ANALYSIS OF THE INDONESIAN HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOCUSING UPON THE ENGLISH PROGRAM

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Abstract

The central theme of this paper discusses the current issues in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesian contexts particularly the English curriculum of Indonesian secondary school. It will first explore the historical development of English curriculum in Indonesia including the methods or approaches that have so far been used; this section touches on current directions in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) methodology - Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) - studies that may not be readily adapted by some English teachers in Indonesia. It will then move to the discussion of the goals of Indonesian English curriculum - integrated with Character Education - which could be considered a reflection of needs analysis and its ideologies. Lastly, this paper shows some challenges that could have hindered English language learning and teaching in Indonesia particularly related to the washback of English National Examination held by the Indonesian Government each year at the end of the school term; these challenges may need to be addressed by postgraduate universities that provide a TESOL Master`s programme. It also examines other high-stake assessments that seem to have influenced the directions of the English teaching and learning processes in Indonesian contexts.

Keywords: Curriculum, task-based language teaching, character education, language testing washback

INDONESIAN ENGLISH CURRICULUM ELEMENTS, HISTORY, AND IDEOLOGY

After its Independence Day, 17 Augustus 1945, Indonesia, in which English is taught as a foreign language, has experienced several curriculum changes that have included a variety of different approaches in English language teaching, starting from the Grammar Translation Method, Audiolingual Method and Communicative Approach respectively, and in 2004 moving to *Kurikulum KTSP* (the School-Based Curriculum) that applied a genre-based approach (Gustine, 2014; Spolsky & Sung, 2015). Currently, the curriculum in use is *Kurikulum 2013* (the 2013 Curriculum) which gives emphasis to moral education (Hartono, 2014; Kennedy, 2014). However, following the instruction of the current Minister of Education and Culture, Anies Baswedan, who thinks that the implementation of the 2013 curriculum was too early, that is, without adequate preparation making teachers as well as students not ready to use it, due to the lack of training, most schools stopped implementing the 2013 curriculum and returned to the school-based curriculum (the 2004 curriculum), while the 2013 curriculum is being revised (Sundaryani, 2014).

First of all, to the best of my knowledge, there is no explicit information on needs analysis, that is, how the team of the 2013 curriculum designers collect the data on student needs including the users, target population, and procedures for conducting needs analysis (Richards, 2001). The needs, however, can still be identified by looking at the goals of Indonesian education that are also presented in the official document of the 2013 curriculum in that the goals reflect the needs (Richards, 2001; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Based on the Government Regulations Number 19 Year 2005 about the National Standards of Education, the main goals of Indonesian education, pertaining to all of the subjects taught in Indonesia, are to focus any formal learning activities upon the development of student faith, characters, or morality, healthy, knowledge, creativity, independence and being democratic and responsible (Putra, Nitiasih, Budasi, & Lin, 2014; Ahmad, 2014).

To address the main goals, like all subjects, English language in the 2013 curriculum directs its goals in two forms of objectives (1) core competence (*Kompetensi Dasar*) which deals with moral and character building and psychomotor and cognitive aspects; and (2) basic competence (*Kompetensi Inti*) which focuses upon the contents of the knowledge of each subject (Spolsky & Sung, 2015). The high percentage of student-relevant crime in Indonesia indicates that Indonesian students are lack of morality (Ronaldi, 2014; Sari, 2013). Morality education can be considered to be one of the Indonesian student needs as Richards (2001) and Nation and Macalister (2010) point out that the word "needs" may refer to lacks, wants, and necessities. Another goal of the 2013 curriculum is to respond to the finding of the study conducted by PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) that Indonesian student reading ability is considered to be lowest among its neighbourhood countries (Ilma & Pratama, 2015; Prasetianto, 2014).

Regarding the ideologies underpinning the goals (Richards, 2001; Nation and Macalister, 2010), the 2013 curriculum can be considered to be based on academic rationalism, also called "classical humanism" (Richards, 2001). It gives more emphasis to student intellectual development or the contents of subject matters. Nevertheless, the 2013 curriculum also contains elements of social and economic efficiency by emphasizing practical and functional skills (Chairani, 2015), and learner-centeredness (Chairani, 2015; Kennedy, 2014) as it fosters learner autonomy. Moreover, the 2013 curriculum can also be regarded as having elements of social reconstructionism, given it also helps develop student attitudes and values including tolerance. Lastly, the 2013 curriculum uses cultural pluralism (Lee, 2013), as well, in that it attempts to help students respect other cultures.

Because each chapter of the textbooks is organized around topics or themes covering the four skills of English language (Ahmad, 2014), the syllabus framework of the 2013 curriculum can be said to implement a topic-based syllabus (Richards, 2001). It is one type of

an analytic syllabus in which the language is not linguistically graded and which is based on a product-oriented syllabus, focusing upon the knowledge and skill that students should achieve after any instructions (Nunan, 1988, p. 38). As the textbooks include most such texts as narration, description, report, recount, procedure, exposition, and others, the methodology used within the textbooks can be said to be based on a genre-based approach (Ilma & Pratama, 2015; Prasetianto, 2014).

The assessment in the 2013 curriculum uses summative assessment (Taras, 2005; Boston, 2002), for students take exams in the end of the semesters as well as the national examination (Sundaryani, 2015a). Unlike the previous curricula that are never evaluated, the new curriculum (the 2013 curriculum), after facing much criticism, is now implementing summative evaluation, conducted at the end or after its implementation. The 2013 curriculum is also projected to use formative evaluation as the teachers and students will be expected to do the evaluation throughout the academic years (Elyda, 2013). At any rate, until now there has been no new policy regarding the improvement of the 2013 curriculum.

ONE CURRICULUM ELEMENT THAT PRESENTS A PROBLEM (COSNTRAINS)

The problematic curriculum element that I highlight here is the summative assessment. Its role in the 2013 curriculum is to find out how much students have learnt and to determine whether they pass for the next level (Coffey, Black, & Atkin, 2001; Le Grange & Reddy, 1998) affecting, thus, the grades at the end of the school term. This summative assessment in the form of the national examination assessing student listening and reading skills is not in harmony with the goals of English language teaching in Indonesia that covers the four skills as shown in the attachment of the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education Number 22 Year 2006: (1) students should able to communicate both in spoken and written English; (2) communication is to understand information, to express thoughts and attitudes, and to develop science, technology, and culture; and (3) the ability of communication which is meant

here is to understand and/or to produce oral and/or spoken texts which covers the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Moreover, the national examination unfairly provides the same level of tests for all schools in Indonesia without appropriately considering the different quality of each school. Some schools have inadequate facilities such as no computers, science and language laboratories, and libraries, and even some of the schools in villages have no electricity. The national examination makes teachers cheat to help their students pass the exam (LaForge, 2013), for if students fail, teachers will be considered to have failed too. This reality is contradictory to the main goal of Indonesian national education which is to develop student characters, or morality (honesty) (Putra, Nitiasih, Budasi, & Lin, 2014; Ahmad, 2014). Moreover, the national examination has caused student anxiety (Furaidah, Saukah, & Widiati, 2015) that may affect student motivation in learning English (Rost and Wilson, 2013).

The aforementioned facts then may indicate that the assessment used in the national examination has less intrinsic validity (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), also called "content validity" (Nation and Macalister, 2010), because it does not measure the intended goals. The national examination can also be said to be less practical as it spends a large amount of state budget around US$66.29 million for each national examination (Natahadibrata, 2013a). In 2013 Indonesia lost portion of this sum, around US$560,700 (Natahadibrata, 2013b), due to the late distribution of the exam materials. This year, because of the leak of the exam questions, about 35 million exam papers have to be destroyed (Sundaryani, 2015b).

CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF HOW THE ASSESSMENT RELATES TO THE NEEDS ANALYSIS, OBJECTIVES, SYLLABUS, METHODOLOGY, AND EVALUATION

Needs analysis, also called need assessment (Richards, 1990; Graves, 1996), deals with a number of procedures on collecting and validating student lacks, wants, and necessities (Richards, 2001; Nation and Macalister, 2010). Different from Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who divide needs analysis into target and learning needs analysis, Richards (1990) refers it

into communicative and situation needs analysis; the latter may also be called environment needs analysis or constraint needs analysis which covers both positive and negative constraints (Nation and Macalister, 2010). One of the significances of needs analysis is to gain a large amount of information from teachers, students, writers, employers, and others who may provide useful, relevant information into the curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation, shortly termed "curriculum development" (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards, 1990). As they do not administer any needs analysis, the 2013 curriculum designers seem to subscribe to the same principle as Richards (2001) that when long-term goals can be identified, needs can be determined by the curriculum designers themselves without involving students. To the extent that the 2013 curriculum provides no needs analysis, the relation between the assessment and the needs analysis can be appraised by relating it to the goals that are built on needs analysis. Inasmuch as the goals of the 2013 curriculum are to improve student ability in spoken and written English, the assessment seems to not correspond to these needs as the assessment does not assess student writing and speaking skill. It then creates dilemmas as teachers want to focus upon developing student writing and speaking skill, contrary to the national examination that only assesses listening and reading skills.

The 2013 curriculum may face a challenge reaching its goals regarding its syllabus that focuses upon the content rather than the functions. Richards (2001) explains that in contrast to other approaches of syllabus design that use some form of content as the bridge to focus upon the English language skills, a topic-based syllabus focuses upon the content of information of the topics as the carrier of language. Nevertheless, Jalilzadeh and Tahmasebi (2014) state that this type of syllabus may respond to the integration of the four skills because it provides authentic materials on a specific topic that may require students to read, listen, speak, and write. The 2013 curriculum syllabus seems to share the same view as each chapter provides material on the four skills (Ahmad, 2014). A genre-based approach as the

methodology used in the 2013 curriculum appears to have reflected the syllabus and the objectives in that it provides activities to cover the four skills. Nunan (1991) discusses the use of a genre-based approach for practicing listening and speaking, although it is mostly used for teaching writing and reading. The national examination as the assessment, in contrast, is inconsistent with this syllabus and methodology because it provides no attempts to assess the four skills.

In relation to curriculum evaluation, Indonesian curriculum designers appear not to make best use of assessment as a major source in gaining information for the gradual development of a curriculum (Richards, 1990; Nation and Macalister, 2010) since there have been no Indonesian curricula that have ever been evaluated. It also happens to teachers in the classrooms, for they are not trained to use assessment for curriculum evaluation (Adi, 2012; Elyda, 2014). The 2013 curriculum is currently being evaluated, but again the evaluation is not based on the results of the assessment since the focus rests solely upon evaluating the textbooks.

CHANGES RECOMMENDED (RATIOANALE AND MERITS)

Taking into account the above-mentioned facts and the principles of the reliability, validity, and practicality for assessment, the solution I recommend here is the deletion of the national examination conducted in Indonesia and to replace it with the implementation of formative assessment covering the fours skills. Given the concept of "formative assessment" is used inconsistently by researchers (Brookhart, 2001), this paper will share the same definition as what Wininger (2005) proposes that formative assessment provides information in the form of feedback to teachers and students regarding the learning progress in the purpose of improving the teaching and learning processes. Additionally, summative assessment may serve the function of formative assessment when the former provides feedback for student and teacher development in learning and instruction (Taras, 2005).

Inasmuch as Indonesian students have anxiety in learning English, affecting their motivation, the use of formative assessment may bring relief to this issue because the uses of such assessment feedback create student desire to succeed at school and lead to student intrinsic motivation and persistence to learning (Brookhart, 2001; Harlen & James, 1997). Given the goals of Indonesian English language teaching cover the fours skills and each unit of the textbooks provides activities for practicing the four skills, formative assessment could be conducted at the end of each unit to inform students what they have acquired and the desired objectives, yet there should be no grades as can create tension between teachers and students (Brookhart, 2001). To give students grades, the formative assessment can be conducted in the middle and at the end of the semester for 40% + 60%, yet both must be as informational as possible (Biggs, 1998) and must cover the four skills as Nunan (2004) states that what is tested should be in harmony with what is taught. It then makes this assessment meet the principle of intrinsic validity (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), or content validity (Nation and Macalister, 2010). Compared to the previous issues arising from the 2013 curriculum tests held in the middle and end of each semester as well as the national examination, these recommended types of assessment are more practical in that they spend a less amount of time and cost. To make these assessments more reliable, teachers, in creating tests, may need more training from language testing experts provided by the government.

MECHANISMS FOR EVALUATING CHANGES

Providing feedback to students (formative assessment) meets both the target (situation, or environment) and the learning needs as Nation and Macalister (2010) points out that for assessment to meet environment analysis it should not only be economical but also let students know their improvement, and teachers also should assess and provide feedback to any outcomes of the class activities. They continue that an English program should show students that their learning is having progress (lacks), that what they are learning is what they

want to learn (wants), and that they are having better progress at tasks that will be needed after the program (necessities). Formative assessment also corresponds to the 2013 curriculum syllabus and methodology, given it covers the four skills, and the feedback from it would be a main source for curriculum evaluation. Taking into account this consistency, and the validity as well as the practicality of formative assessment, I can make a claim that it can improve the alignment of the six elements. It is important not to ignore, though, due to the political constraints it is not always easy to change the policy of Indonesian government in the dismissal of the national examination. Moreover, providing training for teachers in creating reliable tests may need a large amount of Indonesian budget, but at least it is likely more practical than spending the budget for conducting the national examination.

To make sure the six elements have actually improved and to increase the validity of the obtained data, I will employ data triangulation (McMurray, Scott, & Pace, 2004, p.263; Richards, 2001; Gray, 2014, p. 37), that is, collecting information from more than one sources (interviews, questionnaires, and document analyses). Focusing upon ongoing development, I will use formative evaluation based on Richards`s explanation (2001), the first question to ask is whether the curriculum receives its goals. Limited to the time and cost, I will interview several curriculum developers, have a staff (teacher) meeting for gathering information (Nation and Macalister, 2010), and also analyse the results of student tests as they may provide feedback on the teaching and learning quality (Graves, 1996). The second type of information is regarding the success of the curriculum implementation. I will provide questionnaires in the form of self-report scales that contain a list of principles in teaching, so teachers and students will only need to check items listed to indicate whether the principles or procedures have been attained. I will also provide an open-ended question to let students and teachers provide any comments that may not have been covered in the list. The last thing is to know the degree of the satisfaction with the curriculum by both teachers and students. I would

interview some students from different classes as the representatives but prior to it I would request each student to have a group discussion with their own classmates to collect any useful, relevant information. To teachers, I will not do any interviews in this step since I collect the relevant information in the first step that also focuses upon the attainment of the aims or goals.

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