From School-Based Curriculum to Characters Curriculum: An Analysis of 'Pathway to English'

Asri Purnamasari English Education Department,
Universitas Kristen Indonesia (The Christian University of Indonesia)
Jl. Mayjen Sutoyo, Jakarta, Indonesia
Asri.purnamasari@uki.ac.id

Abstract

This study analyses the implementation of the 2013 Characters Curriculum for Senior High School Grade XI General Programme English materials 'Pathway to English' in Indonesia. By using a qualitative exploratory study, an exploration of the implementation of the Characters Curriculum was explored. The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews to investigate some pre-service and in-service teachers on the implementation of the characters' curriculum by using 'Pathway to English' as the main materials in their schools - the pilot schools. The results and achievements of the study in the pilot schools will contribute to the appropriate application of evaluation and development of the Characters Curriculum to all schools in Indonesia. In this study, the analysis of English materials is focused on some essential elements of language syllabus – objectives, language learning philosophy, methodology, materials used, and evaluation. It is found that the General Programme English materials 'Pathway to English' based on Characters' Curriculum has some strengths and some weaknesses related to the teacher's creativity, learning context, and learners' knowledge. The study recommends some inputs on teaching methodology, which leads to the improvement of teachers' creativity and the development of learners' knowledge, related to the cultural awareness of English language use in their context. This study also suggests some evaluation on Characters Curriculum related to materials, methodology, approaches, and techniques of implementing Characters Curriculum, to have clear instructions for teachers to teach within national standards. Furthermore, the teaching methods could be created based on the context where the learners learn the language. Thus, this curriculum will give some chances for teachers to teach and reach not only knowledge but also cultural awareness and the value of learning to be implemented in their real lives.

Keywords: school-based curriculum, characters curriculum, English material development, and teaching methodology

Editor's Note

Asri Purnamasari is an Assistant Professor at the English Education Department, The Christian University of Indonesia, Jakarta. She received a Master's degree in M.Ed. in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the University of Exeter, United Kingdom, and Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education from the Sanata Dharma University of Indonesia. Her passion for teaching, learning, and researching in educational fields leads her way to serve education through some projects for worldwide society. She is interested in teacher continuing professional development, language acquisition, language learning and teaching, educational technology, curriculum and materials development, and language testing and assessment.

Introduction

Indonesia has made significant efforts to learn new languages, especially English as a foreign language. These efforts encourage not only people as language learners, but also teachers as the sources of learning to plan the language courses, prepare teaching materials, and teach their classes. These aspects lead to a language curriculum development such as how teachers need to know about the procedures to determine the content of language program, the learners' needs, the way to determine learners' needs, the contextual factors to be considered, the nature of aims and objectives and how to develop them, the factors involved in planning the syllabus and units, the way to create good teaching, issues in selecting, adapting, and designing the instructional materials and the measurement of the effectiveness of a language program. Therefore, 'language curriculum is an aspect of a broader field of educational activity known as curriculum development or curriculum studies' which 'focuses on determining what knowledge, skills, and values learners learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring about intended learning outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools or educational systems can be planned, measured, and evaluated' (Richards, 2001, p. 2). As the field of applied linguistics, language curriculum development describes the interrelated set of processes that focus on designing, revising, implementing, and evaluating language programs.

Before curriculum development, an aspect, which is known as syllabus design, is started. As Richards (2001, p. 2) states, 'Syllabus design is a specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested'. Thus, curriculum development is a more comprehensive process than syllabus design. For syllabus design in language teaching, there are two aspects of foundation; they are vocabulary selection and grammar selection and gradation. There are also some assumptions underlying early approaches to syllabus design, they are; the basic units of language which are vocabulary and grammar, and learners everywhere have the same needs. Learners' needs are identified exclusively in terms of language needs. The process of learning a language is largely determined by textbook and the context of teaching is English as a foreign language. These assumptions were from the twentieth century and need to be examined further.

Through this educational system development, the curriculum in Indonesia has changed from Curriculum 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2004, to 2006 (School-Based Curriculum) and now it has changed to 2013 (Characters Curriculum). All of these changes are affected by the political system, socio-cultural, economic, science, and technology in society and nation (Soekisno, 2007). The foundations of the Indonesian curriculum are the Pancasila – Philosophical Foundation of the Indonesian Republic, and the 1945 Constitution educational goals and approaches. The curriculum aims to prepare the next generation to attain good quality, especially through Education.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to explore and find some reflections, which offer useful suggestions for the way to implement Characters' Curriculum through the use of the 'Pathway to English' book implemented in some pilot schools in Indonesia.

This study is also aimed to find out some strengths and weaknesses of the Characters' Curriculum through the use of 'Pathway to English' book. Then, the study is done to find some suggestions related to the implementation of the Characters' Curriculum through the use of 'Pathway to English' book in some pilot schools in Indonesia.

Research Questions

Thus, in this study, the research questions, which become the basis for the research, are:

1. How is Characters Curriculum through the use of 'Pathway to English' book implemented in some pilot schools in Indonesia?
2. What are some strengths and weaknesses of the Characters' Curriculum through the use of 'Pathway to English' book?
3. What are some suggestions related to the implementation of the Characters' Curriculum through the use of 'Pathway to English' book in some pilot schools in Indonesia?

Underpinning Theory

According to Brown (1995), the term goals as the logical outcome to determine the needs of a group of language learners is general statements about what must be accomplished to attain and satisfy learners' needs. Objectives are precise statements about what content or skills those learners must master to attain a particular goal. The specification of objectives and the process of thinking through what is involved in achieving the program goals will lead to analyzing, synthesizing, and clarifying the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the learners' language needs. Goals and objectives can be differentiated through the level of specificity, which is useful to plan and maintain language programs. Objectives can vary in many forms and may differ in degree of specificity since objectives serve different learners' needs in different levels of specificity.

Three strategies can be used to put materials in place in a curriculum, they are adopting, developing, or adapting (Brown, 1995, p. 157). Adopting materials can be achieved by deciding on types on materials; all materials must be located to prove the usefulness, reviewing and evaluating materials to make the final choices, and reviewing materials regularly to make sure that the materials are still relevant to learners' needs and the changing conditions of the program. Developing materials can be done based on the curriculum, which includes the framework, needs assessment, goals and objectives, and test. Even though designing materials may have implications for teachers' workload, collaboration to develop the materials based on the curriculum can be effective. This includes adherence to theoretical bases with approaches and organizational principles of the syllabus. Adapting materials may be done whenever there is no textbook matching the learning goals and the teachers may use the existing set of materials and adapt them to the needs of the program. The steps of adapting are finding and evaluating, analyzing, classifying, filling the gaps, and reorganizing the materials (Brown, 1995, pp. 157-167). These strategies will help to develop materials in language programs so that the materials will suit the program goals and objectives. In preparing the materials, the teachers have to focus on the essential questions of what content should be taught and how the materials need to be sequenced in materials development processes.

Related to the evaluation process, the test possibly measures learners' performance based on core competencies and basic competence, which are offered by the Characters Curriculum. This kind of test is what it is called by the Criterion-referenced test (CRT) (Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985, p. 68). To pass the test, the learners must reach the point of objectives in the materials, thus their score will be based on the criterion score. This kind of test will allow learners to achieve high marks as long as they focus on the criteria to be achieved as learners' achievement.

Significances of the Study

The analysis in this study will be based on some elements of language syllabus – objectives, language learning philosophy, methodology, materials used, and evaluation. The suggestions hopefully could give valuable input on the development and implementation of English materials based on the Characters Curriculum in the future.

Literature Review

Curriculum 2013 is the newest in Indonesia. There are many changes, which are offered by curriculum 2013 to syllabus design, especially for English materials, in this context the implementation of the curriculum is for Senior High School Grade XI General Programme. Speaking about some differences in curriculum 2013, the comparison of the newest curriculum with the previous one, which is Curriculum 2006 (School-Based Competence), will show how these two curriculums may bring controversy amongst educators in Indonesia and why those curriculums still exist together in the educational system of Indonesia. The four elements of change include (1) standard of graduate competencies, (2) standard of contents, (3) standard of learning processes, and (4) standard of assessment.

Characters' Curriculum was officially launched on July 15, 2013, by The Ministry of Education and Culture, and was implemented in all schools. However, the implementation of Characters Curriculum faced some problems related to instructions, materials, methods, and approaches which lead to some controversies and schools to keep implementing the 2006 curriculum. Since 2015, the Indonesian education system has implemented two curriculums with 6,221 schools implementing Characters Curriculum out of 208,000. These 6,221 schools are becoming pilot schools to gain evaluation of the development of Characters Curriculum in the future.

Regarding the changes of School-Based Curriculum to Characters Curriculum, the main goal of the 2006 curriculum is to develop learners' competencies by developing teaching and learning processes according to the learners' character and the situation of their schools. While in the latest curriculum – Characters Curriculum, the main purpose is to shape the individuals who are faithful in God, good in characters, confident, successful in learning, responsible as citizens, and positive as contributors to civilization (Ministry of Education and Cultures, 2013). The purpose of Characters Curriculum development aims to generate productive, creative, innovative, and effective Indonesian employees through reinforcement of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge, which are integrated (Mulyasa, 2013: 65).

Some factors, which influence these changes, are higher education, which focuses on the development of science and technology especially in public universities, and the development of education, teacher-training programs in some institutions of education. Other factors are a community that demands and needs qualified employees in business development, jobs, and companies, and system value in society, both from a moral, religious, social, cultural, and political perspective - all contributing to curriculum development.

Some interesting changes in Character's Curriculum include the achievement being a balance of soft skills and hard skills – attitude, skills, and knowledge, while in the 2006 curriculum the achievement is focused on knowledge-based competence. The achievement standard of Characters Curriculum might become more sophisticated; however, the measurement for achieving balanced soft skills and hard skills could become a new challenge for teachers, to design appropriate tools to measure learners' achievement. Conversely, from the previous curriculum, the standard of achievement could be easily measured by looking at some examinations or test results since the test will lead to the knowledge-based competence of the learners. However, the achievement in the 2006 curriculum seemed to be narrow and could not reach the value of learning itself – to be useful in their real lives.

Related to the subject amount, Characters Curriculum offers more learning hours but less subject amount, while the 2006 curriculum offers many subjects with less learning hours. It seems that Characters Curriculum tried to more focus on the knowledge specification, which learners need to achieve. This longer duration might benefit learners to learn deeper about the subject they choose; however, the Characters Curriculum still could not indicate the link between adding the length of a lesson with learners' achievement. This answer will be gathered by analyzing the achievements of the pilot schools.

Then, in Characters' Curriculum, all learning processes from elementary to senior high school are delivered through a scientific approach which consists of observation, questions, analysis, presentation, conclusion, creation, as the methodology used. However, in the 2006 curriculum, the learning process was achieved through exploration, elaboration, and confirmation and the methodology used. Related to technology, the information technology & communication in Characters Curriculum become teaching and learning tools, while information technology & communication in the 2006 curriculum constituted a subject. The use of the scientific approach as the methodology used in the curriculum might show the advancement of learning; however, this scientific approach could limit the way learners choose to learn constructively. On the other hand, the methodology used in the 2006 curriculum gave more chances for learners to explore their learning styles and in this curriculum, technology may become a vital tool for learning, but the most important one is how learners could use all resources around them as learning tools. The use of technology, information technology & communication in Characters Curriculum may create new challenges for schools, which insufficiently resourced with electricity and technology in their schools. However, the implementation of technology in education should now become the focus to compete in worldwide education.

Regarding class focusing group, in Characters Curriculum, this classification starts in senior high school grade 10, while in 2006 curriculum class focusing group starts in senior high school grade 11. An early classification for senior high school learners might become a crucial chance for learners to be more expert in their area. This could become an effective way for learners to study their specialty deeper. However, this specification is no supported by appropriate subjects since the learners still have more than half of their program to learn general subjects. Therefore, it could be concluded that the Characters' Curriculum has more advanced achievement standards of learning, but the implementation seemed not ready yet given the problems raised. Now, it is a wise way that the Ministry of Education does not directly stop the implementation of the Characters Curriculum, but they are still concerned with the evaluation and development of the curriculum for further implementation by having some pilot schools. The Characters Curriculum could fix some weaknesses of the 2006 curriculum, which give too many free choices for teachers and learners to conduct teaching and learning activities in their schools. This free creativity

leads to a different level of education for every school, but on the other side, the 2006 curriculum gives the chance for teachers to teach creatively and learners to learn with fun activities.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative inquiry and interpretative paradigm or constructivist worldview (McKay, 2006). The qualitative inquiry seeks to understand individuals' views on the world (Bell, 2010). This study explores and finds out what participants think about the implementation of the characters' curriculum and some strengths and weaknesses related to the use of the 'Pathway to English' book. It is therefore practitioner research is known as the natural setting (Cohen, 2000; Robson, 1993; Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001). Therefore, the social context in which the study event appears is important (Neuman, 1994).

This qualitative study is an exploratory activity (Wellington, 2000, p. 133) and it is shaped by an interpretation process (Denscombe, 1998; Denzin and Norman, 2000). As Creswell (2014) states, qualitative research is 'the approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem' (p. 4). Allwright (2005) defines Exploratory Practice (EP) as an indefinitely sustainable way of language teaching and learning, to develop understandings of life in language. In particular, this study attempts to make sense of the collected data, question them, and generate new insights from them (Wellington, 2000) to make them understandable (Neuman, 1994). By implementing a mixed-methods approach, a more complete understanding of the topic of the study can be provided as this study uses qualitative and quantitative methodology (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; cited in Creswell and Clark, 2011). As this study is exploratory, non-probability sampling is used. Non- probability sampling is more feasible and more informative in qualitative research compared with probability sampling (Wellington, 2000). In this study, the participants are 10 pre-service teachers and 6 in-service teachers who I know and have professional experience with. They are from the researched context and experienced the researched event. Furthermore, participants have the chance to give further information about the data needed to gain a deeper understanding (Neuman, 1997, p. 206). The sample is also identified based on a sample of convenience in which a selected group is in some way representative of the larger population (McKay, 2006, p. 37).

In this study, a semi-structured interview (Nunan, 1992, p. 149) or an in-depth interview (Esterberg, 2002; Grix, 2004) is used to collect data. By implementing this data collection tool, rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, attitudes, and feelings are gained (McKay, 2006, p. 51; May 1997, p. 109). This type of interview consists of a list of pre-determined questions, which were asked for all participants, and it also includes some questions unique to each participant, based on their responses (Nunan, 1992). It allows for follow-up questions to be asked to gain a deeper understanding (Richards, 2003, pp. 64-65) and is useful for exploring topics in detail (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87). Besides, this interview approach is useful when making comparisons between interview responses for analysis (Grix, 2004, p. 128).

Findings and Discussion

In this section, based on participants' views, the analysis of senior high school grade XI general program English material 'Pathway to English' will be explored through some elements of language syllabus which focused on objectives, language learning philosophy, methodology, materials used, and evaluation. The pre-service and in-service teachers' views reflect on the differences and changes, which might be implemented, to make the materials become more appropriate for teaching and learning English in Indonesia.

Objectives

In senior high school grade XI general program English material 'Pathway to English', teaching English has core competence as the goals and basic competence as objectives which later be developed into program goals and instructional objectives through every unit. Program goals are general statements concerning desirable and attainable program purposes and aim based on perceived language and situation needs, while instructional objectives are 'specific statements that describe the particular knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that the learner will be expected to know or perform at the end of a course or program (Brown, 1995). Goal statements could become a basis to develop more specific descriptions of learning behaviors addressed at the end of the program, which is called instructional objectives.

In 'Pathway to English', the core competencies of Characters Curriculum for grade X of senior high school English materials are:

1. Comprehending and applying religious values
2. Comprehending and applying the values of honesty, self-discipline, responsibility, care (mutual aid, cooperation, tolerance, peace), polite, responsive and proactive; demonstrating such attitudes in solving various problems in interacting effectively with the social and natural environment as well as in being a model in the global society.
3. Understanding, applying, analyzing factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge based on the interest in science, technology, arts, culture, and humanities with humanistic, nationalistic, and civilized insight concerning the causes of phenomena and events; applying procedural knowledge in the desired specific field of studies in solving problems.
4. Processing, analyzing, and presenting developments of the concrete and abstract domains of the learned materials; being able to apply various methods according to scientific principles. (Kemdikbud, 2013)

These core competencies will later be developed in every unit. Then, based on

Characters' Curriculum, the goals of every unit have a social function and the objectives are developed through four skills – listening, speaking, reading, study, grammar, and cultural awareness. The book develops the materials based on core competence and basic competence of the Characters Curriculum. Then, the goals and the objectives in every unit are appropriately implemented in the steps of learning.

Language Learning Philosophy

Based on national language policy decisions in Indonesia, English has become more popular compared to some other foreign languages. The government of Indonesia has put Bahasa Indonesia as a national and official language since Independence Day,

August 17, 1945. Then, English is considered as a third language or a foreign language where English has been more popular than any other foreign languages such as German, French, Dutch, and Chinese. The English language in Indonesia has been taught for over 50 years. The Department of Education in 1967 stated that the objective of English language teaching in Indonesia was to equip learners to read textbooks and references in English, to participate in classes and examinations that involved foreign lecturers and learners, and to introduce Indonesian culture in international arenas. These objectives then become the underpinning of the English curriculum in high schools for 1975, 1984, and 1994 curriculums.

Thus, nowadays, the current trend in language education in Indonesia since Independence Day is that the government of Indonesia has placed English language teaching as one of the compulsory subjects in schools. The government has played an important role in determining the school curriculum, textbooks, and teachers with some changes of English curriculum for five times – 1) In 1945, it was a grammar- translation-based curriculum during the Dutch occupation of Indonesia, (2) in 1958, this was an audio-lingual based curriculum, based on the involvement of Ford Foundation of the United States, (3) in 1975 was the revised new style, audio-lingual based curriculum as the first curriculum at the beginning of the "new era", (4) in 1984, a structure-based communicative curriculum to develop communicative skills, and (5) in 1994, meaning-based communicative curriculum, during this time, the communicative approach was mostly used in the schools around the world.

In this book, language-learning philosophy is learning English to help learners gain social function based on core competence and basic competence, which Characters Curriculum offers. This book successfully addresses the competencies into an applicable social function, where learners could implement the language in their daily life, based on their four skills, grammatical, and cultural awareness.

Methodology

There are some methods, which are implemented to learn English in senior high school grade XI general program English material 'Pathway to English'. The materials use an analytical method to find out the social functions, the structure and language features of every aspect which learners need to achieve, for example in 3.1: Analysing the social functions, the structure and language features of expressing and responding suggestions and offer, according to the contexts. The best aspect of the methodology is the analysis will be based on the context of where the knowledge will be acquired. This method is appropriately used for learners in Indonesia who learn English in different contexts and have certain cultural understanding in certain areas.

Besides using this analytical method, the materials ask the learners to construct spoken and written text to explore their knowledge in the target area of learning, for example, 4.1: Constructing spoken and written text to express and respond to a suggestion and offer, according to its social functions, structure and language features. These methods are based on social functions as the goals, and structure and language feature as the objectives. Then, the understanding method, such as 4.4: Understanding the message informal invitation letters. Editing method, such as 4.5: Editing a formal invitation letter according to its social functions, structure, and language features. Study methods such as 4.6: Study formal invitation, according to its social functions, structure, and language features.

The methods which are used in the materials will be observed through listening to some passages, identity, imitate, write; questioning through identity, ask, and understand; exploring through find, do, and write; associating through analyze, compare; and

communicating through demonstrate, read, make. The method takes a learner-centered approach. At the end of every unit, there is self-reflection, which is very important for learners to reflect on what they have learned and to improve their achievement in the next units.

Material Used

Related to materials used, School-Based Curriculum Enables schools to develop their teaching-learning process creatively by the condition of their schools and society. However, this change creates a problem amongst teachers who are not competent enough to create teaching and learning materials based on core competencies and basic competence. This problem happens since English teachers are not given sufficient and regular training to apply the concept of the approach used in developing teaching materials for teaching English. They might not master Genre- Based Approach well; that is to say, working linguistic analysis to work within the language area of a particular subject or topic. Additionally, the sources, which support teachers in adopting, developing, or adapting their teaching materials, might not available sufficiently in their context. Thus, the teachers sometimes just let the learners learn by themselves in their context, without focusing on the target achievement. In curriculum 2006, Content Standards and Competency Standards are centered on the needs, and the needs of learners and their environment, diverse and integrated, responsive to the development of science, technology, and art, comprehensive and continuous, lifelong learning, the balance between the interests of the global, national, and local.

In Curriculum 2013, the core is no simplification efforts, and a thematic-integrative approach to potentially add content in the future; indeed, the curriculum is structured to anticipate future developments. The materials aim to encourage learners to be better able to make observations, ask questions, reason, and communicate (present), what they earn, or they know after receiving learning materials on natural phenomena, social, art, and culture. Here, 'Pathway to English' has shown a generally high standard of general aims of Characters Curriculum. The materials used consist of appropriate authentic sources, which often motivate learners to understand the materials well. However, the materials could be made more colorful especially for the pictures to attract the learners more. Furthermore, the sections in the book seem to be full which adds a sense of difficulty in the material.

Evaluation

In these materials, there is no exact test designed, but the teachers could make a test based on the materials and what has been taught during the teaching and learning process. As the book contains some direct exercises in every unit, the questions on exercise parts could be classified as regular tests. By considering test qualities, the questions in every unit show complete information about what the learners learn. The focus of the questions is also related to the objectives of every unit and the purpose of the question and exercises lead to the development of methodology used in the book. The questions are delivered at every stage in learning the units.

Regarding testing in these materials, it could be suggested that at the end of every unit, the book should have a summative test, which has some questions so that the learners can conclude all the aspects that they have learned in every unit. Thus, at the end of the semester, teachers could adopt some summative questions from every unit, to design a final test. By having this kind of summative test, both teachers and learners could prepare well for their CRT tests.

Limitation, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study suggests some evaluation of Characters Curriculum related to materials, methodology, and approach and technique of implementing Characters Curriculum, so that the curriculum could give clear instructions for teachers to teach within national standards. However, the teaching methods could be created based on the context where the learners learn the language. This will give chance for teachers to teach and reach not only knowledge but also cultural awareness and the value of learning to be implemented in their real lives. The syllabuses might focus on vocabulary and grammar. This is because English is used as a foreign language, thus the approach used is by knowing the vocabulary and understanding the grammar.

In the foreign language context, learners learn English only in the classroom since the community does not use English in their daily communication. The learners actively improve their English competence through a learning process supported by the materials as their primary input. In this learning process, the syllabus developers might simplify and rationalize the input based on learners' needs through the process of selection and gradation. Thus, by learning the vocabulary and the grammar it is assumed that learners can learn the vocabulary and produce some sentences with the correct structure.

Besides focusing on vocabulary and grammar, the syllabuses are also focused on general English skills and knowledge since it is believed that all learners in every part have the same English competence needs. Meanwhile, the topics can be modified into those, which are familiar for the learners but still within the same knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and also for the skills relevant to implementing the school-based curriculum. In learning English, all learners' needs are assumed as learning English to solve their problems. As a result, they only learn English as part of subjects and not as the knowledge and skill to solve their problem through English.

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