



Emotional Dynamics and Potential Burnout of Indonesian Digital Native EFL Teachers amid Uncertainty in Curriculum Change

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emotional dynamics and potential burnout of Indonesian Digital Native EFL teachers amid uncertainty in curriculum change. The research aimed to examine teachers' emotional responses, the impact on professional performance, and the relationship between curriculum uncertainty and burnout. This study employed an embedded mixed methods design involving 48 Digital Native EFL teachers from West Nusa Tenggara. Data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires and open-ended responses and analysed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and Spearman correlation. The findings revealed that teachers experienced both positive and negative emotions, with hope and optimism emerging as dominant responses, while anxiety and frustration were reported at moderate levels. Curriculum uncertainty affected lesson planning, teaching clarity, and motivation. The correlation analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between curriculum uncertainty and teacher burnout. Qualitative findings further revealed coping strategies such as peer collaboration and professional development, alongside stress caused by unclear curriculum direction. The study concludes that curriculum uncertainty influences teachers' emotional wellbeing and professional performance. Institutional support and clear guidance are essential to reduce burnout risk and maintain instructional effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Education in Indonesia has undergone continuous development and transformation, particularly in relation to curriculum reform. Over the past decades, the Indonesian government has implemented several curriculum revisions, including the 1994 Curriculum, the 2004 Curriculum (KBK), the 2006 Curriculum (KTSP), the 2013 Curriculum, and the current Merdeka Curriculum (Ekawati, 2016). These reforms reflect ongoing efforts to improve educational quality and align learning outcomes

with 21st century competencies. However, frequent curriculum changes pose significant challenges for teachers, who must continuously adapt their instructional practices, assessment strategies, and teaching materials, often with limited preparation and unclear guidance.

One major challenge of continuous curriculum change is the uncertainty it creates for teachers. Changes in policies and educational expectations often lead to inconsistency in implementation, leaving teachers unsure about their professional roles and instructional decisions. Gafar Mustapha et al. (2025) explain that this condition reflects the misalignment between intended, translated, and achieved curriculum, where policy level goals are not effectively implemented in classroom practice due to limited teacher training, inadequate resources, and insufficient institutional support. This misalignment may increase teachers' psychological pressure as they are required to adapt continuously under unstable conditions. In addition, Hidayat et al. (2025) found that although teachers demonstrate a general understanding of the Independent Curriculum, their comprehension of its practical implementation remains limited, indicating a persistent gap between curriculum understanding and classroom practice. This suggests that teachers are still required to invest considerable effort in translating curriculum principles into effective instructional practices, which further increases cognitive demands during curriculum reform.

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, this situation is particularly demanding, as it often results in increased workload and emotional responses such as anxiety, frustration, and emotional exhaustion (Aeria et al., 2018; Lee & Yin, 2011). These conditions reflect broader patterns of academic stress in educational contexts, where stress may arise from heavy academic workloads, adjustment to new environments, financial difficulties, and social demands. Such stress can lead to mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and reduced academic performance (Hasanah & Rusman, 2025).

In addition, the current generation of digital native teachers faces additional pressures during curriculum reform. Although they are generally more familiar with digital technologies, they are expected to integrate these tools effectively into teaching practices, which requires continuous adaptation and professional development. Limited confidence or insufficient technical competence in using digital tools may further increase stress and emotional strain, potentially leading to burnout (Morska et al., 2022; Yip et al., 2022). Teachers' emotional responses are also shaped by their professional identity, where perceived competence in handling curriculum demands is associated with positive emotions, while uncertainty tends to generate negative emotional states.

Previous studies have shown that curriculum reform is closely linked to teacher well-being. Teachers often experience mixed emotions, including excitement, anxiety, and disappointment, which influence their motivation, classroom performance, and professional satisfaction (Yip et al., 2022). Furthermore, curriculum change has been associated with burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Aeria et al.,

2018; Pekrun et al., 2014). However, most existing studies focus on general teacher populations, with limited attention to digital native EFL teachers who simultaneously navigate technological integration and curriculum reform demands.

Given these gaps, understanding the emotional dynamics of digital native EFL teachers is essential. Their emotional responses are not only individual psychological reactions but are also shaped by broader systemic factors such as curriculum instability, implementation gaps, and institutional support. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the emotional dynamics and potential burnout of digital native EFL teachers in Indonesia amid uncertainty in curriculum reform. Specifically, it examines how these teachers perceive, experience, and regulate their emotions during curriculum change and how these emotional responses influence their professional performance. This study contributes to the growing literature on teacher well-being by providing empirical evidence on the interaction between curriculum uncertainty, emotional dynamics, and burnout in the context of digital native EFL teachers.

2. Methodology

This study employed an embedded mixed methods design (Creswell John W, 2009) to examine the emotional dynamics and potential burnout of Indonesian Digital Native EFL teachers amid curriculum change uncertainty during the 2024/2025 school year. The design integrated quantitative questionnaires as the primary data source with qualitative open-ended questions embedded to provide deeper insights and contextualize the quantitative findings.

A total of 48 EFL teachers from West Nusa Tenggara participated, consisting of 24 females and 24 males, all actively teaching English at secondary and higher education levels and regularly using digital tools. Quantitative data were collected using a 43 item Likert-scale questionnaire covering seven dimensions. Items were adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and other validated instruments, with language adjusted to suit the context of curriculum reform. Each item was rated on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree/never) to 5 (strongly agree/always). The questionnaire consisted of seven sections, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Instrument of Questionnaires

Section	Dimension	Items	Score Range	Low	Medium	High
1	Anxiety and Worry	5	5 – 25	5 – 11	12 – 17	18 – 25
2	Frustration and Anger	5	5 – 25	5 – 11	12 – 17	18 – 25
3	Hope and Optimism	5	5 – 25	5 – 11	12 – 17	18 – 25
4	Professional Confidence	5	5 – 25	5 – 11	12 – 17	18 – 25
5	Impact on Teaching and Learning	8	8 – 40	8 – 18	19 – 29	30 – 40

6	Motivation to Carry Out Teaching Duties	7	7 – 35	7 – 16	17 – 26	27 – 35
7	Curriculum Change and Teacher Burnout	8	8 – 40	8 – 18	19 – 29	30 – 40

To enrich the quantitative data, four open-ended questions were embedded, allowing teachers to describe their emotional reactions, coping strategies, and perceptions of how curriculum uncertainty affected classroom practices. The prompts were as follows:

1. What aspects of curriculum change most strongly affect your emotional condition as a teacher?
2. How do you usually manage feelings of uncertainty or ambiguity related to curriculum change?
3. How has curriculum related uncertainty specifically affected your classroom teaching practices?
4. Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession due to the uncertainty or ambiguity of curriculum reform?

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS with descriptive statistics, normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk) were conducted because the sample size was fewer than 50 participants. Since the data were not normally distributed, Spearman’s rho correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between curriculum uncertainty and teacher burnout (Nalendra et al., 2021). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of responses, (2) initial coding to identify meaningful statements, (3) categorization of codes into broader themes, (4) reviewing themes for consistency, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) reporting findings. To ensure credibility and validity, triangulation was applied by comparing qualitative responses with quantitative findings. Additionally, representative quotations from participants were included to strengthen the transparency of interpretation. These procedures helped ensure consistency between raw data and research conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents a study of how teachers feel when curriculum change occurs, how these feelings impact on their work, and how this relates to burnout. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to previous research to better understand the challenges teachers face and how they handle them.

Teachers’ Emotional Response

Teachers’ emotional responses were analyzed across three dimensions: anxiety and worry, frustration and anger, and hope and optimism. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Emotional Responses

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety & Worry	48	7	25	15.33	4.279
Frustration & Anger	48	5	25	15.29	5.562
Hope & Optimism	48	10	25	18.79	3.579
Valid N (listwise)	48				

As shown in Table 2, hope and optimism recorded the highest mean score ($M = 18.79$), followed by anxiety and worry ($M = 15.33$), and frustration and anger ($M = 15.29$). This pattern indicates that although teachers experienced moderate negative emotions, positive emotional responses were relatively more dominant during curriculum reform. Rather than reflecting a simple emotional tendency, this distribution suggests emotional complexity among Digital Native EFL teachers. The coexistence of positive and negative emotions indicates emotional ambivalence, where teachers simultaneously experience stress and optimism in response to curriculum uncertainty. Qualitative data further illuminate this pattern. Some teachers emphasized emotional strain caused by unclear curriculum direction:

“The aspect of curriculum change that has the most emotional impact is the uncertainty and difficulty of adaptation for teachers and students. Too frequent and rapid curriculum changes can cause stress, anxiety and feelings of inadequacy.” Respondent 42

Similarly, another teacher reported emotional pressure due to unclear implementation:

“When everything is done in an urgent time and there is no certainty about the flow of the curriculum.” Respondent 15

These reactions are in line with the findings of Fathi et al. (2021) and Lee & Yin. (2011), who explained that educational reform can generate confusion and psychological strain, especially when change occurs rapidly and without clarity. Teachers' emotional responses, whether positive or negative, were influenced by their perception of preparedness, institutional support, and personal teaching philosophies. However, contrasting responses also emerged, indicating strong professional commitment and intrinsic motivation:

“Never. Because I am proud to be a teacher and feel that this is my calling.” Respondent 48

This variation suggests that emotional responses are not uniform but shaped by teacher's perceived professional identity and meaning making of their role. From a theoretical perspective, this pattern can be explained using value theory of achievement emotions by Pekrun et al. (2014), which posits that emotions are determined by perceived control and task value. Teachers who perceived higher control over instructional decisions or strongly valued their profession tended to report optimism, while uncertainty reduced perceived control and triggered anxiety.

In addition, emotional reactions are consistent with findings from Amin et al. (2023), who found that repeated negative emotional triggers can disrupt motivation and task performance. Conversely, Cheng (2021) and Yin (2021) emphasize that positive emotions such as hope contribute to resilience, engagement, and instructional creativity. Therefore, emotional responses in this study reflect an interaction between external policy instability and internal psychological resources, rather than a purely situational reaction.

Impact of Curriculum Uncertainty on Professional Performance

Teachers' professional performance was analyzed across three components: professional confidence, impact on the learning process, and motivation to teach. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Professional Performance

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Professional Confidence	48	8	25	18.13	3.885
Impact on the Learning Process	48	8	40	21.85	7.757
Motivation to Carry Out as a Teacher	48	7	35	14.94	7.006
Valid N (listwise)	48				

Table 3 shows that curriculum uncertainty most strongly affected the learning process ($M = 21.85$), followed by professional confidence ($M = 18.13$), while motivation to carry out teaching tasks recorded the lowest mean ($M = 14.94$). This suggests that instructional practice is the most vulnerable aspect of curriculum reform. Qualitative responses support this interpretation. One teacher explained:

“Uncertainty in the curriculum has a significant impact on my teaching practice in the classroom. When the curriculum changes frequently or lacks clarity of direction, I find it difficult to design consistent and structured lesson plans. This also affects the selection of teaching materials, evaluation strategies and pedagogical approaches used.” Respondent 44

These findings suggest that curriculum uncertainty created challenges in lesson planning, assessment, and teaching strategies. Consistent discipline in managing teaching responsibilities plays an important role in improving teacher well-being and reducing role ambiguity, which may contribute to burnout (Aeni et al., 2026). These challenges indicate that curriculum uncertainty directly affects pedagogical planning, assessment strategies, and instructional confidence. Another teacher expressed uncertainty regarding teaching boundaries:

“I became a little hesitant to determine the boundaries of the material that I have to teach in the classroom.” Respondent 32

These findings indicate that curriculum uncertainty directly affects pedagogical planning, assessment strategies, and instructional confidence.

This result aligns with Fullan Michael (2007) Curriculum Change Theory, which emphasizes that effective curriculum reform requires clear guidance, training, and institutional support. Without these conditions, teachers experience reduced instructional clarity and effectiveness. Similarly, Ekawati (2016) found that curriculum instability negatively influences lesson planning and classroom management. However, the current study also reveals variation in teacher responses. One participant stated:

“It is not really affected because the action in class is the same.”
Respondent 31

This finding also aligns with the psychological understanding of emotion (Cheng, 2021; Soufi, 2022), which highlights that emotional responses influence professional behavior depending on the level of perceived threat and personal coping ability.

Correlation between Uncertainty in Curriculum Change and Teacher Burnout

This study examined the relationship between curriculum change uncertainty and teacher burnout using two main variables. Curriculum uncertainty was measured through two items reflecting inflexibility, ambiguity, and limited adaptability during curriculum changes. Teacher burnout was assessed using six items representing emotional exhaustion in teaching contexts. This approach allowed the study to explore how curriculum uncertainty relates to emotional fatigue among Digital Native EFL teachers through correlation analysis. Before conducting the correlation analysis, a normality test was performed using the Shapiro–Wilk test due to the small sample size ($N = 48$). The results indicated that both variables were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the non-parametric Spearman’s rho correlation test was used to determine the relationship between the two variables. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Curriculum Change Uncertainty and Teacher Burnout

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Uncertainty in Curriculum Change	48	2	10	5.02	2.207
Burnout	48	8	23	13.77	4.259
Valid N (listwise)	48				

The results showed that the mean score of uncertainty in curriculum change was 5.02 with a standard deviation of 2.207, a minimum score of 2, and a maximum score of 10. These figures indicate that, overall, the respondents experienced a moderate degree of uncertainty during the curriculum reform process. Meanwhile, the mean score for the burnout variable was 13.77, with a standard deviation of

4.259, a minimum of 8, and a maximum of 23. This reflects that most teachers also experienced moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, suggesting the presence of psychological strain in response to ongoing curriculum changes.

The distribution of scores across both variables illustrates that while some respondents reported low levels of uncertainty and burnout, others experienced relatively high levels, indicating a varied but noticeable emotional impact of curriculum reform. To further understand burnout levels, the total burnout scores were categorized into low, moderate, and high levels. Figure 1. presents the frequency distribution of burnout levels among respondents. The figure shows that although most teachers were categorized as experiencing low burnout, a considerable proportion reported moderate to high burnout, indicating that curriculum uncertainty continues to create emotional pressure for many teachers. These results show a diverse distribution of burnout levels among the participants. While the data confirms that many teachers were emotionally stable, the presence of nearly 46% of respondents in the moderate to high categories indicates that burnout is still a significant concern within this population.

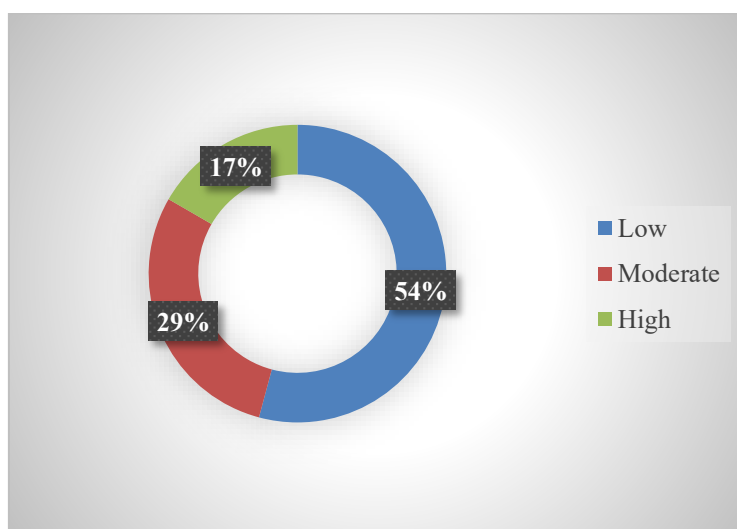


Figure 1. Frequency Burnout Level

Before conducting the correlation test, the normality of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The results indicated that both variables were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the non-parametric Spearman's rho correlation test was employed in Table 5.

Table 5. Spearman's Correlation Result

			Uncertainty in Curriculum Change	Teacher Burnout
Spearman's rho	Uncertainty in Curriculum Change	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.713**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
		N	48	48

Teacher Burnout	Correlation Coefficient	.713**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	48	48

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. presents the Spearman's rho correlation analysis between curriculum uncertainty and teacher burnout. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that higher levels of perceived curriculum uncertainty are associated with increased teacher burnout. The positive correlation value of 0.713 indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of curriculum uncertainty and the level of burnout they experience.

From the perspective of Maslach & Jackson (1981), which posits that persistent stress caused by ambiguity, high demands, and insufficient institutional support contributes to emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of professional achievement. This means that the higher the perceived curriculum uncertainty, the higher the level of teacher burnout. Meanwhile, the significance value of 0.000 (<0.01) indicates that this relationship is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level

The strong positive correlation shown in Table 5. indicates that curriculum change uncertainty plays a significant role in shaping teachers' emotional experiences. These findings suggest that frequent curriculum revisions, unclear implementation guidelines, and increased administrative demands contribute to emotional exhaustion and reduced professional well-being among teachers. The qualitative findings further support this result. Several teachers reported feeling overwhelmed during curriculum adaptation. One respondent stated:

"Once. When adapting to the new curriculum. Understanding, designing lessons and assessments and practicing them under conditions of lack of understanding, resources and support was very draining physically and mentally." Respondent 47

Another respondent emphasized the pressure created by policy demands:

" I have. Because students are required to complete and pass even though students rarely come in or do not do assignments and tests. This is a policy from above " Respondent 45

These statements indicate that burnout is not merely the result of curriculum reform itself, but is exacerbated by systemic challenges, such as unrealistic mandates and limited teacher autonomy. These patterns reflect the findings of Aeria et al. (2018) and Utami et al. (2024), who emphasized that policy burdens and excessive workload play a significant role in increasing teacher burnout. However, not all teachers experienced severe burnout. Some participants demonstrated strong professional commitment and resilience:

"Never. Because I am proud to be a teacher and feel that this is my calling."
Respondent 48

The findings reveal that although teachers experienced uncertainty during curriculum reform, many demonstrated emotional resilience. This resilience may be attributed to digital native teachers' familiarity with change and adaptability to new technologies. As individuals who grew up in a technology rich environment, digital native teachers tend to be more flexible in adopting new teaching strategies and integrating digital tools into classroom practices. This adaptability enables them to respond more positively to curriculum reform, which may explain the dominance of positive emotions such as hope and optimism found in this study.

However, the presence of moderate levels of anxiety and frustration suggests that digital competence alone does not eliminate emotional pressure. Curriculum uncertainty still affects teachers' confidence, particularly when implementation guidelines are unclear. This situation reflects the broader context of Indonesian educational policy instability, where frequent curriculum reforms require teachers to continuously adjust their teaching approaches. Such ongoing changes may create emotional strain, even among adaptable digital native teachers, highlighting that institutional support plays a crucial role in helping teachers manage emotional challenges.

Interestingly, some teachers reported minimal impact on their teaching practices, indicating contradictory findings compared to previous research. While earlier studies suggested that curriculum change significantly disrupts teaching performance, some participants in this study maintained stable classroom practices. This difference may be influenced by teachers' professional experience, coping strategies, and school level support systems. In addition, teachers' professional identity may also contribute to their ability to maintain consistency in teaching practices despite policy changes. Teachers who strongly identify with their professional roles may remain committed to instructional quality regardless of external challenges.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that while curriculum uncertainty contributes to burnout, individual resilience and professional identity also influence teachers' emotional responses. Such responses illustrate emotional resilience and alignment with professional identity, supporting the findings of Mairitsch et al. (2024), who noted that internal motivation and personal values serve as psychological buffers against emotional fatigue. These findings suggest that emotional responses to curriculum reform are shaped by multiple interacting factors, including digital native adaptability, Indonesian educational policy instability, institutional support, and teacher professional identity. Therefore, teacher burnout cannot be attributed solely to curriculum change but rather to a combination of policy demands, workload, emotional adaptation processes, and teachers' resilience in navigating ongoing educational reforms. This finding is consistent with recent evidence showing that teachers' psychological well-being is not only shaped by external stressors such as curriculum uncertainty, but also by internal psychological resources including self-efficacy, resilience, emotion regulation, and psychological

capital, which collectively function as protective factors against burnout (Imas Kristiyana et al., 2026).

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to Digital Native EFL teachers in West Nusa Tenggara, which may limit generalizability to other contexts. Second, the data relied on self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce response bias. Third, the cross-sectional design only captured teachers' emotional responses at one point in time, whereas emotional dynamics may change over longer periods. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate in depth interviews, and conduct longitudinal studies to better understand how teachers' emotional responses evolve during continuous curriculum reform.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the emotional dynamics and potential burnout of Digital Native EFL teachers amid curriculum change uncertainty. The findings revealed that teachers experienced both positive and negative emotions, with hope and optimism emerging as dominant responses. Despite challenges, many teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability in managing curriculum uncertainty. Curriculum change also influenced teachers' professional performance, particularly in lesson planning, instructional clarity, and motivation. While some teachers maintained stable teaching practices, others experienced difficulties due to unclear curriculum guidance. Furthermore, the findings indicated a strong relationship between curriculum uncertainty and teacher burnout, suggesting that continuous policy changes may contribute to emotional exhaustion. However, professional identity, resilience, and institutional support played important roles in mitigating burnout risks. Overall, this study successfully achieved its objectives by identifying teachers' emotional responses, examining the impact on professional performance, and analyzing the relationship between curriculum uncertainty and burnout. These findings highlight the importance of providing clear curriculum guidance and institutional support to maintain teacher well-being and instructional effectiveness.

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