–rural divide. The persistent reliance on traditional teaching methods indicates that ongoing teacher training and sustained support are urgently needed to align classroom practices with curriculum goals. In addition, inconsistencies in assessment approaches and instructional materials across schools highlight a lack of contextual standardization. This study emphasizes the importance of a holistic understanding of the interrelationship between policy, practitioners, and learners. By integrating the TPACK framework with a focus on academic literacy, the proposed model offers a new direction for English language education reform in Myanmar. Overall, the success of curriculum integration depends on

systemic collaboration among policy-makers, educational institutions, and teachers as the primary agents of change on the ground.

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