REVIEWING THE CURRICULUM OF AN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum is a very important guideline as any teacher should have to develop syllabuses, lesson plans, and teaching materials. This study aims at evaluating the current curriculum of the English department of one of the private universities in Indonesia, Sisingamangaraja University (pseudonym); a teacher training college. This study is trying to look at the content of the curriculum to meet the criteria of a good curriculum. The documented data used were collected from the Head of the University's English department. Further, the author also conducted interviews to the Head of the English department and some of the English department's current students. It is expected that the outcome of this study will bring some recommendations to the institution necessary to improve the studied curriculum and it is not unlikely that the recommendations can also be useful for English teachers elsewhere.

Key Words : curriculum; objective; language learning; assessment

ABSTRAK

Kurikulum merupakan pedoman yang penting karena setiap guru harus mengembangkan silabus, rencana pembelajaran, dan materi pembelajaran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai kurikulum yang digunakan oleh Jurusan Bahasa Inggris di salah satu universitas swasta di Indonesia, Universitas Sisingamangaraja (nama samaran); Lembaga Pendidikan Tenaga Kependidikan. Penelitian ini mencoba untuk menganalisa isi dari kurikulum berdasarkan kriteria dari kurikulum yang baik. Data penelitian ini diambil dari dokumen dari ketua Jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini juga melakukan wawancara kepada ketua Jurusan Bahasa Inggris dan beberapa mahasiswa baru jurusan tersebut. Hasil dari penelitian ini diharapkan memberi masukan kepada institusi untuk meningkatkan kurikulumnya dan tidak menutup kemungkinan rekomendasi yang diberikan dalam penelitian ini bermanfaat bagi guru bahasa Inggris di tempat lain.

Kata Kunci: kurikulum; tujuan; pembelajaranbahasa; penilaian

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum the author chose to analyze is the curriculum of the English study program of the teachers training college of the University of Sisingamangaraja, Indonesia. This currently used curriculum was applied since the mid of 2009. The target learners of this curriculum are graduate students from Senior High Schools from different regions in the province; North Sumatera. There have been some curriculum revisions since the establishment of this study program in 1962. However, the author will only analyze the current curriculum with brief comparison to the second latest curriculum when necessary. Since the curriculum is written in *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language), then for reference that needs clarity, it will be translated into English.

Curriculum is 'a general statement of goals and outcomes, learning arrangements, evaluation and documentation relating to the management of programs within an educational institution' (Feez, 1998, p.9) that covers four broad components including 'planning, implementing, evaluating, and managing' (Nunan, 1988, cited in Nunan, 1989, p.14). However, the written document of the current curriculum of the English study program of the University of Sisingamangaraja mentions only some details on planning and little on implementing and managing and nothing about evaluation. It only provides information on the background and the purpose of the curriculum change, the series of activities to produce the new curriculum, the vision, mission, objective, and the unit courses descriptions of the new curriculum. Therefore, the author did some interviews to the Head of the English department and to some of its students to get more comprehensive information to satisfactorily present this curriculum analysis. Later on, for convenience, to refer to the current curriculum of the Sisingamangarja University English study program, the author will simply use '2009 curriculum'.

METHOD

This is a qualitative study conducted by mostly collecting documented data and personal interviews. The data collected were received from the Head of the English department of Sisingamangaraja University in the form of curriculum and syllabuses. Another data such as national curriculum was collected by the author from the Internet. The personal interviews were conducted by the author to the Head of the English

department and some of the current students studying in the English department. This study will focus on discussing every aspect of the curriculum by grouping them into seven categories: the aims and objectives of the curriculum, the history of the Curriculum, the implementation of the Curriculum, the theory of language and language learning that underlies the curriculum, the relationship of the curriculum to government and institution's policies, assessment policies accompanying the curriculum, and professional development provisions regarding the curriculum implementation. The theories used for every aspect of the curriculum discussed will come non-separately under each topic of discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Aims and Objectives of the Curriculum

Richards (2001) defines aim as 'a statement of a general change that a program seeks to bring about in learners and reflects the ideology of the curriculum and shows how the curriculum will seek to realize it' (p.120). The 2009 curriculum's aim is to carry out an effective learning process and to enable graduates to participate effectively and successfully in the

society. More precisely, the Head of the English Department states that its aim is relevant with the institution and the faculty's aims, which is to particularly enable students in teaching English based on the current demands in the work field (perscomm, March 28, 2015). It is exactly as what Brown (1995) suggests that emphasis should be centered on 'students' needs' (p.21), in this case to be professional teachers.

Richards (2002) defines objective as 'a statement of specific changes a program seeks to bring about and results from an analysis of the aim into its different components' (p.11). The objective of the 2009 curriculum is to produce professional, qualified, and ethical English teachers and alumni that can exist to be models in the plural and global society. Particularly, the alumni will be able to compete in various aspects of knowledge including science, attitude and skills, and to be able to build educative cooperation among a variety of society's elements in order to manage an optimum educational process. These are samples of the actual abilities Brown (1995) claims for students to have in achieving a specific aim.

The History of the Curriculum

The prior 2003 curriculum is a competence based curriculum that has

been in congruence to the previous government regulation for national standard curriculum. Then, in 2007, the Indonesian Ministry of National Education designs a new national standard curriculum and requires every school to adapt that new curriculum. However, this English study program has only started to adjust its curriculum in 2009. This 2009 curriculum is a revised edition of the 2003 curriculum designed in August 2009 by considering the Indonesian government regulation about national standard curriculum No.19, Chapter III, article 9, 2005, Sisingamangaraja University's principal academic regulation 2005, and the Head of Sisingamangaraja University's decision letter No.86, 2009. However, the curriculum revisions were basically triggered by the emergence of Unit Level Curriculum from government and the overlapping of some unit courses in the previous 2003 curriculum.

KTSP is designed based on content and graduate competence in which it emphasizes knowledge, skills and fundamental values reflected in consistent and continuous habits for thinking and responding that enables students to be competent. Therefore, to keep up with the national curriculum change that obviously is a demand for producing professional teachers,

Sisingamangaraja University's English Department designs the 2009 curriculum based on competence but with integration of text based. However, the reviewing process seems to be held in quite a rush because it must be applied immediately (perscomm, March 28, 2015). Regarding some of the unit courses overlapping, the Head of the English Department, acknowledges that there are four unit courses that have quite similar contents one to another. They are Pronunciation Practice I, Pronunciation Practice II, Dictation, and English Phonology. So, because they are overlapping, the first three courses are deleted and are substituted with English Basic Competence I and English Basic Competence II that provide students with not only pronunciation but also structure and vocabulary, while the English Phonology remains.

The Implementation of the Curriculum

The new curriculum was implemented in the second semester in 2009 and applied to all students. However, there is no change in the educational organization system which applies credit system. The purpose of the credit system corresponds to the institution's mission in order to provide students more varied and flexible unit courses for their target and interest of

certain professionalism. One credit means fifty minutes lecturing in the classroom, sixty minutes structured academic activity outside the classroom such as doing assignments, writing paper, and library research, and another sixty minutes for independent study (perscomm, March 28, 2015).

Like the previous curriculum, there are 160 credits of unit courses provided for students. Students unnecessarily enroll in all courses since, in order to graduate, they are only required to pass 146 credits consisting of 142 credits mandatory unit and 4 credits elective unit. However, to overcome the problems of that some students have taken some unit courses that are no longer exist in the new curriculum, the English Department makes regulation for unit courses conversion. For example, students who have taken 'PendidikanPancasila' (the special course to learn Indonesian philosophy) can convert the grade for 'Batak's literacy' (one of the Indonesian ethnics' literacy; origins from North Sumatera) without even enrolling in the new course (perscomm, April 25, 2015). Actually, this kind of policy has been implemented since 2003 where there was a curriculum change from the 1997 to the 2003 curriculum.

There are some major changes of unit courses in this new curriculum, they areone unit course changes from mandatory to elective, thirteen unit courses' names modified more specifically, three unit courses no longer provided, and two new mandatory and four new elective unit courses added to the curriculum. Although many of the courses are for general purposes, some of them are targeted for specific purposes such as speech, academic writing, English correspondence, and poetry. In contrast,despite the unit courses' changes, there is no additional teaching staff. Presently, there are 25 lecturers; part timer and full timer, one has Doctoral Degree, most have MastersDegree, and some Bachelor graduates, to teach almost a thousand students enrolling in the English study program.

For teaching practices, every lecturer must take the curriculum as a guideline to design their course and 'develop their courses and programs' (Nunan, 1989, p.17). This is as what Nunan argues that lecturers are people who are dealing with detail work and strategies to run the unit courses in classroom. Yet, both the Head of the English department and current students that the author had interviewed mentioned that there was no change in lecturers' teaching

methods and contents (perscomm, April 24 & 25, 2015).

The new pedagogical theme for this curriculum is integrating genre into the communicative competence based curriculum. Therefore, the lecturers should be able to recognize and teach appropriate genres in their teaching. The text-based syllabus will most appropriately fit in this purpose for that type encompasses all types of syllabuses (Feez, 1998). Then, as representative, the author chose the communicative listening course's syllabus. The finding is that the syllabus only has a general description of the course, lists of sixteen meetings' topics, teaching methods, evaluations and references.

This English study program has actually been supported with two language laboratories one is a multimedia laboratory equipped with 40 computers for students, a widescreen, a projector, a big loudspeaker, teaching materials, and a pilot computer for the lecturer, and the other one is an internet room with 40 computers (perscomm, April 23, 2015). However, these facilities are still only for listening courses (perscomm, April 24 & 25, 2015).

The Theory of Language and Language Learning that Underlie the Curriculum

Two important elements, Feez (1998) emphasizes, to create an English course syllabus are the theory of language and language learning. These theories should drive the curriculum since syllabus is the specific plan for teaching any unit courses from the content of the curriculum. Therefore, a language curriculum must have an underlying theory of language and language learning. Nevertheless, it is not overtly stated in the 2009 curriculum what theory of language and language learning underlies the curriculum. However, by reviewing the aim and objective of the curriculum and the principles on what bases the curriculum is designed from, it seems that all components concentrate on content and competence. It appears that language is understood as text and discourse and the language learning theory is to serve the purpose of communication. It seems to achieve what Harmer (2007) argues that both text and discourse can communicate meaning when they have the factors of 'coherence and cohesion' (p.29). For that purpose, theoretically, lecturers should apply communicative language teaching strategies focused on text, and based on 'communicative competence'

(Celce-Murcia et al., 1995, p.5). Sufficiently, the curriculum's unit courses have covered the required components of linguistic, strategic, sociocultural, actional, and discourse competencies to meet the proposed model of Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) communicative competence.

The Relationship of the Curriculum to Government and Institution's Policies

The Indonesian Ministry of Education provides national curriculum, syllabuses and even lesson plans for school teachers. However, Universities are in differently situation in which the government only provides guidelines as principles to design each University's curriculum, syllabuses, and lesson plans.

The 2009 curriculum is fundamentally organized in accordance with the institution (Sisingamangaraja University) academic regulation, chapter II, article 5, 2005 and the Indonesian government regulation no.19, chapter III, article 9, 2005. Briefly, the curriculum has an inseparable interrelationship to both regulations. Firstly, the English study program revises the 2003 curriculum based on the government regulation for the implementation of a new curriculum; KTSP to best facilitates students to be professional teacher candidates that soon must be able to teach using KTSP in schools. Secondly, the result is the 2009 curriculum that has not only consisted of all courses required by the government but also integrated the University's vision and mission in its aim and objective.

Assessment Policies Accompanying the Curriculum

There are two kinds of assessment to know how much students have learned in the course. They are proficiency test that measures student's understanding of the language and achievement test that measures students' ability after learning a certain course for a period of time. An achievement test can be conducted either after the completion of a lesson or at the completion of a course (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Unfortunately there is no assessment policy accompanying this curriculum, not even a single guideline for lecturers to make a test. So every lecturer freely makes their own tests to evaluate students' learning (perscomm, April 24, 2015) with common assessment forms such as assignment, quiz, practicum, midterm test and final test. For Communicative Listening course, for instance, the tests were about filling in gaps and writing a summary of the video watched or listened to (pers comm., April 25, 2015).

Referring to curriculum evaluation, it is a five-yearly program (perscomms, March, 28, 2015). Yet, the 2009 curriculum is the result of the 'summative evaluation' (Richards, 2001, p. 288) of the 2003 curriculum in which it has been evaluated as less valuable to help students' existence in institution and society (2009 curriculum, p. 2).

Professional Development Provisions Regarding the Curriculum Implementation

Regarding the implementation of the new curriculum, the Head of the English Department admits that it has not been explained to all lecturers and there has not yet been any training or workshop or other forms of professional development arrangements nor is there a plan to make one (perscomms, April 24, 2015). However, apart from the curriculum issue, the English Department has a policy for staff to attend international seminars or workshops and to encourage lecturers to continue their study for a higher degree (perscomms, March, 28, 2015).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Listed in the table below are the strengths and weaknesses of the new curriculum and immediate recommendations to overcome the weaknesses. As the table shows, the main weaknesses are the unclearly defined objectives, unmentioned theories of language and language learning and unchanging contents and methods of teaching despite the changing curriculum.

In line with these weaknesses, some recommendations, as also shown in Table 1 are offered. Concerning the objectives for instance, the description of smaller observable learning performances is suggested so that they could be easily measured. In this case, lecturers are advised to define the objectives of their courses in their syllabuses. With regards to theory, there should be mechanism to make sure that all lecturers are informed so that every body have the same perception about the theory underlying the curriculum. Finally, concerning the teaching method, it is suggested that regular workshops and seminar are conducted to continually develop teacher professionalism.

Table 1. The Strengths and the Weaknesses of the New Curriculum

No	Strengths	Weaknesses	Recommendations
1	It is a new communicative competence based curriculum that soundly integrates text based competence and has sufficiently met the government's regulation.	The curriculum's objectives are still less specifically defined, therefore the author assumes the syllabus of each unit course should have specific stated objectives. Unfortunately, after looking at some syllabuses, none mentions any objective in it.	The curriculum's objectives should be revised to better describe the aims into smaller observable learning performance (Richards, 2002) and teachers should define their courses' objectives in their own syllabuses.
2	Though there are some unit courses no longer provided, students can just convert their grades to the new unit courses in the 2009 curriculum.	The curriculum has not mentioned its theory of language or language learning, and this causes suspicion whether there is any.	The theory of language and language learning underlie the curriculum must be defined and informed to all lecturers so that everyone will have a same perception on how to modify their teaching to correspond the new curriculum.
3	It has greatly accommodated the institution's missions in its aim and objective.	In congruence to the 2009 curriculum, lecturers should apply CLT methods; however, it seems that there is still lack of 'communicative activities' (Harmer, 2007, p.70) happening in the classroom. It appears that the changes are in names only while contents and teaching methods remain unchanged.	This will be of good issue for lecturers' meeting to encourage immediate workshops, seminars or trainings. The informants can be from the lecturers or professionals from government or other institutions. Teachers' teaching can also be observed for good purposes such as for improving teachers' teaching methods, 'needs analysis, or research' (Brown, 1995, p. 193).
4	It has a multimedia laboratory and an Internet room	They are not yet used maximally.	The lecturers or the Head of the study program should organize the use of the room and its facilities to their maximum potential for developing students' skills and knowledge in English.
5		There is no guideline to assess students' learning.	The Head of the English Department should assign a committee to design a guideline for students' learning assessments and administer periodical review because test results will contribute greatly for 'curriculum development and program evaluation plans' (Brown, 1995, p. 125).
6		Despite its implementation in progress, it has not been explained to all lecturers and no initiative for any sort of professional development provision.	The Head of the English Department should arrange a meeting to socialize the curriculum and uses it to collect lecturers' ideas for professional development arrangements.

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