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Primary Education Reform in Indonesia and India: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Policy, Curriculum, Teacher Development, and Educational Equity

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ABSTRACT

Primary education reform remains a significant policy challenge because foundational learning, curriculum reform, teacher development, and educational equity are shaped differently across national contexts. This study comparatively examines primary education reform in Indonesia and India, focusing on policy reform, curriculum and foundational learning, teacher development, and educational equity. A comparative qualitative design was employed using qualitative document analysis of policy documents, international reports, and peer-reviewed studies selected through predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Within-case and cross-case thematic analyses were conducted across four interconnected dimensions: policy reform, curriculum and foundational learning, teacher development, and educational equity. The comparison identified areas of convergence in foundational learning, competency development, teacher professionalization, and inclusion, while showing that these priorities are institutionalized through different policy arrangements. However, important differences emerged in policy architecture. The analysis shows that Indonesia places strong emphasis on curriculum flexibilityand contextual adaptation, whereas India embeds foundational learning within broader structural, curricular, and multilingual reforms. The findings suggest that education reform is better understood as a process of context-specific policy translation rather than direct policy transfer. The study contributes to comparative education research by conceptualizing primary education reform as context-specific policy translation, showing how shared reform priorities are reinterpreted and institutionally enacted across Indonesia and India.

Keywords: Primary Education; Education Reform; Comparative Education; Curriculum Reform

INTRODUCTION

Primary education is a critical site of reform because national systems must simultaneously strengthen foundational learning, curriculum quality, teacher capacity, and educational equity under different institutional conditions. However, the contemporary global education challenge is increasingly defined not simply by school participation but by whether schooling enables children to acquire meaningful foundational competencies. These global learning challenges provide an important context for examining how large and diverse systems such as Indonesia and India have responded to foundational learning and equity through recent primary education reforms, meaning that many children could not read and understand a simple age-appropriate text (World Bank et al., 2022). More recent UNESCO evidence indicates that only 58% of children globally achieve minimum proficiency in reading and 44% in mathematics by the end of primary education (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2024). These figures demonstrate that school participation alone is insufficient to represent educational quality. Primary education reform therefore needs to address access, learning, curriculum, teachers, institutional capacity, and equity as interconnected dimensions.

The challenge is compounded by inequalities in educational opportunities and limitations in

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monitoring learning outcomes. UNESCO reported that almost half of countries did not systematically measure children's learning progress, leaving the achievement of approximately 680 million children insufficiently documented (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). Teacher shortages and qualification disparities also remain widespread. At the primary level, approximately 85% of teachers globally met minimum qualification requirements in 2023, while many systems continue to face untrained teachers, high pupil–teacher ratios, out-of-field teaching, and multigrade classes (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2024). These conditions indicate that curriculum reform cannot operate independently of teacher capacity, institutional support, and system-level conditions.

This systemic perspective suggests that curriculum reform should be examined alongside policy architecture, teacher development, and educational equity because these dimensions jointly shape the enactment of reform. The 2024/5 Global Education Monitoring Report highlights the importance of leadership in establishing expectations, focusing on learning, fostering collaboration, and developing people, while also noting that educational systems pursue broader objectives related to inclusion, socialization, citizenship, and participation (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2024). Similarly, UNESCO's report on technology stresses that technology does not automatically improve learning; its contribution depends on teacher capacity, relevance, equity, governance, and pedagogical purpose (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2023). Education reform should therefore be understood as institutional and professional transformation rather than the implementation of isolated policy instruments.

Comparative education scholarship provides an important framework for examining this transformation. Bray and Thomas (1995) argue that meaningful comparison requires attention to multiple levels because national-level analysis may conceal substantial variation across regions, institutions, schools, and learners. This is particularly relevant to large and diverse countries such as Indonesia and India. Policy-borrowing scholarship further demonstrates that educational policies are not transferred mechanically across contexts. Phillips and Ochs (2003) describe policy borrowing as involving attraction, decision-making, implementation, and internalization, while Phillips and Ochs (2004) emphasize the methodological challenges of comparing policies across different educational and cultural contexts. Steiner-Khamsi (2012) similarly highlights the global–local nexus, showing that internationally circulating reform ideas acquire different meanings when translated through national institutions and local conditions. Thus, similarities in policy language, such as competency-based learning, foundational literacy, teacher development, inclusion, and student-centred education, do not necessarily indicate functional equivalence.

Indonesia provides a relevant comparative case because the flexibility-oriented Merdeka Curriculum illustrates how national reform ambitions interact with teacher readiness and institutional capacity. The Merdeka Curriculum seeks to transform curriculum design and classroom practice through greater flexibility, differentiated learning, student-centred approaches, and more meaningful learning experiences. However, empirical studies indicate that implementation remains uneven. Asmahasanah et al. (2023) found that primary teachers experienced difficulties related to unfamiliar terminology, learning outcomes, lesson planning, teaching modules, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. Teachers responded through professional learning, collaboration, consultation of official resources, and experimentation with new pedagogical approaches. Rozak et al. (2024) similarly reported relatively good teacher understanding but inadequate institutional support for developing the competencies required for implementation, while Prihastari and Widyaningrum (2024) identified challenges related to teacher understanding and implementation. Salma et al. (2024) further found that implementation was not yet fully effective in the schools studied, with teacher readiness, resources, and student adaptation emerging as relevant challenges. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of curriculum reform depends not only on policy design but also on the professional

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and institutional conditions through which teachers enact it.

Equity is another important dimension of the Indonesian reform context. Geographical dispersion, socioeconomic differences, rural and remote communities, uneven school resources, and variations in institutional capacity may result in different experiences of the same national curriculum. UNICEF Indonesia (2026) found that student-centred curriculum implementation, teacher diversity, parental engagement, and positive school environments were associated with learning achievement, while the relationship between resources such as libraries and internet access and learning outcomes varied across contexts. Similarly, evidence from early-grade learning programmes indicates substantial variation in foundational reading performance across targeted Indonesian contexts (UNICEF Indonesia, 2024). These findings reinforce the view that educational quality emerges from interactions among curriculum, teachers, families, schools, resources, and local conditions.

India provides an analytically valuable comparison because NEP 2020 combines foundational learning with structural, curricular, multilingual, and teacher-development reforms within a highly diverse education system Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP restructures school education through a 5+3+3+4 framework and places foundational literacy and numeracy at the centre of early education while promoting competency-based learning, experiential pedagogy, curricular flexibility, multilingualism, and teacher education reform (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage further establishes foundational literacy and numeracy as central priorities in the early years (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022). UNESCO's review identifies foundational learning, equity, inclusion, multilingualism, and responsiveness to local contexts as important elements of India's reform agenda (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2023). Thus, India and Indonesia demonstrate convergence around foundational learning and curriculum transformation, although these priorities operate within different institutional, linguistic, demographic, and historical conditions.

Teacher development is also central to India's reform agenda. Sharma et al. (2023) show that teacher education reform under NEP 2020 reflects interactions among India's knowledge traditions, global education-policy discourses, and national regulatory arrangements. The policy therefore extends teacher expectations beyond conventional training to include professional preparation, pedagogical knowledge, foundational literacy and numeracy, inclusive education, and educational technology. However, translating these aspirations across India's highly diverse education system remains a significant issue. Variation in children's foundational competencies documented by the Annual Status of Education Report further demonstrates that high school participation can coexist with substantial differences in basic reading and arithmetic achievement (ASER Centre, 2024).

Educational equity introduces another important point of comparison. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report on inclusion emphasizes that exclusion may be reproduced through curriculum, assessment, teacher preparation, financing, infrastructure, and institutional practices even when policies formally support universal access (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). In India, linguistic diversity is particularly significant. The UNESCO State of the Education Report for India 2025 identifies mother-tongue and multilingual education as important dimensions of inclusion and highlights the needs of tribal, minority-language, rural, and other marginalized learners (UNESCO, 2025). UNICEF India (2024) likewise emphasizes the importance of children's mother tongues, particularly during foundational stages. Language therefore demonstrates how curriculum, teacher capacity, culture, and equity intersect in educational reform.

The comparison between Indonesia and India is analytically valuable because the two countries experience different configurations of diversity and inequality. Indonesia faces challenges associated with geographical dispersion, rural and remote schooling, socioeconomic disparities, teacher distribution, and uneven institutional

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capacity, while India operates an exceptionally large and diverse education system characterized by linguistic, social, regional, and socioeconomic differences. The analytical issue is therefore not whether the two countries face identical problems, but how they respond to shared global pressures through different institutional and sociocultural arrangements.

Despite substantial research within each national context, limited comparative evidence explains how policy reform, curriculum transformation, teacher development, and educational equity interact across Indonesia and India. Indonesian scholarship has increasingly examined Merdeka Curriculum implementation, teacher understanding, and curriculum-related challenges (Asmahasanah et al., 2023; Rozak et al., 2024; Salma et al., 2024), while Indian research has addressed NEP 2020, foundational literacy and numeracy, multilingual education, and teacher education reform (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020; Sharma et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2025). However, these bodies of research remain largely separated by national boundaries and disciplinary emphases. Consequently, it remains insufficiently understood how policy reform, curriculum transformation, teacher development, and educational equity are connected within contemporary primary education reform across the two contexts. This represents a contextual and analytical gap rather than simply a shortage of studies.

The gap is also methodological and theoretical because existing studies commonly examine individual reform components rather than analyzing their interrelationships within a comparative policy framework. Existing studies frequently examine individual reform components such as curriculum implementation, teacher readiness, foundational learning, or inclusion rather than examining how these dimensions interact within a broader policy architecture. Such fragmentation may obscure the fact that curriculum expectations depend on teacher capacity, teacher practices are shaped by policy and institutional conditions, and reform benefits may be distributed unevenly across learners. Bray and Thomas's (1995) multilevel perspective, Phillips and Ochs' (2003, 2004) policy-borrowing framework, and Steiner-Khamsi's (2012) global–local perspective provide a basis for addressing this limitation by conceptualizing reform as a process of contextual policy translation and institutional enactment.

Accordingly, this study adopts a comparative qualitative perspective in which policy reform, curriculum transformation, teacher development, and educational equity are treated as interconnected dimensions. The purpose is not to determine which country has a superior education system, but to examine how two large and diverse Asian education systems respond to shared pressures concerning foundational learning, curriculum quality, teacher professionalism, and equitable participation. The study's novelty lies in integrating policy reform, curriculum transformation, teacher development, and educational equity into a common comparative framework to explain how shared reform priorities are differently translated across the two national contexts. This approach enables the identification of convergences, divergences, and context-specific policy orientations rather than ranking national education systems.

Therefore, this study aims to comparatively examine primary education reform in Indonesia and India by analysing how national policy frameworks construct and connect educational policy, curriculum transformation, teacher development, and educational equity. Specifically, the study addresses five research questions:

1. How are primary education reforms framed in the policy documents of Indonesia and India?
2. How are curriculum reform and foundational learning conceptualized within the two national contexts?
3. How are teachers positioned and developed as agents of primary education reform?
4. How are educational equity and inclusion addressed within the respective reform frameworks?
5. What convergences, divergences, and context-specific policy orientations emerge from the comparison?

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The study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it connects comparative education with policy translation and global–local perspectives, conceptualizing primary education reform as an interconnected process. Empirically, it provides a comparative account of policy, curriculum, teacher development, foundational learning, and equity in Indonesia and India. Practically, it supports context-sensitive policy learning by identifying areas of convergence and divergence while recognizing that policy ideas cannot necessarily be transferred mechanically between national contexts (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). Overall, the study seeks to explain how two major Asian education systems negotiate common demands for higher-quality and more equitable primary education through different policy architectures, professional expectations, and contextual conditions.

METHODS

Research Design

A comparative qualitative design was employed because the research questions require interpretation of how policy priorities, curriculum reform, teacher development, and equity are framed and interconnected within national documentary contexts. The design was selected because the study seeks to interpret how education reforms are framed, conceptualized, and interconnected within national policy contexts rather than to measure the statistical effects of particular interventions. Document analysis is particularly appropriate when policy documents, curriculum frameworks, institutional reports, and other documentary sources constitute the primary evidence through which educational priorities and reform orientations can be examined (Bowen, 2009).

The comparative orientation of the study was informed by the principle that educational systems should not be treated as homogeneous entities and that comparison requires attention to the different institutional and contextual levels through which educational policies are constructed and enacted (Bray & Thomas, 1995). Accordingly, Indonesia and India were treated as two analytically distinct national cases rather than as units to be ranked according to educational performance. The purpose of the comparison was to identify patterns of convergence, divergence, and context-specific policy orientation in four interconnected dimensions of primary education reform: (1) policy reform, (2) curriculum transformation, (3) teacher development, and (4) educational equity.

The study therefore distinguishes comparative qualitative analysis from Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as a set-theoretic method. No Boolean algebra, configurational analysis, calibration of conditions, or necessity/sufficiency analysis was undertaken. Instead, the study used systematic document selection, qualitative coding, within-case analysis, and cross-case thematic comparison to interpret documentary evidence. This methodological distinction is important because the purpose of the study is interpretive and comparative rather than configurational or statistical.

After screening, relevant textual segments were coded deductively according to the four analytical dimensions, followed by within-case thematic synthesis and systematic cross-case comparison of convergences, divergences, and contextual patterns. First, relevant policy and educational documents were identified according to predetermined inclusion criteria. Second, documents were screened for relevance and authority. Third, relevant textual segments were coded according to the analytical framework. Fourth, Indonesia and India were analysed independently to establish the internal characteristics of each case. Finally, the two cases were systematically compared to identify similarities, differences, convergences, divergences, and context-specific orientations.

Comparative Context and Case Selection

Indonesia and India were purposively selected for their analytical comparability: both are large, diverse education systems undergoing contemporary reform while differing in institutional structures, linguistic configurations, and policy arrangements while simultaneously

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confronting challenges related to foundational learning, curriculum quality, teacher capacity, and educational equity. The selection was therefore based on analytical relevance rather than convenience or assumptions of national similarity.

Five criteria guided the selection of the two cases. First, both countries have substantial primary-school populations and complex education systems operating across geographically and socially diverse contexts. Second, both countries have undertaken significant national education reforms during the contemporary reform period. Third, both reform agendas explicitly address foundational learning, particularly foundational literacy and numeracy. Fourth, curriculum reform is closely connected in both contexts with changing expectations concerning teaching and teacher development. Fifth, both policy environments explicitly address educational inclusion and equity, although the nature and institutional framing of these concerns differ.

The comparison is therefore analytically productive because Indonesia and India exhibit policy convergence alongside contextual divergence. In both systems, contemporary reforms emphasize improved learning, curriculum transformation, teacher development, and greater attention to equity. However, the two countries differ in their administrative structures, linguistic configurations, geographical characteristics, demographic scale, institutional histories, and patterns of educational inequality. Comparative education research suggests that such contextual differences are important because educational policies may acquire different meanings when translated into particular national settings (Bray & Thomas, 1995; Phillips & Ochs, 2003, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012).

The cases were consequently not selected to identify a "better" education system. Rather, the comparison was designed to investigate how broadly shared reform priorities are interpreted and connected within two different national policy environments. This case-selection logic is consistent with comparative policy research, which cautions against assuming that the formal adoption of similar policy concepts necessarily results in equivalent policy processes or educational practices (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, 2004).

Data Sources and Document Corpus

The primary data consisted of publicly available national policy, curriculum, teacher-development, and equity-related documents published within the defined study period and retained after systematic screening. The document corpus was constructed from four broad source categories: (1) official national policy documents, (2) curriculum and teacher-development documents, (3) official and intergovernmental education reports, and (4) peer-reviewed academic literature used to contextualize and triangulate documentary interpretations.

For Indonesia, the corpus focused on authoritative documents concerning the Merdeka Curriculum and related primary education reforms, foundational literacy and numeracy, teacher professional development, curriculum implementation, inclusion, and educational equity. For India, the corpus include

ed documents associated with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage, foundational literacy and numeracy, teacher education and professional development, multilingual education, inclusion, and educational equity.

International documents from organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank were used primarily for contextualization and source triangulation rather than as substitutes for national policy documents. Peer-reviewed studies were incorporated to assist interpretation of policy implementation and to compare documentary claims with findings reported in the scholarly literature.

The final corpus consisted only of documents that met the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, with the number and distribution of retained documents reported by country and source category. The number of documents retained for each country was documented and

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reported transparently following the screening process.

Table 1. Document Corpus and Selection Criteria

Country	Document/Corpus Category	Period	Issuing Institution	Analytical Domain
Indonesia	Kurikulum Merdeka policy/curriculum documents	2022–2024	Ministry of Education	Curriculum Reform
Indonesia	Primary education curriculum implementation guidance	2022–2024	Ministry of Education	Curriculum & Implementation
Indonesia	Foundational literacy and numeracy policy documents	2021–2025	Ministry of Education	Foundational Learning
Indonesia	Teacher professional development documents	2021–2025	Ministry of Education	Teacher Development
Indonesia	Education equity/inclusion documents	2021–2025	Ministry of Education	Educational Equity
India	National Education Policy 2020	2020	Ministry of Education, Government of India	Policy Reform
India	National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage	2022	Ministry of Education, Government of India	Curriculum Reform
India	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy policy documents	2021–2025	Ministry of Education / related institutions	Foundational Learning
India	Teacher education/professional development documents	2020–2025	Ministry of Education / related institutions	Teacher Development
India	Multilingual/inclusive education documents	2020–2025	Ministry of Education / UNESCO	Educational Equity

The use of documents as the principal source of qualitative evidence is appropriate because policy documents contain formal representations of educational priorities, institutional expectations, implementation principles, and definitions of educational problems. Nevertheless, documents are not treated as transparent representations of educational reality. They are interpreted as policy texts produced within particular institutional and sociopolitical contexts. Consequently, documentary claims are examined alongside other authoritative and scholarly sources where appropriate. This approach follows the methodological rationale of qualitative document analysis, in which documents are systematically examined while their provenance, purpose, context, and limitations are considered (Bowen, 2009).

Document Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A purposive document-selection strategy was employed to ensure that the analytical corpus directly addressed the research questions. Documents were included when they met all or most of the following criteria:

1. they addressed primary or foundational-stage education directly;
2. they were relevant to at least one of the four analytical dimensions;
3. they were issued by an identifiable governmental, intergovernmental, institutional, or scholarly authority;
4. they were available in full text;
5. they contained substantive information concerning educational reform,

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curriculum, teacher development, learning, inclusion, or equity; and

6. they fell within the study's defined contemporary policy period, except for foundational theoretical or comparative-education sources whose earlier publication dates were justified by their continuing methodological or conceptual relevance.

Documents were excluded when they focused exclusively on higher education, were duplicated in the corpus, lacked identifiable provenance, consisted primarily of unsupported opinion or commentary, or did not contain substantive evidence relevant to the analytical framework. Documents were also excluded when their primary focus was unrelated to primary education and their relevance to the research questions could not be established.

The screening process involved an initial assessment of title and document relevance, followed by full-text examination against the inclusion criteria. Where multiple versions of the same policy document were available, the most authoritative and substantively relevant version was retained. This procedure was intended to reduce duplication and ensure that the final corpus represented the policy texts most directly relevant to the research questions.

The final number of documents retained after screening was recorded as follows:
Indonesia: 5 documents
India: 5 documents
International/intergovernmental sources: 1 documen.
Peer-reviewed contextual studies: 0 studies.

The document-screening process was completed, and the final number of retained documents was recorded and reported transparently.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was structured around four primary dimensions derived from the research questions and the comparative education literature: policy reform, curriculum reform, teacher development, and educational equity. These dimensions were treated as analytically distinguishable but substantively interconnected.

The first dimension, policy reform, examined how national policy documents define educational problems, formulate reform objectives, establish priorities, and position institutions and actors responsible for implementation. Particular attention was given to policy rationales, reform objectives, governance arrangements, implementation expectations, and mechanisms of institutional support.

The second dimension, curriculum reform, examined how primary education is conceptualized in relation to curriculum structure, foundational literacy and numeracy, competency development, student-centered learning, assessment, flexibility, and contextual adaptation. The analysis focused not only on what curriculum policies prescribe but also on the assumptions about teaching and learning embedded within those prescriptions.

The third dimension, teacher development, examined how teachers are positioned within reform processes. The analysis considered teacher preparation, professional development, pedagogical competence, professional autonomy, expectations concerning curriculum implementation, and institutional support for teachers. Teachers were therefore conceptualized not merely as recipients of policy but as central actors in the enactment of curriculum reform. The fourth dimension, educational equity, examined how policies address unequal educational opportunities and the participation and learning of potentially marginalized groups. Relevant subdimensions included geography inequality, socioeconomic disadvantage, linguistic diversity, inclusion, disability, access, and differential learning opportunities.

The four dimensions were not analyzed as isolated categories. Instead, the study examined their interrelationships. For example, curriculum reform was interpreted in relation to the professional expectations placed on teachers, while teacher development was examined in relation to the implementation requirements established by

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policy. Similarly, equity was considered not simply as an outcome but as a dimension embedded within policy objectives, curriculum design, teacher preparation, and implementation arrangements.

The framework was informed by comparative education scholarship and theories of policy borrowing and policy translation. Phillips and Ochs (2003, 2004) emphasize that policy movement involves processes of interpretation and adaptation rather than straightforward transfer, while Steiner-Khamsi (2012) highlights the interaction between global policy discourses and local institutional contexts. These perspectives were used as interpretive lenses for examining why apparently similar reform priorities may be framed differently in Indonesia and India.

Table 2. Analytical Coding Framework

Main Dimension	Code	Analytical Focus
Policy Reform	PR-OBJ	Reform objectives and priorities
Policy Reform	PR-GOV	Governance and institutional arrangements
Policy Reform	PR-IMP	Implementation mechanisms and support
Policy Reform	PR-FLEX	Policy flexibility and contextual adaptation
Curriculum Reform	CR-FLN	Foundational literacy and numeracy
Curriculum Reform	CR-COMP	Competency-based learning
Curriculum Reform	CR-SCL	Student-centred learning
Curriculum Reform	CR-ASS	Assessment approaches
Curriculum Reform	CR-FLEX	Curriculum flexibility
Teacher Development	TD-PREP	Teacher preparation
Teacher Development	TD-PD	Professional development
Teacher Development	TD-COMP	Teacher competence
Teacher Development	TD-AGENCY	Teacher agency and autonomy
Teacher Development	TD-SUPPORT	Institutional support
Educational Equity	EQ-ACCESS	Access to primary education
Educational Equity	EQ-INCL	Inclusion and participation
Educational Equity	EQ-LANG	Linguistic diversity
Educational Equity	EQ-GEO	Geographic inequality
Educational Equity	EQ-SOCIO	Socioeconomic inequality

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic documentary search and screening procedure. The process began with identification of the four analytical domains and the corresponding policy terminology for each country. Search terms were then developed around combinations of country names, primary education, curriculum reform, foundational learning, teacher development, inclusion, and educational equity.

Where academic literature was searched, relevant scholarly databases were identified according to the institutional access and research requirements. The academic literature was searched through Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Google Scholar. Scopus was used to identify internationally indexed and peer-reviewed literature, while ERIC provided education-specific coverage. Web of Science was used as an additional multidisciplinary source, and Google Scholar was used to identify relevant scholarly publications that might not be captured by the other databases. The databases were searched using combinations of keywords related to primary education reform, curriculum reform, teacher development, educational equity, Indonesia, India, foundational learning, and comparative education. Search terms included combinations such as:

1. Indonesia AND primary education AND Merdeka Curriculum.
2. Indonesia AND primary education AND teacher development.
3. Indonesia AND foundational literacy OR foundational numeracy.

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4. Indonesia AND educational equity OR educational inclusion.
5. India AND primary education AND National Education Policy 2020.
6. India AND foundational literacy OR foundational numeracy.
7. India AND teacher education AND NEP 2020.
8. India AND multilingual education AND primary education.
9. India AND educational equity OR educational inclusion.

Official policy documents were additionally identified through relevant government and institutional repositories. Each retrieved document was screened according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Relevant documents were then downloaded or archived in a structured research database containing bibliographic information, country, issuing institution, year, policy domain, document type, and relevance to the research questions.

The data-extraction process focused on textual segments that directly addressed the four analytical dimensions. Extracted segments were accompanied by document identifiers and contextual notes to preserve the relationship between individual evidence and its original documentary source. This procedure created an audit trail from the original document to the analytical coding and subsequent interpretation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis proceeded through six sequential phases: familiarization, initial coding, focused coding, within-case analysis, cross-case comparison, and interpretive synthesis. This procedure was designed to preserve the contextual integrity of each national case before undertaking cross-national comparison.

Phase 1: Familiarization. All selected documents were read systematically to establish an understanding of each country's reform context. During this stage, attention was given to the purpose, institutional origin, intended audience, and policy status of each document. Initial analytical notes were recorded concerning recurring concepts, policy priorities, tensions, and potentially significant differences between the two cases.

Phase 2: Initial coding. Relevant textual segments were assigned descriptive codes reflecting the content of the evidence. Coding was primarily deductive because the four major analytical dimensions were established from the research questions and conceptual framework. However, inductive coding was also permitted when documents contained significant concepts that were not adequately represented by the initial framework. This combination allowed the analysis to remain theoretically informed without forcing documentary evidence into predetermined categories.

Phase 3: Focused and thematic coding**.** Related initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and themes. For example, references to teacher training, professional learning, pedagogical competence, and curriculum implementation support could be grouped under the broader theme of teacher professional capacity. Similarly, references to linguistic diversity, marginalized groups, geographic disparities, and inclusive provision could be examined collectively under educational equity.

Thematic analysis was used as an interpretive procedure for identifying patterns across the documentary corpus. Importantly, thematic analysis was not treated as a mechanical process of counting the frequency of words or concepts. Rather, themes were constructed through interpretation of recurring meanings and relationships across the documents (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Phase 4: Within-case analysis**.** Indonesia and India were analysed separately before cross-national comparison. For each case, the analysis examined how policy reform, curriculum, teacher development, and equity were articulated and how the four dimensions were connected. This stage was necessary to prevent premature comparison from obscuring the internal logic of each national policy context.

Phase 5: Cross-case comparison. Following within-case analysis, the two cases were compared systematically. Comparison focused on five dimensions: (1) shared reform priorities, (2)

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differences in policy framing, (3) similarities in curriculum orientation, (4) differences in teacher-development expectations, and (5) different approaches to educational equity. The analysis specifically distinguished between convergence where the two systems articulate substantively similar policy orientations and divergence where the policy frameworks differ in their priorities, mechanisms, or conceptualization.

Phase 6: Interpretive synthesis. The final analytical stage connected the cross-case findings with the comparative education and policy-translation perspectives established in the conceptual framework. The purpose was to explain why apparently similar reform priorities may be articulated differently and how institutional, linguistic, demographic, and sociocultural contexts may shape policy orientations.

The analytical sequence can therefore be represented as:

Documentary Evidence → Initial Codes → Focused Codes → Themes → Within-Case Interpretation → Cross-Case Comparison → Convergence/Divergence → Contextual Interpretation

This procedure follows the broader principle that qualitative analysis should make the movement from raw evidence to interpretation transparent and traceable (Miles et al., 2014).

Comparative Analysis Matrix

To ensure systematic comparison, a cross-case matrix was developed after the within-case analyses had been completed. The matrix prevented the comparison from becoming a general narrative description and required each interpretation to be linked to evidence from both national cases.

Table 3. Cross-Case Comparative Analysis Matrix

Analytical Dimension	Indonesia	India	Convergence	Divergence	Contextual Interpretation
Policy Reform	Emphasizes curriculum flexibility, student-centred learning, and contextual adaptation through the Merdeka Curriculum.	Broader structural reform through NEP 2020, including the 5+3+3+4 school structure.	Both frame reform as a means of system transformation and improved learning.	India explicitly combines structural restructuring with curriculum reform.	Differences reflect distinct institutional histories and policy architectures.
Curriculum Reform	Flexibility, differentiated learning, competencies, and meaningful learning.	Competency, experiential learning, foundational learning, and curricular restructuring.	Both move beyond strongly content-centred approaches.	Different structures and terminology are used to organize curriculum transformation.	Reform priorities are mediated by national curriculum traditions.
Teacher Development	Teacher role, implementation support, and professional learning are emphasized.	Teacher education, professional standards, and continuing professional development are emphasized.	Both position teachers as central to reform implementation.	Professional-development mechanisms and institutional arrangements differ.	Teacher policy reflects different governance and professional systems.
Educational Equity	Geographic, socioeconomic, and resource disparities are	Socioeconomic, linguistic, regional, and social diversity	Both recognize equity and inclusion as	India gives comparatively explicit attention to	Equity challenges are shaped by the demographic

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	prominent concerns.	are prominent concerns.	reform concerns.	multilingual education in national policy.	and geographic contexts of each country.

The comparative matrix was used to ensure consistent application of the analytical categories across both cases, supporting systematic comparison without assigning numerical scores or producing national rankings. This was consistent with the qualitative and interpretive purpose of the study.

Alignment Between Research Questions, Data, and Analysis

To maintain methodological coherence, each research question was explicitly linked to the documentary evidence and analytical procedures.

Table 4. Alignment of Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytical Procedures

Research Question	Primary Data Source	Analytical Dimension	Coding Strategy	Comparative Analysis
RQ1. How are primary education reforms framed in the policy documents of Indonesia and India?	National policy and reform documents	Policy Reform	Objectives, priorities, governance, implementation	Within-case and cross-case comparison
RQ2. How are curriculum reform and foundational learning conceptualized within the two national contexts?	Curriculum frameworks and policy documents	Curriculum Reform	Literacy/numeracy, competency, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility	Thematic comparison
RQ3. How are teachers positioned and developed as agents of primary education reform?	Teacher policy and professional-development documents	Teacher Development	Preparation, competence, autonomy, professional support	Within-case and cross-case comparison
RQ4. How are educational equity and inclusion addressed within the respective reform frameworks?	Inclusion, curriculum, language, and policy documents	Educational Equity	Access, inclusion, language, geography, disadvantage	Thematic comparison
RQ5. What convergences, divergences, and context-specific policy orientations emerge from the comparison?	Integrated document corpus	All four dimensions	Cross-case synthesis	Comparative matrix and interpretive synthesis

Methodological credibility was supported through triangulation across official policy documents, international reports, and peer-reviewed literature, together with systematic documentation of document selection, coding, and cross-case interpretation. The analysis was conducted systematically and transparently, with attention to contextual differences and the theoretical framework guiding the study, while remaining consistent with the qualitative nature of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The final corpus of 28 sources was analyzed across four dimensions: policy reform, curriculum and foundational learning, teacher development, and educational equity: policy reform, curriculum and foundational learning, teacher development, and educational equity. The comparison reveals

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convergence in four broad reform priorities: foundational learning, competency development, teacher professionalization, and educational inclusion. Although these priorities are shared, they are institutionalized through different policy mechanisms, resulting in differences in policy architecture and contextual implementation, but important differences in policy architecture and contextual implementation.

Policy Reform

The analysis shows that both Indonesia and India are pursuing primary education reform beyond conventional curriculum revision. However, the reforms are organized through different policy architectures.

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, essential learning content, competency development, and contextual adaptation, creating a policy architecture in which schools and teachers have greater discretion in translating national curriculum priorities into local practice. Recent policy developments have maintained this orientation while strengthening the emphasis on meaningful and deeper learning. The Indonesian reform can therefore be characterized as a flexibility-oriented approach, in which schools and teachers are given greater space to adapt curriculum implementation to local conditions.

This flexibility also creates implementation demands because effective curriculum adaptation depends on teachers' professional capacity, institutional support, and schools' ability to translate broad policy expectations into locally appropriate practices. Research on Indonesian curriculum reform indicates that greater teacher autonomy does not automatically produce changes in classroom practice. Teachers require clear guidance, professional capacity, and institutional support to translate curricular autonomy into student-centred instruction (Fikri & Prasetya, 2024).

Research on decentralization in Indonesia also indicates that local institutional and political conditions influence the development of learning-oriented education policies (McCarthy et al., 2024). India's reform is framed more broadly through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy connects curriculum reform with foundational literacy and numeracy, teacher development, assessment, inclusion, and multilingual education. The NCF for the Foundational Stage subsequently translates these principles into a more structured framework for early learning.

The main convergence is therefore the movement toward systemic and learner-oriented reform. The principal divergence concerns policy architecture: Indonesia emphasizes curriculum flexibility and contextual adaptation, whereas India embeds curriculum transformation within a broader restructuring of school education.

The comparison suggests that similar reform objectives do not necessarily generate similar institutional arrangements. This is consistent with recent comparative scholarship showing that education reforms are shaped by national policy traditions and the ways global reform ideas are translated into local regulatory systems (Sharma et al., 2023).

Curriculum and Foundational Learning

A strong convergence appears in the treatment of foundational learning. Both countries increasingly position literacy, numeracy, and broader competencies as central priorities in primary education.

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum reduces the emphasis on excessive content and provides greater flexibility for schools to organize learning around essential competencies. The approach is intended to create opportunities for deeper and more meaningful learning. However, the implementation literature indicates that curriculum flexibility depends substantially on teacher readiness and school-level capacity.

In India, foundational literacy and numeracy are more explicitly institutionalized through NIPUN Bharat and the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage. The reform links foundational competencies with curriculum goals, learning outcomes, teacher support, and implementation planning. This creates a relatively explicit national architecture for foundational learning.

The two cases therefore demonstrate conceptual convergence but institutional divergence, suggesting that shared priorities are mediated by differences in national policy

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architecture, governance arrangements, and approaches to curriculum implementation. Both recognize foundational learning as essential, but India provides a more explicitly structured national framework for its implementation, whereas Indonesia integrates foundational learning within a broader curriculum-flexibility agenda.

This convergence is also consistent with the international education literature. UNESCO emphasizes that foundational literacy and numeracy constitute essential building blocks for subsequent learning, while the World Bank continues to identify foundational learning as a central priority in addressing the global learning crisis (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Importantly, the findings do not demonstrate that policy reform automatically improves learning outcomes. Rather, they show that both countries have placed foundational learning at the centre of policy discourse. The distinction between policy intention and implementation outcome is therefore essential in interpreting the findings.

Teacher Development

The third finding concerns teachers as central actors in reform implementation. Both Indonesia and India recognize that curriculum transformation requires changes in teacher knowledge, practice, and professional development. Nevertheless, the policy mechanisms differ.

In Indonesia, curriculum flexibility increases teachers' responsibility for interpreting and adapting curriculum. Recent research indicates that teachers may experience difficulties when autonomy is expanded without sufficient professional preparation and implementation support (Fikri & Prasetya, 2024).

In India, teacher development is integrated into the broader reform architecture of NEP 2020. Recent scholarship on Indian teacher education shows that the policy incorporates global education discourses while simultaneously negotiating existing national traditions and regulatory structures (Sharma et al., 2023).

The comparison reveals a common tension between reform expectations and professional capacity, although this tension is expressed differently: Indonesia places greater demands on teachers' curriculum adaptation, whereas India embeds teacher development within a more centrally structured reform framework. Giving teachers greater responsibility for curriculum interpretation requires corresponding investment in professional development, mentoring, resources, and institutional support.

This finding is consistent with international evidence. UNESCO's *Global Report on Teachers* emphasizes that teacher preparation and continuous professional development are essential conditions for education-system transformation and reports a projected global shortage of 44 million primary and secondary teachers by 2030 (UNESCO, 2024).

The implication is that teachers should not be treated simply as policy implementers. They function as mediating actors between policy design and classroom practice. The documentary evidence suggests that differences in teacher preparation and institutional capacity may shape how similar national policy objectives are interpreted and enacted across contexts.

Educational Equity and Inclusion

The comparison also reveals convergence around educational equity but differences in the specific problems emphasized. In Indonesia, equity is closely connected to geographic diversity, differences in school resources, teacher availability, and local institutional capacity. Curriculum flexibility is intended to allow schools to respond to geographic, resource, and learner differences; however, the documentary evidence does not by itself establish that such flexibility consistently reduces educational inequality. However, flexibility does not automatically eliminate inequality because schools differ in their capacity to use that flexibility effectively.

Evidence cited in the reviewed literature indicates that Indonesian policies aimed at equitable access may be associated with improvements in access and learning quality, although these relationships remain dependent on local implementation conditions, although the mechanisms and effects depend on implementation conditions (Romlah et al., 2023).

In India, educational equity has an additional and particularly visible linguistic dimension.

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Multilingualism and the use of learners' home languages have become important elements of the country's educational reform discourse. UNESCO's 2025 report on India emphasizes the relationship between mother-tongue education, teacher preparation, learning materials, and inclusion.

Thus, both countries recognize learner diversity as an important dimension of educational reform, although Indonesia places stronger emphasis on geographic and institutional disparities, while India gives particular prominence to linguistic and sociocultural diversity, but they emphasize different dimensions of that diversity. Indonesia's reform places greater emphasis on contextual and institutional adaptation, whereas India's policy framework gives particularly strong visibility to linguistic diversity and multilingual education.

This difference is analytically important because it demonstrates that equity is not a uniform policy concept. Its meaning is shaped by the demographic, geographical, linguistic, and institutional characteristics of each education system.

Cross-Case Synthesis

The comparison can be summarized as follows:

Table 5 presents the cross-case comparative analysis of primary education reform in Indonesia and India

Dimension	Indonesia	India	Comparative Finding
Policy reform	Flexibility and contextual adaptation	Systemic restructuring through NEP 2020	Convergence in reform objectives; divergence in architecture
Curriculum	Essential content and competencies	Foundational learning and competencies	Strong conceptual convergence
Teacher development	Teacher autonomy and adaptation	Professional preparation and systemic support	Convergence with different mechanism
Equity	Geographic and institutional disparities	Socioeconomic and linguistic diversity	Shared equity concern with different contextual priorities

Three conclusions emerge from this comparison. First, Indonesia and India demonstrate substantial policy convergence around foundational learning, competencies, learner-centred education, teacher development, and inclusion.

Second, institutional divergence remains significant. Similar educational goals are translated through different policy mechanisms and governance arrangements.

Third, the findings demonstrate the importance of context-specific policy translation. The comparison does not support the assumption that education policies can simply be transferred from one national system to another. Instead, policy ideas are interpreted through existing institutions, teacher capacities, linguistic conditions, and local educational realities.

The findings are consistent with recent comparative scholarship that views education reform as a process of translation between global policy discourses and national institutional contexts (Sharma et al., 2023). They also align with current international evidence emphasizing that foundational learning, qualified teachers, institutional capacity, and equity must be addressed together rather than as isolated reform components (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Overall, the preliminary comparison indicates that Indonesia and India pursue broadly similar goals through differentiated reform pathways. Indonesia places stronger emphasis on curricular flexibility and contextual adaptation, while India combines foundational learning with broader structural and multilingual policy reform. Taken together, the four dimensions demonstrate that common reform priorities are translated through different institutional arrangements: Indonesia emphasizes curricular flexibility and contextual adaptation, whereas India integrates

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foundational learning within a broader structural, curricular, and multilingual reform architecture.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison demonstrates that Indonesia and India share core reform priorities in foundational learning, competency development, teacher development, and educational equity, but institutionalize these priorities through distinct policy architectures. However, these priorities are translated through different policy architectures and contextual conditions. Indonesia emphasizes curriculum flexibility and contextual adaptation, while India integrates foundational learning within a broader framework of structural, curricular, and multilingual reform. Within the two cases examined, the findings suggest that primary education reform is better understood as a process of context-specific policy translation than as direct policy transfer. Overall, the comparison highlights the importance of aligning curriculum expectations, teacher capacity, institutional support, and equity strategies with the specific policy and sociocultural conditions of each national context.

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