

The 1994 English Curriculum of Secondary Schools and Its Implications to the Teaching of English in Indonesia

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Abstract: The 1994 English curriculum has been implemented since the 1994-1995 academic year at the secondary schools. In order to implement the curriculum well, teachers and others concerned should understand the principles underlying the development of the curriculum. Implications of implementing the curriculum should also be considered very carefully so that optimal results can be expected. Four areas of implications will be discussed in this article, namely: teaching and learning activities, the training of English teachers, the teachers' lesson plans, and the evaluation procedures. In addition, two of potential problems of implementation will also be discussed.

Key words: English curriculum, teacher training, evaluation, secondary schools.

The 1994 English syllabus for the Lower as well as Upper Levels of Secondary Schools in Indonesia has been developed as a revision of the previous English syllabus, the so-called 1984 syllabus. The main features of the revised version include the realization of the communicative approach into the communicative syllabus and the syllabus format. Although the 1984 English curriculum adopts a communicative approach, its realization in the syllabus does not reflect its claim. The format of

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the 1984 is so rigid that the teachers do not have enough rooms for developing their creativity, and the format of the 1994 version, therefore, has been so designed that it allows the teachers to be creative in developing their instructional materials and their teaching strategies in the classrooms.

As a required subject at the Secondary Schools, English functions as a means for the students to develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the areas of science, technology, and arts, so that they can participate in the development of the nation.

In this article, the writer will describe the main components of the 1994 syllabus and provide some elaborate explanations of the components whenever necessary. Some issues and problems that may imply will also be presented. It is suggested that those interested in the background of the development of the syllabus read some relevant sources (Huda, 1990; 1992; and Madya, 1992).

THE CONTENTS OF THE SYLLABUS

The Syllabus consists of two main parts: Introduction and Instructional Program (Depdikbud, 1994a; 1994b). The Introduction describes some essential elements of the syllabus: what language is, the function of English in Indonesia and in the Secondary Schools, the general instructional objectives, the scope, and some general guidelines. The Instructional Program describes the instructional components of the syllabus. It includes the general instructional objectives to be achieved in each year, a list of themes to be covered in each year, possible topics to be selected under each theme, a list of communicative functions and examples of the communicative expressions, and a list of possible teaching-learning strategies to be selected by the teachers. In addition, a list of vocabulary items is also provided, which is classified into two categories: vocabulary items especially needed for communicative functions in the themes and those needed for general communicative functions.

The Instructional Objectives

Two different general instructional objectives are stated for two levels of secondary schools (Lower and Upper). At the Lower Level,

the objective is that by the end of the program, the students will have developed English language skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing in thematic situations in accordance with their individual developmental levels and interests, using 1000 word-level and appropriate structures (Depdikbud, 1994b), and the objective at the Upper Level is that by the end of the program, the students will have developed English language skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing in thematic situations in accordance with their individual developmental levels and interests, using 2500 word-level and appropriate structures (Depdikbud, 1994a).

The order of priorities of the language skills to be mastered is changed from the order set in the 1967 Ministerial Decree on the basis of the results of the 1987-1990 national surveys of the teaching of English in the Secondary Schools (Huda, 1992). In addition to the general instructional objectives which are stated at each level of the Secondary Schools, a set of general instructional objectives is also formulated in each year. This set of general objectives is elaborated into each of the skill areas to be developed: reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

The Instructional Materials

The instructional materials to be developed by teachers or textbook writers would include: the instructional objectives appropriate for each level and year, the list of themes to be covered in each term of the year and the possible topics that can be selected under the themes, the list of communicative functions and examples of their communicative expressions, the list of teaching-learning strategies to be selected for the development of each of the skill areas, and the list of vocabulary items appropriate for each theme in addition to the general list of vocabulary items to be covered in each level.

Procedures for developing the materials into actual instructional materials may follow the following steps:

- (1) Determine the instructional objectives to be achieved in a unit of time.
- (2) Determine the theme appropriate for the level and the term of the year.

- (3) Select one of the possible topics under the theme in the list.
- (4) Determine the appropriate topic to be selected in accordance with the needs of the students (if necessary, select your own topic).
- (5) Determine the kinds of communicative activities that can be developed under the selected topic on the basis of the objectives to be achieved in a particular unit of instruction.
- (6) Determine the communicative functions, the grammatical structures, and the vocabulary items necessary for the communicative activities to happen in accordance with the students' level of development.
- (7) Determine the appropriate texts for the communicative activities and the instructional objectives to be achieved.
- (8) The appropriate texts should be taken or adapted from authentic materials.

The Instructional Approach

The approach to teaching English in the 1994 Syllabus is labeled 'meaning-based approach,' which is actually not different from the instructional approach labeled 'communicative approach' as claimed for the 1984 English Syllabus. The term 'meaning-based approach' is used instead of 'communicative approach' because of two reasons. First, the term communicative approach has been misinterpreted as an approach of teaching English targeted toward the achievement of oral communicative competence only. In fact, communicative language teaching takes care of the four language skills. Second, one of the most important aspects of communication is negotiations of meanings between speakers and listeners, and between writers and readers (Savignon, 1991).

Basically, the meaning-based approach to teaching English at the Secondary Schools is based on the principles (a) that language is viewed as an instrument to express meaning which is realized by way of structures and vocabulary, (b) that meaning is determined by linguistic and situational contexts, (c) that learning a language is learning to use the language in communicative activities in the target language (written as well as oral, receptive as well as productive), (d) that the mastery of the language components is needed to support the mastery of the communicative competence, and (e) that the teaching of the language components can be done whenever necessary.

IMPLICATIONS TO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In the 1994 Curriculum, the ultimate instructional objective of the teaching of English at the secondary schools has been clearly stated, that is, the mastery of the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Each area of the four-skill objectives is further elaborated into micro-skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing stated explicitly in each year of each level of the secondary schools.

The implication is obvious. The teaching and learning activities in the classrooms should always be oriented toward the mastery of the four language skills. The teacher should always make every effort to involve the students in language activities using the language for communication. The language activities should be designed in such a way that students will have to read, listen, speak, and/or write in the activities. Grammatical points are no longer the topics to be discussed or covered in the teaching and learning activities. Instead, themes and topics representing aspects of life are used, not as the instructional materials to be mastered, but as means for organizing the instructional materials. Themes and topics function as guidance for giving context of discussions in the language activities. The instructional materials to be mastered by the students would include the language materials necessary for reading, listening, speaking, and writing in situations relevant to the students' immediate and future needs. The language activities should involve the students in using the language for communicative functions in their real life. Reading activities, for example, can be focused on reading articles from newspapers, magazines, or from other sources, about how to keep healthy. In addition to learning how to read, they can also read the articles to learn how to keep healthy. Listening activities can be focused on listening to oral descriptions about how to operate a computer from tapes, recorded materials, or even from live presentations of the teacher. Again, in this kind of language activities, the students do not only learn to listen, but they also listen to oral descriptions to learn something useful for their life. Speaking and writing activities should also be designed to include the kinds of activities which will help the students improve their English as well as their life. The speaking activities can be related to the function of speaking for expressing thanks or for sharing ideas and information,

and the writing activities can be related to the function of writing for sending some message to a friend who lives far away.

These kinds of teaching and learning activities can later serve as an answer to the blame frequently addressed to the teaching of English at the secondary schools: college graduates do not master English because their English teachers at the secondary schools focused too much on the mastery of grammatical points instead of the mastery of language skills (Gatra, 1996).

THE IMPLICATIONS TO THE TRAINING OF ENGLISH TEACHERS

The kinds of teaching and learning activities suggested by the 1994 English curriculum as mentioned above require that English teachers have a good mastery of the four language skills. Without a good mastery of the four language skills, English teachers will not be able to help their students acquire the language skills. In the classrooms, English teachers should be able to manage the class by involving the students in the activities of reading, listening, speaking, and/or writing in a real communication. English teachers cannot involve the students in the activities without involving themselves first in the same activities. Every English teacher should serve as a model of a good reader, a good listener, a good speaker, as well as a good writer. In addition, English teachers may still need to have a good mastery of the English grammar because they should be able to diagnose their students' difficulties in using the language for communication. In the 1994 English curriculum, however, the role of grammar has been determined as just one of the language components, besides vocabulary and spelling/pronunciation, to support the mastery of the four language skills, and the teaching of grammar as a separate teaching activity will only be conducted if it is necessary to support the mastery of the language skills.

In the curriculum of the English Department preparing English teachers for secondary schools, the four language skills should be given enough emphasis in the form of explicit courses and implicit courses (the hidden curriculum). That is, in addition to the so-called skill courses especially designed to train the students in the four language skills, the content courses should also facilitate the students in developing their

language skills. Courses like Research Methods or Language Testing, for example, should also be conducted in English involving the students in reading the references, listening to the lectures, discussing the concepts in the class, and writing some papers. In addition to knowledge and skills related to the courses, the prospective English teachers will also develop their English language skills.

The demands for more qualified teachers of English should be answered by the English Language Teacher Training Institutions (IKIP/FKIP/STKIP) by reemphasizing the students' mastery of the language skills. In line to this idea, the English Department of IKIP Malang has been trying to revive the so-called 'Intensive English Course'. This program is offered in the first semester comprising 28 intensive contact hours per week focusing on the development of the students' language skills (especially oral) before they take other courses.

THE IMPLICATIONS TO THE TEACHERS' LESSON PLANS

The syllabus design of the 1994 English curriculum is in an essay format intended to give flexibility to the users in developing the instructional materials. In its format, the 1994 English curriculum serve as a source of raw materials for the teachers (and also textbook writers) to develop their own creativity in preparing their instructional materials and activities which can really involve the students in the use of the language for communication. The flexibility of the syllabus may also have its implication to the writing of the lesson plans. English teachers, therefore, should not be burdened with a rigid and fixed lesson plan format which may restrict the creativity of the teachers in developing the instructional materials. An English teacher's lesson plan should be made to serve the need of the teacher and her students in creating meaningful language activities: a lesson plan which will become the guide of the teacher to teach in the class--not just a formal procedure which will only serve the supervisor. The supervisor, in this case, should also understand the real function of a lesson plan. A lesson plan should now be treated as something needed to ensure effective and meaningful teaching and learning activities in the class, and not as something to fulfill a formal requirement.

English teachers' planning time should now be devoted more to selecting-and-adapting materials from different sources (textbooks, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, etc.), designing activities (types of tasks, questions, procedures) on the basis of the materials, and/or doing 'cut-and-paste-and-photocopy' to be distributed as hand-outs for the students. Different teachers in different schools may need different kinds of preparation. A newly recruited English teacher may need a very well-organized lesson plan guiding her in the teaching and learning activities, step by step, minute by minute. She needs such a rigid lesson plan to ensure her that she will be able to teach well/effectively. A very experienced English teacher, however, may not need such a rigid well-organized lesson plan in order to teach well.

THE IMPLICATIONS TO THE EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The implications of the 1994 English Curriculum to the evaluation procedures can be inferred from the basic principles for developing evaluation procedures according the 1994 Curriculum as follows:

(1) There are two kinds of evaluation procedures: procedures for evaluating learning progress and procedures for evaluating learning outcomes. The evaluation of learning progress is designed to (a) identify students' learning progress, (b) obtain feedbacks for remedial teaching and enrichment, and (c) obtain feedbacks for improvement of teaching and learning strategies. This kind of evaluation can be conducted at the end of one or two instructional units. The data or scores obtained from this evaluation will be used in combination with those from the end of a term's evaluation to assign grades for the students' report cards. The evaluation of learning outcomes is designed to measure the achievement of the instructional objectives at the end of a term, a year, or a program of the secondary schools. This kind of evaluation should only include test items measuring the students' skills of reading, listening, speaking, and/or writing.

(2) The instructional objectives which have been elaborated in the syllabus into sets of micro skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing should be used as a basis for developing evaluation instruments. Any instrument evaluating students' learning outcomes should only measure the language skills. Most of the instructional objectives stated in the

syllabus are already measurable (e.g. be able to identify the main idea explicitly mentioned in a paragraph), but some are still not measurable yet (e.g. reading for pleasure). The instructional objectives which are not measurable should be developed into more measurable instructional objectives before they are used as a basis for developing the evaluation instruments.

(3) The list of themes and topics in the syllabus should be used as a reference for selecting the context of the evaluation materials. To measure listening skills, for example, the teacher can develop test items which measure the students' ability to find the main ideas of some short paragraphs about sanitation. Themes and topics should not be treated as the materials to be mastered by the students. Any evaluation instrument should not be designed to measure the students' mastery of the themes or topics.

(4) The texts which will be used as the materials for developing the evaluation instruments can be taken from two different sources: (a) the textbooks which are used by the teachers in their class activities (the so-called 'seen materials'), and (b) authentic/semi-authentic materials which are not used by the teachers in their class activities (the so-called 'unseen materials'). For developing the evaluation instruments to be taken by the students of the schools using the same textbooks, the teachers can use the 'seen materials', but for developing the evaluation instruments to be taken by the students of the schools using different textbooks, the teachers must use the 'unseen materials'. In line with this idea, the national final examination ('Ebtanas') must use the 'unseen materials' because the reality indicates that different schools use different textbooks. There are two basic principles underlying the use of the two alternative sources of instrument materials. The first is 'test-fairness'. It will be fair to use the 'seen materials' if the students have been exposed to the same textbooks/materials; but if different students have been exposed to different textbooks/materials, what is considered 'seen' to some students will be considered 'unseen' to other students. And this is unfair to these students. The second basic principle is that what should be measured is the generic skills of reading, listening, speaking, and/or writing, and as generic skills, they are materials-free. Teaching English, according to the 1994 English Curriculum, is teaching the students to use the language for communication. What should be 'mastered' by the

students is not the materials in the textbooks, but the language skills developed. The materials used in the teaching and learning activities are only used as means of developing the skills.

(5) From the practical point of view, not all the language skills can be measured or tested in the national examination, and not all can be measured by using 'paper-and-pencil-tests'. Perhaps only reading skills can be tested in the national examination. Classroom teachers, therefore, should be empowered to develop their own evaluation instruments the results of which should be used as part of the criteria for judging the achievement of the students' learning outcomes. 'Non-paper-and-pencil-tests' may have to be used as classroom evaluation instruments to measure a language skill like speaking. Continuous evaluation procedures using observation sheets and rating scales, for example, can be developed to measure speaking skills.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Only two of potential problems of implementing the curriculum are raised in this article. First; in the 1994 Curriculum, English is also offered as a local content at the Elementary Schools, beginning grade 4 or 5. The decision whether English will be taught at the Elementary School is left to the local administrators (the principal as well as the educational officers) on the basis of the individual school potentials. The problem is how elementary English syllabus should be developed and integrated into the 1994 English syllabus for the Junior High Schools. This problem will get more complicated considering that a Junior High School teacher may have students (especially in the first grade) graduating from different elementary schools (with and without English subject).

Second; the 1994 English syllabus is considered to be the syllabus to be implemented nationally. Everything included in the syllabus is, therefore, supposed to contain the minimal essentials to be covered in the teaching and learning activities. The consideration that the syllabus only contains the minimal essentials is still based on the 'expert' judgment of the curriculum developers, and is, therefore, subject to empirical verifications. The problem is whether there is any possibility that major or even minor improvement may be done during the implementation stages. Some possible improvement may have to be done to any of the

contents of the syllabus. Some instructional objectives may turn to be too demanding, or some themes determined for each year hard to develop into meaningful communicative and learning activities, or some grammatical structures and vocabulary items in the list are not really necessary for the communicative functions. Do we need to wait for another ten years to improve it? This is not just a practical question, but it is also a substantial one. How do we come to the conclusion that some instructional objectives are too demanding, some themes are hard to develop into communicative activities, and some grammatical structures and vocabulary items are not necessary?

These potential problems should be addressed in studies of curriculum implementation so that efforts can be done to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The implications of the 1994 English curriculum just described above should draw the attention of, especially, four different groups of people to the four areas respectively: teachers concerning the teaching and learning activities, teacher educators concerning the training of English teachers, school administrators concerning the teachers' lesson plans, and test developers (and also teachers) concerning the evaluation procedures. The effectiveness of the 1994 English curriculum will largely depend on the cooperation among the four groups of people.

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