

Indonesian Secondary School EFL Teachers' Understanding and Practice in Developing School Based EFL Syllabus

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Abstract

This study sought to explore Indonesian secondary school EFL teachers' understanding of the School Based Curriculum Development policy, and examine their practices in developing school-based EFL syllabus. Seven secondary school EFL teachers participated in this study. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and were analysed using Thematic Analysis procedure. This study reveals that the participants had different understandings of SBCD. Some of them seemed to have understood the steps of syllabus development partially, while other tended to see the issue as irrelevant. Syllabus development had been mostly practiced as syllabus adaptation or adoption. In the implementation of the curriculum they were facing the problems of lack of understanding and skills in developing the syllabus, workloads and time constraints, unavailability of adequate media, and unreadiness to change old practices in syllabus development.

Keywords: Development, EFL, Practice, School Based, Syllabus, Understanding

Introduction

In 2006 the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Indonesia made a fundamental curriculum reform by launching *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (School-based Curriculum Development – or SBCD Policy). In short, this is a significant change from the almost 60 years tradition of centralized curriculum paradigm, which fed the teacher with ready-made curriculum and syllabus, to a decentralized curriculum policy which puts teachers at the forefront of syllabus development.

With the current SBCD policy, The Ministry of Education, through *The National Board of Educational Standards*, only issues the so-called *Standar Kompetensi Lulusan* (Graduate's Standard Competencies) – the standard of behaviours, knowledge, and skills a student should possess in order to qualify for graduation, and *Standar Isi* (Standard Contents) – the scope of teaching materials and levels of competence needed in order to achieve *Graduate's Standard Competencies* on a certain level of education. Teachers and schools are given the autonomy to develop their own curriculum and syllabus that suit their immediate context-specific situations and conditions to meet the standards by following a step-by-step guideline for the school-based syllabus development supplied by the board.

The shift to SBCD presents teachers the task of transforming the predetermined standard competencies into syllabus and classroom practices. Brooker and Clennett (2006) remind that

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such a task requires teachers to have “procedural clarity” without which the process of SBCD will be impeded. However, literature on SBCD in different contexts in the world has been consistent in suggesting that curriculum innovations, including SBCD, run the risk of being misunderstood or, at least, partially understood by teachers (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Wang, 2008; Graves, 2009; Handler, 2010; Chen & Jin, 2000; Sabar et al, 1987; Kennedy, 1992; Marsh et al, 1990). Such a situation, coupled with teachers’ lack of skills due to inappropriate trainings and some contextual problems such as lack of media and facilities, lack of supervision and monitoring, has resulted in practices that deviated from the initial intention of the innovation.

Indonesian EFL teachers have been so far the ones who enjoy the centralized curriculum and syllabus the most. Relying heavily on ready-made syllabus and commercial materials, Indonesian EFL teachers’ tasks have been put at ease. Therefore, considering the low English competence and performance of most Indonesian EFL Teachers (Balitbang Diknas, 1999), and long-established practice of centralized curriculum and syllabus, the new policy is feared by many to cause a major turbulence in the field (Kunandar, 2006).

This study aims to explore the issue on Indonesian EFL secondary school teachers. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the teachers’: 1) understanding of the underlying ideas and concepts of SBCD and School based EFL syllabus development; 2) understanding of the recommended steps of school based EFL syllabus development; 3) steps in the development of their school-based EFL syllabus and why they follow these particular steps; 4) problems faced in developing the syllabus and how they overcome them. Information on these issues is crucial, particularly in relation to decision making pertaining pre-school-based curriculum implementation intervention measures. Such data will also guide the related authorities in aiding and supporting the teachers in developing the school-based EFL syllabus.

Design

This qualitative study was conducted on Indonesian secondary schools EFL teachers teaching in the District of Kerinci, Province of Jambi, Indonesia. The choice for the District of Kerinci as the setting of the study was based on the characteristics of the district that are in many ways similar to other districts in Indonesia in terms of system of education, levels and types of school, teachers qualification and recruitment procedures, as well as training received. Hence, the findings of this study may reflect the status of the issue in other districts across the country. The criteria for the selection of the participants were; 1) The participants should be those who have been teaching for at least 5 years. This is to ensure their familiarity with SBCD and CBC; 2) The participants represent the different levels and types of the secondary schools; and 3) Some of the participants were those from secondary schools (junior and senior) that have implemented SBCD together with School-based EFL syllabus development. Teachers that met the criteria were individually contacted to confirm their availability for the interview; seven of them confirmed their availability. They consisted of three senior secondary school teachers, one teacher junior secondary school teacher, one *madrasah tsanawiyah* (Islamic junior secondary school) teacher, one *madrasah aliyah* (Islamic senior secondary school) teacher, and one vocational senior secondary school teacher.

The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Data Analysis proceeded through procedures for *Thematic Analysis* suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) Creswel (1998) and Hooten (2005). The digitally audio-recorded qualitative data from interview were first transcribed and translated into English. The translation was then read for the general sense and overall meaning. The next step was a detailed analysis with coding process which organizes the materials into “chunks”. The coding was done by giving different colors for

responses associated with different research questions. This was followed by segmenting the text data into categories and labelling those categories with a term. In this research, the research questions serve as predetermined categories as well as terms. Thus, responses were categorized under each corresponding research question, and then analyzed for main ideas. Main ideas that were related to each other were then grouped using color coding, generating a smaller number of categories or themes upon which interpretation or meaning making of the findings were made.

Findings and Discussion

Understanding of SBC, Syllabus Development, and The Steps in School Based EFL Syllabus development

Despite the fact that all the participants indicated that they were using School-based English Syllabus, they did not give uniform responses regarding their understanding of the curriculum syllabus. When asked of this issue, their responses evolved around two central themes, namely the essence of SBC and teacher's responsibility in SBC.

Those who stressed on the essence of SBC also had diverse views on the nature of the essence. Some observed no essential difference between SBC and the previous curriculum, the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), and perceived it as the improved version of the CBC. One of the participants, for example, observed:

"Well...in...in my opinion SBC is an improvement of the CBC. The Competency-based Curriculum. An improvement of it. Actually...they're just the same thing. There're some parts that are taken out and some others are added. Yes, there're some improvements...before...the changes, for example, it's just lesson plan but now it's called lesson action plan. So, it's just slightly changed"

Another participant added a different view to the "essentialist perspective". To him the essence of the SBC lies in the school's context-related nature of the curriculum, that in the SBC framework, each individual school should have a unique curriculum developed to suit the context of the school.

Six out of the seven participants also shared the view that in SBC the teacher is responsible for the development of the syllabus. They also agreed that in SBC teachers have to promote student-centred active learning. Two of them mentioned:

"Well, actually, in SBC we lead the students to do more than the teacher. They have to be more active. Finding things themselves, the teacher just directs."

"The teacher's job is just to supervise. Supervising the progress, how is the what we call it...for example, today's lesson...how far they have progressed."

A rather extreme view on teacher's responsibility in the SBCD was expressed a senior participant. He saw that the SBC was a curriculum that prioritizes the accomplishment of its objectives rather than stressing on the process. Thus, he put the SBCD as "a coping-with-target curriculum".

"So, I found that how the new curriculum is. Coping with the standard, the target of the curriculum. So, teachers have to finish the contents. Regardless whether the students understand or not. Just keep going. That's it"

The participants' understanding of the Steps of the School Based EFL Syllabus Development can be categorized into three themes, namely *No Knowledge*, *Partial Understanding* and *Unimportant Issue*. As the label indicates, the *No Knowledge* theme describes the participants' absence of knowledge about the steps. While the *Partial Understanding* theme was drawn from responses that reflected the participants' rough or

incomplete understanding of the steps. Most of them were only aware of contextual nature of the syllabus-that the syllabus should be tailored to the context of the school, but failed to mention the individual steps. One of the participants, for example, explained:

“And I heard this... that we may develop our own teaching materials, we can develop our teaching materials that suit our context. What it’s about, I’m not sure. Someone told me so. We may develop our own teaching materials. Probably, this is the right that comes with the school-based curriculum. (We are) given a special right to develop teaching materials that suit the context.”

However, rather than developing one in the full sense, the awareness of the contextual nature of the syllabus had been mostly translated into adjusting the contents of ready made syllabi to their context of teaching. This was realized by changing the contents that they found did not fit their context of teaching with ones that would suit it better.

The *Unimportant Issue* theme centres’ around the respondents’ perceptions that developing the complete syllabus following the steps is unnecessary for they can just refer to the available syllabi, either from the Ministry of National Education or from text-books publishers. Thus, to them, the question of whether or not one knows the steps is not relevant.

The two major themes in the respondents’ understanding of the SBCD, i.e. The Essence of SBCD and Teachers’ Responsibility in SBCD did touch some of the nature of SBCD, but only partially. While the ideas that “teachers are not responsible in syllabus development” and “SBCD as curriculum that prioritize the accomplishment of the contents, rather than the student’s mastery”, literally, did not describe the nature of SBCD. Rather, they seem to suggest the participant’s idiosyncratic views of SBCD. These findings indicate some problems in the respondents’ understanding of SBCD which make the effectiveness of the introduction of the new curriculum by the policy makers questionable.

The absence of knowledge and partial understanding of the steps of syllabus development projected by participants and the perception held by some of them that the issue is unimportant are quite unexpected. This is considering the fact that most of them had been formally introduced to SBCD through trainings and workshops, at least at school level. Here, the adequacy and effectiveness of the trainings and workshops are also questionable. This seems to be consistent with their suggestion for more, better, and thorough trainings, and with the results of evaluation of the implementation of SBCD by district level SBCD facilitators and trainers across the country conducted by Pusat Kurikulum (2007) that revealed most of the facilitators and trainers had not understood the curriculum well.

A different perspective on the issue is offered by Nation and Macalister (2010). They note that curriculum change is not only about change in the curriculum *per se*, but also about changing teachers’ belief. They furthermore argue that teachers come to trainings or workshop with well-established beliefs about teaching and curriculum they have both from their professional experience and pre-service program. Therefore, in addition to introducing the curricular change, it is also important to address the issue of change of teacher’s beliefs, particularly at the initial part of the training or workshop. When their beliefs is ready for the change, they would be likely to accommodate new ideas easily.

The tendency of most of the participants to understand the SBCD in term of their responsibility, rather than from theoretical or conceptual perspective, seems to support, to some extent, suggestion made by Borman (1984) and Kennedy (1992) that teachers are practitioners, not theoreticians. While, the fact that some of them perceived mastery of the steps unimportant and their tendency to relate this view to the availability of the ready-made syllabi might provide a description of the impact of the prevalent practices of syllabus adaptation and adoption on their perception of the importance of the steps. In other words, despite the trainings they had had, the participants of this study might have observed a gap

between their knowledge of what the policy had prescribed and the seemingly acceptable and prevalent practices of syllabus adoption and adaptation among their colleagues hence made the mastery of the skills seemed less important.

These findings are consistent with research that showed that variations and problems in teachers' understanding of a curricular policy is not unexpected. Nation and Macalister (2010), for example, suggest a high possibility for curricular change to be misunderstood by implementers. Wang (2008) specifically highlights understanding of the syllabus and the learner-centred approach promoted by the syllabus and textbooks as two areas where problems with teachers' understanding are likely to occur. In addition, research by Chen and Jing (2000) on the implementation of SBCD in Taiwan also identified what they termed as problems of "*Lack of clear vision of and whole picture of SBCD*" in the teachers' conceptual understanding level. They highlighted the frustration the teachers in their study experienced due to the problem and their need for external help and intervention to solve the problem. Earlier, similar highlight was also voiced by Gordon (in Sabar et al, 1987), Rudduck (in Kennedy, 1992), and Marsh et al (1990). In the field language teaching, research by Allright (1984), Slimani (1989), Ur (1991), and Dobinson (1996) indicate that variations in teacher interpretation of a syllabus during the course and variations in what students actually learn from the teacher intervene between syllabus as a plan and the actual outcomes which learners achieve.

Nevertheless, researchers have also stressed the importance of a shared common understanding between policy makers and implementers for a change to be successful. Wang (2008), for example, warns that misunderstanding or partial understanding by teachers as the implementer of the policy might result in their reluctance to adopt the change and ignorance of some aspects of it. In this light, Fullan (2007) stresses the necessity to clarify the intention of the curriculum change by the initiators at the initial phase of the change. This is in order to minimize teachers' anxiety and frustration in the implementation phase. He exemplifies his suggestion by referring to a research finding on curriculum change in Canada where a new curriculum guideline was dismissed by teachers' due to problems with their understanding. He, furthermore, anticipates a greater problem of understanding in a more complex change.

The findings that indicate some problems in the respondents understanding of SBCD and the steps in syllabus development and the subsequent discussion in this subsection signify the need for the policy makers and education authorities in Indonesia to address the issue profoundly and comprehensively. A larger scale study and real remedial measures on this matter is, therefore, imperative.

Steps in The Development of School Based EFL Syllabus and Reasons for Following the Guideline.

None of the participants claimed that they had developed the complete syllabus in line with the steps. Their practices had been adopting or adapting of the available syllabi to the context of their teaching. Six of the seven participants mentioned that they were practicing "syllabus adaptation" and, in general, they had a similar way of adaptation. First, they selected the syllabi that were available either from the Ministry of National Education or from the textbook publishers; second, they adapted it to the context of their teaching; and third, the judgment on which contents needed adaptation was based on their personal assessment. While one participant mentioned that he was practicing total adoption. He admitted that he did not use the formal syllabi in his teaching because he did not have any of them. He just followed the text-book and its accompanying syllabus.

When asked for their reasons for such practices, their responses centred on four themes. The first was *Lack of Understanding* of the whole idea of the SBCD and the steps in developing the syllabus. "Adaptation" was also practiced because of its prevalence among

EFL teachers in the district. The practice was further facilitated by the abundance syllabi that came with text-books as well as by the sample syllabi supplied by the Ministry of National Education. The participants also related their practices of “adaptation” to the need for adjusting the contents of the available syllabus to their context of teaching of teaching. Almost all of the respondents mentioned this reason. Some of them took the ability of their students as a primary consideration in the process of adoption and adaptation. Another reason for the practice “adoption” and “adaptation” was its practicality. Some of the participants perceived that the objectives, i.e. the Standard Competencies and Basic Competencies of the syllabus were actually the same. While the way or the procedures to achieve those objectives were free to vary. Hence, for practicality reason, adopting an available syllabus and adapting it to the context of teaching would complete the task.

Practically speaking, this is consistent with Brady’s (1992) suggestion that SBCD should be perceived as a continuum of practices depending on individuals or groups involved and what they do, i.e. whether they “select”, “adapt”, or “create” curriculum. Similarly, Lewy (1991) theorises that SBCD can involve creating new products or processes, but that can also involve selecting from available commercial materials and making various adaptations. Such practices were also observed in by in SBCD in New Zealand (Bolstad, 2004), Singapore (Gopinathan & Deng, 2006), and China (Li, 2000). Li, for example, found that most of the schools observed were practicing what she called “school-based implementation of chosen curriculum”, where SBCD was realized as school initiated decision, rather than teacher’s, on which of the available curricula to be adapted- the practice of which she termed as “Quasi SBCD”. Within this perspective, the participants’ practices of adoption and adaption identified in this study might also be categorised as “Quasi SBCD”. But, as they did not mention any indication of school intervention in their decision of which syllabus to adapt, it might suffice to say that it does not share the same meaning as the one carried in the phrase “school-based implementation of chosen curriculum” quoted above. Rather, it is more of “teacher- initiated” adaptation, but, still with school context as their main consideration.

However, SBCD policy in Indonesian context does not mention or recommend either the “select” or “adapt” as the intended form SBC or syllabus development. Rather, it emphasises “creation” by teachers, either individually or in groups, independently or with assistance from other related parties. Hence, there is mismatch between what is intended by the SBCD and what is practiced by the EFL teachers.

The mismatch between the intention of the policy and what is practiced by teachers has also been detected in other research (Cohen & Ball, 1990; McLaughlin, in Wang, 2008). Wang suggests, that such a mismatch is mainly due to teachers’ lack of the prerequisites, such as knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to address the intention of the policy, the problems that are also find in the current study. While Graves (2009) claims that such a mismatch is an expected phenomenon in the “specialist approach” to curriculum development where different groups of people involved undertake different functions in curriculum development with their own beliefs, assumptions, and interpretation of the nature of the curricular policy. According to Fullan (2007), in such a situation, misunderstanding is almost guaranteed. This is also true in SBCD in Indonesia where the basic curricular policy, including The Guidelines, is formulated by the ministry but the development is mandated to teachers. And, as mentioned by the participants, there was a serious communication problem between them and the curriculum authority due to lack of follow-up monitoring and supervision on the implementation of SBCD by the authority.

Another perspective suggested by Fullan (2007) on the situation that could drive teachers to adopt or adapt textbooks, however, worth a discussion. He suggests that the presence of officially approved textbooks could create an impression that the practices of

adoption and adaptation are supported and encouraged by the approving body. This is particularly true in SBCD in Indonesian context. Despite issuing the SBCD policy and setting the 2009 /2010 academic year as the date line for schools across the country to fully implement the SBCD, for the last four years of the implementation the ministry produces textbooks and approves publishers' textbooks to be used by teachers. The reason put forwards for the measures was to help teachers learn and make themselves accustomed to the new curriculum during "the grace period" of three years before they can develop it on their own. From this perspective the practices of adopt and adapt are practiced by the respondents in this study is understandable.

Problems faced in developing the syllabus.

All of the participants mentioned that they were having some problems in developing the syllabus. Generally, their problems could be associated with the issue of "Unreadiness to the curriculum change", and were of two natures. First, problems that rooted in the teachers themselves which pertain to lack of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and syllabus, lack of skills in developing the syllabus, and insufficient skill in handling teaching media that support the syllabus. Essentially, these all lead to the issue of lack of training. Also included under the theme is the difficulty felt by the teachers to shift from old practices in teaching and syllabus development to the new paradigm of the new curriculum.

With regard to the problem of to lack of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and syllabus, one of the participants, for example, disclosed that she had never joined any training on the curriculum and there was no teacher regular meeting for madrasah EFL teachers in which she wished she could have discussed the matter. The only event that had introduced her to the curriculum was the in-school workshops. These workshops, however, had not yet provided her with a comprehensive understanding and skills necessary for her to develop a syllabus on her own.

The notion of "paradigmatic unreadiness" was also identified as a problem. A participant critically pointed to the availability of the developed syllabi by the text publishers which he saw had entailed the tradition of adopting and adapting the syllabi as a prevailing paradigm held by, not only himself, but also the other EFL teachers in Kerinci in general. These, according to him, had prevented the teachers from developing the syllabus on their own.

"Well, the problems in creating it itself, developing it. We are already accustomed to this kind of thing. We receive the-ready-made ones. We just need to implement them. There're many problems if teachers have to develop one on their own."

The second type of problem faced by the teachers in developing the syllabus was "peripheral" in nature. This is related their context of teaching which included problems that pertained to time constraints, absence of teaching materials to suit the syllabus, and student low ability and motivation. These problems came under the theme labelled Problems".

Most of the participants indicated that they resorted to either adoption and adaptation or total adoption of the available syllabi as the strategy to overcome the problems they faced in developing the syllabus, i.e. the problems of lack of understanding, students' low ability and motivation, and time constrain. They did not mention any other efforts he had taken to solve the problems. Thus, it is safe to say that it was not a strategy resulted from a process of strategic planning. Rather, it was the most possible and most convenient option they could afford at that time. And this was enhanced by the text-book publisher that provided them with everything they needed to keep their teaching running and to solve the problem of students' low or mixed ability. As for the problem of the absence of adequate teaching media and

materials for the syllabus they indicated that the problem was beyond their responsibility and capability to solve.

The problem of teachers' lack of understanding and skills in syllabus development is a common phenomenon in SBCD. This problem has been identified by Sabar et.al (1987), Marsh et al. (1990), Lewy (1991), Kennedy (1992), Ramsay et al.(1995), Chen and Jin (2000), and Li (2006). Overall, these researchers highlight the need for a sufficient, phase – by-phase “grace period” at the early part of the introduction SBCD, where teachers are provided with trainings, external and expert supports, and continuous supervision, in order for them to have a less troubled entry and embracement into the new policy. Kennedy (1992), for example, states:

“SBCD must be taught and practiced over a reasonable period of time before it can become part of teachers’ natural repertoire. We do not do teachers a favor by throwing them in at the deep end, tossing them some money, and hoping that they will survive. SBCD must be the subject of a deliberate strategy to equip teachers with new skills that will enable them to be more effective and more productive practitioners” (p.192).

Furthermore, Lewy (1991) note that the change to SBCD is not only about changing teachers’ understanding and practices. It is essentially about change of paradigm, not only in teachers, in a wide range of components of a system of education, a change that requires some radical transformation, and it takes time.

Suggestions made by Kenedy and Lewy highlighted above also, at the same time, explain the “unreadiness to change old practices” theme identified in this study. When talking about SBCD, most of the participants tended compared it to the previous curriculum, the CBC, expressing their frustration over what they perceived as an “untimely curriculum change”; that SBCD was introduced when they were just about to get accustomed to CBD. To a great extent, what they perceived as “untimely curriculum change” and the frustration it had caused to them are understandable. As discussed in the literature review, since 1975 the national curriculum of Indonesia changed in somewhat every ten years interval. However, SBCD was introduced in 2006, only two years after the introduction of CBC. This finding concords with Marsh et al. (1990) who note the restricting impact of a teacher’s experience with a past curriculum on his or her acceptance of the new one, and suggest that the typical daily activities of teachers are hectic, therefore they need some periods of stability, regularity, and predictability.

With regards to the problems of workload, time constraints, and media, other researchers have also noted similar issues. Kennedy (1992), for example, observing an SBCD project in Australia, found two major problems faced by the teachers in SBCD: lack of time for group meeting and group tasks and lack of time for individual work on the project. He, furthermore, reflects that it seems almost impossible to place new demands on top of teachers’ already hectic schedule, while quality SBCD materials, clearly, will not be produced by teachers who work on them on a part-time basis. He insists that teachers need special time allocated for them outside their teaching load to plan, think, reflect and act seriously on SBDC. Hence, he argues that SBCD would hardly work just because the authority has decreed it or because of its academically sound theoretical foundation. Similar suggestion is also made by Gopinathan and Deng (2006) in their observation of SBCD in Singapore. Hence, it should be sufficient to suggest the Indonesian curriculum authority to consider allowing teachers special time to work on the SBCD.

The media problem is one that those who observe EFL teaching in Indonesian schools would expect to find. Most schools are not well equipped with facilities and media for EFL

teaching such as language laboratory, audio-visuals, and books and other references. Schools that are better equipped are usually favourite schools located in cities. The participants in this studies mentioned that the syllabus required them to use some particular media but they were not available at their schools.

Marsh et al. (1990) insists that the provision of appropriate resources should be a major concern in SBCD. They suggest that some fund be specially allocated for SBCD. The centrality of this issue is exemplified by Kennedy (1992) who reports that almost 50% of the grants scheme intended to support SBCD in Western Australia were spent to purchase new resources or new instructional documents.

In Indonesia, documents on SBCD policy did not mention about the funding of SBCD program. But schools and school committees can list it in their expenditure plan for the fund the school receives from the government through the School Operational Assistance Program that disburses block grants to all schools throughout the country, based on a per-student formula. In terms of its proportional allocation principle, this formula does address the issue of efficiency. However, as the amount of the grant a school receives depends on the number of enrolments, only schools with a big number of students will enjoy a bigger sum of grants. Usually these schools are favourite schools and mostly located in cities. Schools with less number of students receive smaller amount and, therefore, less able to improve their facilities and resources or to extend their academic programs, even though their needs are actually quite similar to those of favourite schools. Clearly, this fact could have some impacts on the SBCD and requires an immediate solution.

The “student problems” theme which includes issues related to students’ low ability and motivation in learning English and mixed-ability classes) seems to be unique to this study. The available literature on SBCD, so far, has not mentioned such problems. Possibly, the key idea in this matter is that the participants perceived a gap between the expectation of the Standard Competencies and Basic Competencies and their the students’ ability. This is also in line with suggestion made by another participant that SBCD would only work with students with a higher ability. This is consistent with the observation made by Graves (2009) on the unique challenge posed by classrooms in language learning. She postulates that what is possible in language teaching is, to a great extent, determined by the level of learners’ proficiency in the target language.

Hence, the teachers seemed to be in a dilemmatic situation. On one hand, in Indonesia English is taught as a foreign language. Even though, there is a growing number of elementary schools that make English, its status is still optional, in the sense that the school decides whether to teach it or not, and the recruitment of the English teacher is still on part-time basis. Many schools with limited funding and resources can not afford it. Therefore, most students start to learn English only in their junior secondary school, the first level of education where English is taught as a compulsory subject. In their daily life, they speak their mother tongue, i.e. their local languages, or Bahasa Indonesia, the official language. They have a very limited expose to English, and research on Indonesian students’ knowledge and performance of English has consistently reported unsatisfactory results (e.g. Mistar, 2005, Emilia, 2005).

On the other hand, in developing the syllabus in SBCD, teachers have to refer to the Standard Competencies and Basic Competencies that are developed by a team of academicians at the Ministry of Education. They also have to keep in their mind that the competencies are to be examined in the centralized National Exam. Thus, even though they are free to develop the other parts of the syllabus, they have to achieve the same objectives, regardless of the ability of their students or the availability of the resources at their schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has identified the participants' inadequate, partial, and idiosyncratic understandings of SBCD and school based syllabus development. This finding is consistent with what the literature has predicted in externally initiated or top-down curriculum innovations. The discussion have also shown that curriculum change, though technically simple, is a socially complex phenomenon influenced by a web of factors. In many instances, change from a centralized curriculum policy to SBCD necessitate a change of paradigm in those involved in the change process, particularly in relation to their role in curriculum decision making. In this light, this study argues that there should be a systematic effort to reconceptualise, articulate, disseminate, and guide of the paradigm shift. Furthermore, although it has been suggested by the literature as a common phenomenon among teachers, the tendency of teachers to be more concerned about practical instructional matters, rather than for the conceptual and theoretical understanding of SBCD, has to be attended to closely. This is because teachers' proper understanding, as the discussion has suggested, is an essential element for the success of SBCD, or any other curriculum innovations.

The gap between the intention of the policy and what is practiced by the teachers and problems in the implementation of the development of the syllabus were found to be salient features in this study. Teachers, being at the intersection of competing demands and conceptual and contextual constraints, have exercised their agentive role autonomously in determining what is possible and appropriate in their immediate context of teaching. They have also shown that they believe in the future of the SBCD. They want their problems and aspirations to be heard and their voices are shared by other teachers in similar studies. In this light, compared to SBCD in other countries, SBCD in Indonesia is still at its inception. At this stage, no one is at the position to expect something perfect. There is still a long way ahead that should be travelled by all the stakeholders with development and improvement through learning from their own practices and from the experience of SBCD in other contexts.

This study has also shown that curricular innovation facilitates teachers' professional development. As such, the SBCD should be perceived as an opportunity for such an endeavour. The lack of and deviation from both the conceptual understanding and practical undertakings of SBCD / syllabus development pointed in this study could serve as valuable information for improving the practices of SBCD / syllabus development. In addition, the introduction of SBCD challenges teachers with a new role of curriculum decision maker, a role that necessitates a change of paradigm and perception of teachers' professional responsibility.

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