A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CURRICULUM IN ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Curriculum design needs to fulfill the diverse group of students to discharge different needs and cultural context relevance. Thus, this study employs a descriptive qualitative aimed at reviewing the practices of two different curriculums, Curriculum 2013 and Cambridge Curriculum, in terms of (1) teaching-learning practices, (2) course materials, and (3) students' engagement strategy. This study involved two English teachers from two Islamic High Schools, both private and state, in North Sumatra East Java Province respectively. Two instruments, observation to obtain data related to teaching-learning practices and interview to obtain course materials and students' engagement, were employed and analysed by interpretation and thematic analysis. The first results revealed similar teaching-learning practices done by Teachers 1 and 2: explaining concepts in teaching vocabulary, drilling in teaching grammar, and working with sound in teaching pronunciation. The second result showed no similarity in distributing the course materials; Teacher 1 used fully developed materials, while Teacher 2 used textbooks provided by the school. The third result explained that both teachers used the same strategy in maintaining the students' engagement by offering help with studying, talking, and motivating them. This study contributed to providing a description for how to implement Curriculum K13 and Cambridge Curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum review, ELT curriculum, Islamic school

INTRODUCTION

The practicality and effectiveness of curriculum are particular components of teaching-learning that educational practitioners and government genuinely want to achieve. The curriculum has two turning goals, referring to helping students in achieving students learning process and learning outcomes (Seitz, 2017). It means that the curriculum's goals refer to learning objectives, materials, and assessments intertwined altogether, i.e., how teaching-learning is conducted to achieve the objectives, how appropriate materials are distributed for students to facilitate learning, and how appropriate assessments are implemented to measure the students' outcomes. Hence, the curriculum determines the quality of the learning and students if implemented based on its essence, like fulfilling the learning principle and acknowledging the students' conditions.

Referring to the curriculum implementation within the last one decade, several studies described the different outcomes from different contexts (Barrot, 2021; Hardman &

A-rahman, 2018). For example, the actualization of the curriculum in Malaysia and the Philippines lacks interactive and communicative learning teaching, and insufficient learning inputs for real-life situations. The learning materials were designed in an old-fashioned design known as teacher-centred learning approach. It inferred that the curriculum needs to be designed containing two aspects, cognitive and skill, that should facilitate the learners to use the target language.

Similarly, it also occurred in the Indonesian context that the government has been already demonstrating and facilitating interactive curriculum (i.e., 2013 curriculum, a.k.a K13 based on the Indonesian term), yet its implementation does not reflect the outcomes due to adopting conventional teacher activities. Some factors that are contributed to the ineffectiveness of curriculum implementation refers to no supportive aid from administrators to show the practices (Seitz, 2017), the dilemma of implementing either teacher or students-centered roles (Brown, 2000:46), students' needs ignorance (Brown, 1995), and most importantly a lack of teachers' comprehension and skills. Overly found in previous studies, the curriculum gap also occurred because learners have different native languages spoken every day (Zein, 2020), in that teachers make an effort to help students learn to communicate both oral and written language, such as how they design learning activities, materials and other crucial learning components needed.

In the same manner, the English curriculum implementation in Korea is likely similar to Indonesia, in which the curriculum is communication-oriented education. It is applied in order to contribute to the rapid change of the 21st century, which carries two purposes; cultivating communicative competence and utilizing various activities and tasks. In high school education, the curriculum implementation intends to stimulate fluency and accuracy through communicative activities and sentences examples. The activities are chosen and implemented relevant to the learners' level, aptitude, interest, and future career (Moodie & Nam, 2016). Furthermore, the English curriculum in Korea is completed as a mandatory and elective English curriculum that allows students to take lessons based on their career plans (Hwang & Kim, 2019). Communicative competence has been demonstrated since it was back intended to solve the learners' necessity for the 21st-century learning era.

Bringing up the curriculum implementation issues in different countries, curriculum implementation generally is figured out into private and state schools. Firstly, private

institutions and/or schools tend to prioritize English as a basis of communication, which means a teacher focuses on increasing the intensity of making use of English in every situation (Vukosi et al., 2021). We assumed that private schools tend to decide how they design the curriculum, setting up the learning conductivity, standard competencies, and materials that can be beyond their country's control to achieve 21st-century learning goals; communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. The learning input is adapted from authentic sources to grant learners endeavors in real-life situations.

Secondly, state schools genuinely use the national curriculum because they are connected to the government, referring to for. ies., policies, school facilities, and funds. This means that the learning principles, teaching approaches, and materials suggested by the government should be well-tried and used in teaching students. The government's policy pursued that every school located in rural and urban schools needs to implement the national curriculum. However, the national curriculum might not be favorable and suitable for certain students' conditions in particular areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Indonesian context, the curriculum changes from time to time. The two last curriculums implemented, Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) and Curriculum 2013 (K13). At the outset, the KTSP implementation in ELT contexts intentionally expected students to reach students' communicative competence (Zein, 2020), such as encouraging learners to understand and make use of language in the four language skills. Nonetheless, the factual field confirmed that KTSP was commented on since receptive skills were just prioritized, which produced low quality towards the students' communicative competence (Zein et al., 2020).

It was then changed into Curriculum 2013 because of the critisation. This curriculum was considered improved learning for four reasons; firstly, genuinely leading the students to be active participants in the classroom; secondly, encouraging learners to have critical thinking and character building (Putri & Reswari, 2018); thirdly, following the era of development responding to the sophisticated technology and developed knowledge; and lastly. Leading students to have problem-solving skills (Adiantika, 2021). However, some scholars reconsidered that K13 is powerless; for example, Winarso (2016) argued that K13

did not wholly implement the language learning principles. Further, the assessment encourages teachers to assess the learners' behaviour, skills, and knowledge, which takes time.

The latest curriculum implemented is Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (MBKM), or refers to an independent curriculum; the program attempted to improve the 2013 curriculum following the philosophy of freedom to learn independently (Sudaryanto et al., 2020). Thus, the learning environment in this curriculum is wider; where learners are encouraged to serve in community service, students exchange programs, research activities, problem-based activities, and outing classes to gain more learning input in using the target language. Through these activities, learners indirectly develop their creativity, innovation, and critical thinking since the emphasis is more on the learning practice rather than the theory. Finally, the outputs of Merdeka Belajar are innovation and reflection among teachers and students. Above all, Shihab et al., (2017) mentioned that the essential concept of Merdeka Belajar is to reveal the learners' enthusiasm, desire, and freedom.

The prominent English language in communication nowadays cannot be separated from the role of the British, which revolutionized in the seventeenth to twentieth centuries (Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014), which is out of tension for many people and nations to adopt its style. The Cambridge curriculum was first introduced by Cambridge Assessment International Education, and by that time it was used internationally by many schools overseas, including Indonesia. In fact, since Indonesia was not colonized by the British, many private schools in Indonesia adopted the Cambridge curriculum policy for the ELT field. The decision to adopt an international English curriculum holistically responds to multicultural experiences (Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014). Besides, the Cambridge pathway sets from primary schools to Cambridge ICGSE for high school. Therefore, it is not only used to teach young but also adult learners.

In the Indonesian context, 190 international and national schools have used the Cambridge curriculum as their educational curriculum. Several points that highlight the adaptation of the Cambridge curriculum is related to four points; learning and learners, assessment, language ability, and language awareness. Generally, the Cambridge curriculum has been able to explore an individual's strengths and weaknesses. That said, the teaching and learning of English suit the students' condition, level, and interest. In addition, the

Cambridge assessment encourages teachers to be cognizant of assessing students' skills, knowledge, and behavior and is appropriate for measuring the subskills of the language.

Cambridge has set standards for language proficiency, namely the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), that differentiate the subskills of language ability. Furthermore, the curriculum demonstrates the use of language in communicating context. Yet, not much evidence of actual implementation of the curriculum is reported by practitioners Pratiwi (2019) since Cambridge is not part of the national curriculum, that makes practitioners have no urgency to further investigate its implementation.

METHOD

For significant results, we used descriptive qualitative study since the design provides a profound understanding and process of the curriculum implementation. This study involved two English teachers in two Islamic High Schools in North Sumatra and East Java Province. This study employed observation using a field note and a semi-structured interview to obtain data on the curriculum implementation used in the ongoing semester. The observation was conducted for a month and a half, investigating the implementation of teaching methods and various students' activities. Meanwhile, the interview concerning course materials and strategy for maintaining students' engagement was done. The questions employed for course materials and students' engagement consisted of eight and four items, respectively. The blueprint of the observation and interview can be seen in Table 1 (*Appendix*).

The observation concerns investigating the learning activities treated to the students concerning teaching sub-skills of English. In addition, the interview attempted to seek the distribution of the course materials regarding the materials' appropriateness and contributions and to investigate the students' engagement during the learning teaching.

The data analysis for the two instruments was divided into two types; interpretation and thematic analysis. The first data, observation, was done by; writing field notes, interpreting the notes based on the designed criteria and organizing the results based on its criteria. Meanwhile, the interview was analyzed based on thematic analysis through these procedures; viewing the data, taking notes, and sorting the data into themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study as well as the discussions divided into three following subcategories; teaching-learning practices, course materials quality, and student engagement.

As the teaching-learning practices were obtained through observation, this study revealed that the teachers used some techniques employed in the English curriculum. The details of the results can be seen in Table 2 (*Appendix*).

Based on the results, the teachers have the same ways of practicing learning teaching methods in common, but they have slight differences in teaching grammar. Pertinent to teaching grammar, Teacher 1 used text analysis, drilling, and controlled practice, while Teacher 2 used concept explaining and drilling. Controlled practice and drilling become more salient for teachers to enable the students as they were introduced to extend their comprehension towards the types of forms and functions for different texts and contexts (Harmer, 2003, p.37). Besides, text analysis provides an easier way to acquire an understanding of grammar rules as learners will be purposeful to the learning objectives (Syarif, 2015).

On the other hand, drilling is found to be forcefully guiding the Islamic schools' students in understanding the basic pattern of English grammar. It is assumed that drilling might be advantageous for beginner learners, but they tend to be dependent on teachers during the learning process (Fransiska & Jurianto, 2016). Therefore, drilling is rather less effective in teaching intermediate and advanced learners. Further, teaching grammar through explaining concepts related to the function, pattern, and example using spontaneous and prepared concepts to ensure the students' understanding in class. The use of spontaneous concept referring to additional information aimed at clarifying the missing and unclear concept. On the contrary, prepared concepts packaged into power-point as the learning media aimed at demonstrating the targeted materials. To the best of our knowledge, explaining concepts merely helps students learn the formula of grammar without comprehensively knowing the real use of English grammar.

Referring to the results both teachers in the Islamic schools adopt the identical teaching method for vocabulary learning using explaining concepts. This method was done in the classroom practice of vocabulary, as the teachers implicitly explained the meaning of

several words that might be complicated for students. The method was aimed to make students understand the clear definitions of the vocabulary, and thus the students could follow the learning flow. The results expand new findings compared to a study by Davoudi and Yousef (2016) applying vocabulary retention, and Muhammed Ali and Ali Bin-Hady (2019) applying four ways, consisting of giving definitions, introducing contextual words, and providing a number of vocabulary inputs.

Explaining concepts is included in one of the five crucial ways in teaching vocabulary (Hatch & Brown, 1995:378) as students are able to vividly identify the meaning of the vocabulary. Further, identifying meaning covers the use of the word in context, as it helps students to grasp the whole text. Consequently, they will be able to demonstrate the vocabulary, either oral or written, since the vocabulary has been mastered. We believe that explaining concepts is a preferable way of teaching vocabulary considering two reasons; relate to students' prior knowledge and memory. According to Horst (2022) teaching vocabulary in an L2 context can be executed by translating the word, providing the synonym or definition, exemplifying an object, and demonstrating examples in context. Thus, these techniques are considered impactful for learners' vocabulary comprehension (Horst, 2022).

Pertinent to teaching pronunciation, working with sounds has been implemented by both teachers with different implementations. Teacher 1 drilled the students with sounds to acquire correct pronunciation without any integrated skills. With this drilling, the students will comprehensively acknowledge and bear in mind the accurate sounds of the words. However, teaching pronunciation should cover the sound of words in sentences found in conversation and written text so that they can easily understand and identify correct word stress as well as intonation (Horst, 2022). On the other hand, Teacher 2 just spontaneously taught pronunciation integrated with reading and speaking skills only when students incorrectly pronounced words. Adopting this way is claimed to be constructive in the skills learned, for example, getting improved the students' fluency and accuracy in speaking (Purwanto, 2019). We believe that integrating vocabulary with major skills will affect on two sides; less students' awareness of receiving the feedback and inadequate pronunciation materials.

Having the learning activities implemented and materials distributed to the students, surprisingly, not all students were able to reach the learning objectives. In responding to the

unaccomplishment of the learning objectives, both teachers had different responses. Teacher 1 provided formative assessment and feedback to improve students' learning achievement and promote independent learning. Besides, the teacher also has a chance to control their students' progress and regression while learning during a semester. This study does not provide any expansions from other studies since it is similar to several studies.

Compared to Teacher 2, the students' uncomplishments were something that the teacher should not be insisted on, meaning that she appreciates the students' performance whether or not the students achieved the learning objectives expected. The teacher believed that students' carried out different English proficiency, intelligence capabilities, backgrounds, as well as learning interests. Thus, 30% out of 100% of learning accomplishment is appreciated by the teacher. This finding emerges new from other studies due to different perspectives of expecting students' achievement. Some studies were only concerned with students' competencies and students' lacks as they attempted to strategize many efforts to make students capable of their learning.

Basically, teachers following the government's curriculum standard have to pursue the same learning objectives set. Compared to teacher's competencies, Teacher 2 puts personal competence on a top list when teaching despite the other competencies; pedagogic, social, and professional. We acknowledge that personality is highly demanded in teaching due to the necessity of students' personal approach to their teacher in order to build up their learning motivation and interest. However, considering professional and pedagogical competence, the attitude toward accomplishing the learning objective is against the curriculum standard. With this in mind, learning accomplishment will be difficult to be dealt with, and learners will not be required to the standard.

The quality of course materials was also investigated, obtained from the unstructured interview. At the outset, the instructional materials were prepared and designed after Teacher 1 conducted a pre-test before starting a new unit. The teacher used the results as a consideration before designing materials. This is really interesting since the students will know the students' initial comprehension before being taught by the teacher. Besides, the interview revealed that the teacher did not use a pre-test to judge the students' understanding yet attempted to acknowledge the students' conditions (backgrounds) and levels to facilitate appropriate materials. Implicitly, the pre-test refers to need analysis which

aims at filling the gap between the input that teachers should provide and the output that the students need to accomplish. Owing to Teacher 2, there was no diagnostic test for the students to begin a new unit for them to learn since the learning regulation comes from the government. In this case, we assumed that a diagnostic test is not really required as the learning objective has been determined to fulfil the learning standards.

Considering the types of materials, Teacher 1 used worksheets and game-based materials. The worksheets were intended to provide a self-study unit to lead the students independently work and practise. The worksheets were distributed to be completed in and outside the classroom. Meanwhile, game-based materials were also demonstrated in teaching grammar and vocabulary, respectively, to drill students in interactive ways since the content of the game matches the students' interests. These findings are surprising since learning grammar was often monotonously implemented, as proven by previous studies Souisa and Yanuarius (2020) that most teachers used conventional teaching approaches. The grammar teaching's emphasis was more on conceptual knowledge and grammar pattern.

Contrary to Teacher 1, the types of materials used by Teacher 2 were textbooks and worksheets distributed from the school. Additionally, those materials were compiled into a power-point form to ease the students figure out the materials related to grammar. The materials decision follows the government rules as the school's status is state; thus, the learning outputs depend on the government as well. Nonetheless, we believe that teachers have full authority to set their own teaching style, learning design, and classroom atmosphere. This belief is supported by Brown (2000).

Referring to teaching pronunciation, Teacher 1 used audio recording is used to bring out authentic materials into the classroom. These typical materials ease the students in identifying the correct pronunciation that is produced by native speakers. Throughout this activity, it is believed that audio recording will be a bridge that connects students' accurate pronunciation and speaking skills. As a consequence, earning good pronunciation is beneficial for learners in the way that their speeches are well understood by the listeners. Desrizon and Narius (2017) argued that producing utterance is related to the practicality of sounds, rhythms, and intonation. On the contrary, Teacher 2 explicitly teaches pronunciation by giving direct feedback to the students. We assumed that throughout this way, the students

gaining pronunciation learning input was not really maximal because it was integrated with speaking skills.

Indicating the students' engagement, the teachers' efforts in making students get involved in learning deal with offering help with studying, talking, and motivating them. Both teachers 1 and 2 helped the students by giving more attention to those who have difficulties in learning and approaching them individually. Thereupon, the students feel convenient and engaged during the learning activity. Clearly, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 believe that teaching does not merely focus on providing various materials or learning activities, yet teachers are essential to make efforts to maintain students' interest in learning. This finding is not new since many researchers found English teachers played a role, such as being motivators to their students.

The teacher's role is always influential, meaning that teachers should be cognizant enough to alternate their teaching execution in relation to conducting teaching, sustaining learners' motivation, and improving teaching quality (Umar, 2021). Accordingly, a teacher's performance becomes a bridge that connects learners' goals and their learning achievement in the forthcoming. Thus, learners' development implicitly depends on the teacher's enlightenment and supervision but is also affected by students' willingness and management to figure out their goals. It means that teachers and students should work together to attain learning accomplishment.

One major point to maintain the students' engagement is to supervise their quality of learning, and both teachers have different answers to this issue. Teacher 1 provided positive competition as a platform to maximize their learning effort in such a way that they will make an effort themselves to learn much either in or out of the classroom. Teacher 1 believes that varying learning experiences is a powerful teaching strategy to make students more convenient, excited, and triggered by the activities. It was ensured that Teacher 1's ways are meaningful to keep good engagement in English learning. When it is opposed Teacher 2, she ensured the students' engagement by individually enquiring about the students' difficulties. This individual treatment was practical for solving the disengaged students.

All things considered, the Cambridge curriculum implemented by Teacher 1 has reflected its principle and aims by providing flexibility in teaching methods and materials, developing learners' language abilities and engagement, and leading learners' creativity. In

the bottom line, the practicality of the curriculum certainly depends on learners' condition, learning environment, as well teachers' pedagogical competence despite its functional curriculum. In other respects, curriculum 13 implemented by Teacher 2 has not been entirely reflected because of two considerations; the learning plans and learning accomplishment were re-designed and adjusted, respectively. The decisions were made due to adapting to the students' conditions and levels. In addition, the execution of curriculum implementation was derived from diverse, relevant theories. The curriculum execution is integrated with various learning approaches, models, and theories to make learners gain the utmost learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

The curriculum adopted in a school or institution is fully considered and agreed upon by the stakeholders, which they could reflect on and assess the curriculum implementation. Referring to students as the stakeholder, the curriculum implementation can be figured out through learners' accomplishment, engagement, convenience, and satisfaction in learning under the adopted curriculum. This means that curriculum practicality can be reflected by learners' accomplishment, whether or not they can achieve the minimum standard. Accordingly, learners' engagement, convenience, and satisfaction possibly contribute to the accomplishment as those points will determine how they acquire the learning process. Second, the way teachers implement the curriculum standard obviously influences learners' accomplishment, which is a reflection of teachers' pedagogy referring to readiness, ability, and preparation in conducting teaching. Third, the curriculum implementation conclusively leads to the school's reflection and evaluation to improve its practicality.

Referring to the two curricula, Cambridge and curriculum 13 were assumed to be worth on the school's vision as well as no comparison towards its practicality. Thus, the output related to the teaching methods, learning materials, and students' engagement were not comparable as those curricula perform on their different essentialities. Nonetheless, certain situations and learners' conditions apparently affect teachers' flexibility in designing and executing the learning materials.

To close up the statement, we believe that the Cambridge curriculum puts high output expectations corresponding with the inputs which refer to international standards. Meanwhile,

Curriculum 13 adopts the principle that English is a foreign language for several considerations; social and culture, learning input and exposure, and assessment. The concept of socially and culturally based materials or learning will bring learners to maintain their identity when learning English. Accordingly, the concept will affect how the learning inputs are designed and exposures are expected, respectively, as a matter that particular assessments are conducted.

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