Does Curriculum Help Students to Develop Their English Competence?  
A Case in Indonesia

Dwi Poedjiastutie  
Department of English and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Fida Akhyar  
Postgraduates Program, Department of English and Education 
University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Deviy Hidayati  
Postgraduates Program, Department of English and Education, 
University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Fajriyah Nurul Gasmi  
Postgraduates Program, Department of English and Education, 
University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

Abstract
To sustain its future competitive employment both at national and international level, Indonesia Government needs to invest more in its human resources. Therefore, education is the critical aspect to prepare highly educated and well-trained human resources for an innovation driven global competitiveness. In education, when curriculum fails to provide sufficient skills and competence for learners, human resources will not likely to move up to higher development level. This article aims at exploring the issues and challenges encountered by Indonesia government in improving the most crucial aspect needed for global competitiveness that is English communication competence. English communication level of Indonesian learners is considered low and satisfactory. Since Indonesian students obtain English from schools and classroom teaching, curriculum objectives should help them achieving the target of learning. However, there are three major issues found in Indonesia curriculum: top-down approach, the absence of Needs Analysis (NA) studies, and no curriculum evaluation. In nutshell, those three factors are suspected to contribute the underdeveloped English communication competences of Indonesian learners. In view of this, Indonesian can learn from other countries that have succeeded in reforming and developing English curriculum while taking into account the uniqueness of its own context.

Keywords: Curriculum development, English competence, challenges, Indonesian learners, Global competition

Introduction

To sustain its future competitive employment both at national and international level, Indonesia Government needs to invest more in its human resources. Therefore, education is the critical aspect to prepare highly educated and well-trained human resources for an innovation driven global competitiveness. More specifically, one of the indicator of qualified human resources for nowadays global competition is the citizens’ possession of high level of language of networking that is English.

The fact that English in Indonesia ranked below other Asian countries had been reported by English Proficiency Index (EPI) in 2017. Eighty countries were surveyed, Indonesia ranked 39 falling behind Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The survey used the English components such as grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary as the basis of its index assessment system. Based on this rank, Indonesia was considered having low English proficiency level with other Asian countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. This study clearly shows that the development of English teaching in Indonesia is still low and unsatisfactory.

EPI is the world’s largest English proficiency ranking for the global scope. Indonesia should consider this data of EPI as a feedback for the English teaching since it is now we are moving to the integration of ASEAN Economic Competition (AEC), the emergence of English as a global language has made English a socially desirable language in Indonesia and elsewhere in the world. In AEC, the quality of human resources has critical roles and more specifically the institutions that prepare future human capital for the country (Nurcahyo, Harahap, & Gharnaditya, 2015). Consequently, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has constituted a major part of the curriculum in private and public institutions in Indonesia over several decades since high level of English proficiency become a fundamental requirement to participate in this worldwide trade, economy, industry, and education collaboration (Choi & Lee, 2008). In other words, developing human resources’ English proficiency level will bring potential benefits for the countries to participate in wider opportunities and global workforce. Based on the points above, examining the development of teaching English in Indonesia is deemed necessary since it will provide clear picture of English for global demands. (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017; Zainal & Ching, 2016; Fitzpatrick & O’Dowd, 2014; Cohen & Weaver, 2005; Coleman, 1988).

Indonesian Government has conducted several efforts to develop English competence level of its teachers and learners. One of the efforts was curriculum revision and change. However, the revision occurs in relatively short period of time. Tobias & Wales (2014) explain that the changes which include the transformation of content-based approach to competency-based approach; teacher-centered to students-centered approach; and centralized to decentralized system require the educational actors to adjust the adopted approaches in relatively short period of time as well. (Ilma & Pratama, 2015; Exley, 2004).

In education, when curriculum fails to provide sufficient skills and competence for learners, human resources will not likely to move up to higher development level. As a matter of fact, there are three major issues found in developing curriculum in Indonesia. They are top-down approach, the absence of Needs Analysis (NA) studies, and no curriculum evaluation. The following section will discuss in more detail.
Top-down process to curriculum development


One of critical issues in Indonesian national curriculum is formulated using the top-down approach. Top-down process implicates the political nuance and the problem with top-down system is giving less or no room for the school to think critically and creatively in its implementation (Madya, 2007; Choi & Lee, 2008). As the result, school as the executor of curriculum is unable to develop their creative programs relevant to students’ needs and their ability level. In addition, the diverse characteristics of students in Indonesia make centralized curriculum fail to address students’ specific needs. Okoth (2016) suggests that curriculum should allow teachers or any educational practitioners to manage their lesson suitable for their learners’ needs.

The curriculum reforms which are solely based on the single perspective of policy-makers will unlikely match with stakeholders as the participant in the major of educational reform. The roles of stakeholders are vital to support and to provide feedback towards the global demand. Taylor (2005) argues that stakeholders’ participations are supposed to take place throughout the entire curriculum development process, including planning, delivering, and evaluating. Dharma (2008) adds that the vital role of stakeholders in curriculum development is also to ensure relevance of curriculum towards the need of life, social life, business, and industrial life. By incorporating both sides: the government and stakeholders in developing curriculum, the challenges and discrepancies in educational reform can be respectively minimized (Thanosawan, 2017). Therefore, it is deemed necessary that the changes of English curriculum have to redirect society and language users to adapt with the future demands that is to be competitive in global economy and industry where the national development will be our goals.

Kirubahar, Santhi, & Subashini, (2010) claim that high English communication competence has strong relationship with the employability. Employability means one's potency to be accepted in job markets, maintain them and (or) move to highest position. In many cases, especially in the context of Indonesia nowadays, this will depend on the ability to speak English fluently and to effectively communicate ideas as well as having competences in reading and writing. However, the curriculums often mismatch with the organization skills (Lie, 2007). As the result, even though learners have been learning English for six years, their communication competence neither reached the expected level required for overseas collaboration nor competitive work force industries.

The absence of Needs Analysis (NA) study as the essential part of curriculum development

Another crucial issue in Indonesian curriculum is the absence of Need Analysis (NA) studies. Brown (1995) defines that NA is systematic collection of both subjective and objective information. A Need Analysis is very crucial step in the development of curriculum for it can identify learners’ target situation. course (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017, Chaudron, Doughty, Kim, Kong, Lee, J., Lee, Y., & Long, Rivers, & Urano, 2005)
A number of NA studies have considered students’ and teacher’s perspectives essential in developing the language curriculum (e.g., Tsao, 2011; Gorsev & Volkan, 2010; Watanabe, 2006). For instance, Watanabe (2006) found that integrating both students’ and teachers’ needs and perspectives in a language curriculum are of vital relevance. Subsequently, it leads to more autonomous policy-making process rather than endorsing learning objectives voiced by those who are distant from the classrooms. He further states that the absence of NA in curriculum development may lead to potential disconnection between learning opportunities and the essential communication outcomes. This highlights the importance of NA as the first and vital step in reconciling such disparities views among stakeholders involved in education. It is crystal clear that a thorough and comprehensive NA should be conducted before designing English curriculum and setting the competencies. The findings of this need analysis should enable schools to make a more realistic alignment of curricular objectives and the student needs (Lie, 2007).

Despite its advantage, the use of NA in Indonesian curriculum development, is not considered vital. Lauder (2008) states Indonesian’s education is lack of discovery on how much people need to learn English, the importance and the function of English for their life. The absence of NA will result in no clear direction of learners’ learning and communication goals.

The no clear direction of communication goals is exacerbated with insufficiency time allocation for English teaching. The newest curriculum (Curriculum 2013) has provided four hours per-week for English from junior up to senior high school level. However, this time allotment remains low compared to other Asian countries. Hong Kong and The Philippines allocate 10 hours per-week for English despite the fact that English is as a second language in both countries (Choi &Lee, 2008).

Further, Panggabean (2015) affirms that Indonesian learners take very long time to acquire English since they do not make English conversation as habit and have a little English exposure. This is in stark contrast with the principle of curriculum development presented in Gallo and Renandya (2001) who argue that curriculum must help students to establish the habit by providing appropriate teaching strategy for the learners and that must be supported by the availability of time. Furthermore, in the classroom setting, Panggabean (2015) also found that the teacher rarely gave students’ tasks in order to produce the language. Even if they do so, the time allocation for speaking practice is relatively short for the big size of speaking class.

Similar issue is reported by Marcellino (2008). He said that the large class might result in less exposure of English. It is due to inadequacy time for teacher to focus on everyone progress in acquiring English. Time allotment should provide learning opportunities for students understanding other elements of language as pronunciation, idioms and other English expressions (Rachmawati & Madkur, 2014).

No evaluation prior to curriculum change

Another essential issue is curriculum evaluation. Curriculum evaluation should be conducted to assure the quality, the effectiveness and the value of a program, product, project, process, objective of curriculum (Worthen & Sanders, 1998). Taylor (2005) conceptualizes evaluation as a vital process to determine the extent to which the communication and learning
outcomes has matched curriculum objectives. In Indonesia, the present curriculum is also meant
to answer the criticism of the previous English Curricula which allegedly fail to help Indonesian
students to readily compete with those from other nations (Lengkanawati, 2005). As a matter of
fact, only a few numbers of studies were conducted as an evaluation of the previous curriculum
(Darsih, 2014).

One of the studies is reported by Ilma and Pratama (2015) mentioning several issues
regarding the evaluation of curriculum 2013. First, curriculum 2013 is seen to be too early to
implement without prior pilot project. Saryono (2013) gives the example that during the
administration of the newest curriculum, especially in East Java, there were only few teachers who
understand the curriculum very well. The transformation from the previous curriculum Kurikulum
Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) or School-Based Curriculum to Curriculum 2013 (K-13) has
brought some significant impact of changes. The new curriculum 2013 use scientific approach,
authentic methodology and assessment (Mulyati, Nurkamto, Suwandi, Slamet, & Andayani 2017)
which are not introduced and employed in the previous ones. The government is expected to
provide adequate time to introduce the concept of new curriculum and explain the result of
evaluation from the previous one as its basis of curriculum changing. This way will help teachers
to understand why the changes needed and to know how to adequately implement every single
element suggested inside the new curriculum (K-13). Orafi (2013) states that curriculum
implementation must be described in a concrete way, especially how to put the concept into an
actual practice. According to Punia (2008), Indonesian curriculum is difficult to be implemented
due to lack of teachers’ perspective in the curriculum evaluation. Darsih (2014) states that
new curriculum requires a thorough assessment for every integrated theme and teachers need a lot of
time to prepare for writing lesson plans, creating teaching aids, or making students’ narrative
assessment.

Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) explain some reasons why teachers mostly resist changes of
curriculum. First, they are lack of ownership, lack of benefit, lack of administrative and training
supports and sudden wholesale change. Especially for English subject, Darsih (2014) claims
teachers have failed to implement K-13 due to lack of authentic assessment, delivery skill and time
allotment for the English practice. Due to this, many teachers remain using the approach and
teaching strategy that they have already known in previous curriculum rather than uncover the
objectives and benefits of the current curriculum. The lack of training may potentially contribute
failures of implementing the new one Consequently, the socialization of this newborn curriculum
needs to be intensive due to the complexity of its classroom application. The complexity can be
viewed in understanding the principles and practices. Lengkanawati (2005) asserts that there are
two major things that teachers must understand from the recent curriculum: the content and the
process. The content covers the holistic teaching principles, skills, and knowledge in classroom
discourse. The process refers to the ways such as how content should be delivered, how classroom
should be managed, how and how many times learners should be assessed, are all the assessment
aspects given by the same teacher or different teachers, are other teachers in other subject involved.
The level of teachers’ understanding both the content and the process greatly contribute to the
teacher’s readiness to face the current model of national curriculum.
The changes have affected not only teachers but also learners in their learning process. Ornstein and Hunkins (2013) state sudden changes in the curriculum might cause the decline in students’ achievement. Students may not easily adjust to the learning system in the new curriculum.

For example, the current transformation from KTSP (School-Based Curriculum) to K-13 or Curriculum 2013 has brought some differences in learning activity; from exploration, elaboration, and confirmation focus and to observing, questioning, processing, presenting, summarizing, and creating focus (Prihantoro, 2015). School-based curriculum (KTSP)- the previous curriculum authorized schools to create learning objectives and goals based on the region or geographical conditions and needs. Whereas, curriculum 13 (K-13) focuses on a certain acquisition that should be obtained by learners regardless their diverse conditions and needs. Consequently, students will not instantly be able to change their learning style and need intensive trainings to adjust the principles of new curriculum.

Intensive trainings for both teachers, educators, and students, affect budget allocation respectively. Generally, in attempt to improve the access of quality of educational service, teachers’ quality, and better learners’ outcomes, governments had set twenty percent from their national budget for all provinces areas across Indonesia. Provincial and regional governments are also required to allocate the same portion of the budget (Sulisworo, Nasir, & Maryani, 2017; Korompot, 2012). This shows that the government deliberately takes serious measurement in distributing the budget for educational purposes, and the actualizations can be seen in providing the program of certification, professional training, and additional incentives for teacher. Among those programs, professional teaching training has the significant movement to improve teachers’ communication competences in its professional development training (Rowden, 2011).

Dasuki (2009) states four aspects are covered to improve teachers’ professionalism: personal competence, social competence, pedagogical competence, and professional competence. By covering those aspects, teachers are expected to be able to present better teaching capacity, and especially for English teacher, it is expected to raise students’ willingness to communicate as well as the improvement of learners’ proficiency level. The government eagerness will be pointless without clear and strong supports from teachers as the curriculum executors at classroom level. Hasan and Bahrain (2014) in his study found that many teachers have lack of commitment to participate in professional development activities. For instance, English teachers who need to develop their performance in teaching speaking, requires practical training not just having discussion or workshop. They need more challenging training conducted overseas. The overseas training will open wider opportunities for teachers to obtain wealth knowledge of language teaching and possibly shift from *learning to know a language* to *learning to use a language*. The shift of the new teaching paradigm will direct them to best performance as well as maintain classroom interaction in which students will actively engage to communication. This is in line with Margana (2013) who said that Indonesian government now facilitate bilingual teachers to be actively involved in training programs as sending and facilitating them to undertake higher degree overseas.
Last but not least, the government disparity distribution attention towards the national budget in remote and rural area. The inequity of budget allocation in rural area caused many teachers unable to participate in some professional development trainings. Qoyyimah (2015) also found in her study that even the opportunities of joining some development training have been provided by government, teachers in remote and rural area have less opportunities compared to those who teach in big cities. Teachers in big cities pose better performance in term of updating their lesson plan, skill, or even using technology for teaching as the outcome of the training. Pasassun (2003) states that the improvement of teacher’ English proficiency will not be able to upgrade to higher level with inequality of budget distribution. Even though remote areas teachers occupy 40% of national population, they are a hundred per cents of Indonesia future development.

Implication for English teaching in Indonesia

Indonesia is very unique and diverse. The differences cover almost in any aspect of life. Daily communication among Indonesian people of the same ethnic and linguistic background is conducted in their mother tongue and there are almost 700 of ethnic languages exist in Indonesia. However, social interaction between people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds mainly occurs in Bahasa Indonesia. Throughout Indonesia the need for English learning has increased over time; however, the impetus for developing English language proficiency differs across various regions of the nation. For instance, in remote and rural areas, the need for English might be viewed as less immediate. On the other hand, it is likely to be stronger in the big cities such as Jakarta, Denpasar, and several other provincial capitals where international networks are required and where, due to tourism and the employment of English-speaking expatriates, direct contacts with native-English speakers is more common. Government should be open to several alternatives of its curriculum implementations to across regions in Indonesia depending on several factors mentioned above and the readiness in terms of, region needs, human and budget resources. For example, some schools should be allowed to adopt KTSP (School-Based) curriculum and some others may be allowed to adopt K-13. when they are ready.

Since the result of English proficiency level of students may be different between schools using School Based curriculum (KTSP) and schools employing K-13, government should have screening institutions which have the authority to recommend school leavers based on their English proficiencies level to study at particular university. The government can assess university ranking in its particular regional and provincial areas on schools’ academic research and reputation. For example, the low English proficient student is strongly recommended to study at university match to its ranking. This is to minimize the teaching problems occur when those students moving to higher or tertiary level. At English Department at tertiary level, for example, up to now there are still a lot of complaint and students’ communication development are considered unsatisfactory. English speaking teachers are struggle a lot since many upper secondary graduates from remote areas with very limited English proficiency enrolled at the universities located in Metropolitan cities. The significant differences in English proficiency level between students from remote areas where English communication is not their priority needs and students from cities where English becomes their priority create more chaotic classroom teaching situation. Due to the high disparity of students’ English proficiency level between high school graduates from remote areas and big cities put teachers additional burden in improving students’ communication competences when they are at universities.
As it has been mentioned earlier that the NA procedure not only can be used by the Indonesian Government as the empirical data for designing any language program and its curriculum but also can be used to develop appropriate Professional Development (PD) useful for developing teachers’ capacity. Many studies suggest that teachers need professional development training dealing managing large size of class, managing mixed ability groups, designing learner-centred classes, and understanding new teaching approaches and paradigms.

Professional development training also should not only from Ministry of Education officials but also from people and expertise in a wide range of backgrounds such as English teachers, curriculum designers, English material developers, translators and interpreters, early childhood teachers, foreign language course managers, motivators, psychologists, school counsellors, home schooling teachers, university professors and classroom researchers. This would give teachers a complete picture of stakeholders’ current needs, issues, and trends of English learning. This approach will possibly connect classrooms with real life employment and reduce mismatch.

Where English is a foreign language, it can be very difficult for language learners to find out opportunity to use for communication because they do not use for daily interactions. Yet wider exposure to English would give students greater opportunities of using it. Teachers can invite committed English users of particular groups or individual such as native speakers or expatriates who were living local to meet students in schools. They can share their experiences and description of their cultures in English. Such activities could be conducted either regularly or as an incidental program. In addition, teachers can also invite some English school teachers, English courses instructors, parents who are able to speak English to functions held for students at schools. The more opportunities teachers can create for students to hear English spoken and use their own English skills, the more confident students will become.

Conclusion

In short, curriculum is small aspect in the big picture of education system of one country. However, if the curriculum is not designed with no careful identification of factors and the development ignores complexity of educational issues, the effect will not accordingly support the development and implementation of language policies at both macro and micro levels, with far-reaching consequences. The government has done several efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. One of the efforts is the shift of curriculum. However, changes do not always guarantee that it will meet the expectation due to many factors such as programs, processes, and people. This should be used to inform the Ministry of Education about the complexity and the difficulties associated with the implementation of the current centralized and top-down curriculum. Therefore, to design more locally-sensitive syllabi and to plan more relevant in-service and pre-service teacher training programs to support effective implementation are considered crucial measurement. Moreover, the use of NA by educators in a range of contexts to ensure the relevance of curriculum content and design.

So far, the implementation of Indonesian curriculum proves that it always faces a lot of resistances and fails to fulfil the standard communication competence. The absence of need analysis lead to discrepancy between teacher’s and learner’s need; a mismatch between the reality
Does Curriculum Help to Develop Students’ English proficiency and curriculum expectations. In addition, the lack of evaluation on the previous curriculum inhibits teachers to implement the new one.

About the Authors:
Dwi Poedjiastutie is an English Lecturer at Department of English and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia. She holds a PhD degree in education from Curtin University, Australia. She has more than 20 years working experience in EFL teaching. Her research interest includes curriculum development in EFL context, English for Specific Purpose material development.

Fida Akhyar Postgraduates Program, English Education at Muhammadiyah University of Malang Indonesia.

Deviy Hidayati, Postgraduates Program, English Education at Muhammadiyah University of Malang Indonesia.

Fajriyah Nurul Gasmi, Postgraduates Program. English Education at Muhammadiyah University of Malang Indonesia.

References
Does Curriculum Help to Develop Students’ Poedicsation, Akhyar, Hidayati, Gasmi

Language Education. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/3002767/English_at_Work_An_Analysis_of_Case_Reports_about_English_Language_Training_for_the_21st-century_Workforce


Punia, R. S. (2008). *To What Extent Top-down or Centralised Initiatives will be successful to determine the Nature of Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment?* Retrieved from http://www.actionresearch.net/living/punia/topcentral.pdf


