

COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM, RELEVANT SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORIES, AND ITS LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

Hendra Heriansyah^{1,*}

Pharisaa Darni²

Rahmat Fajri³

Rosnani Sahardin⁴

^{1,4}University of Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

²Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

³Ubudiyah University of Indonesia, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The complexity of problems encountered in today's world has forced educational institutions to re-envision their mission in order to successfully prepare a competent and skilled alumna who is able to face the future challenges on a global scale. To achieve this goal, a strategic policy and management, which involves different stakeholders and other parties, are needed. To prepare a competent human resource that is able to face each of the challenges and changes, a curriculum is required that meets the established standards as well as the job market demands. In this regard, this paper addresses the implementation of competency-based curriculum (CBC) in Indonesia. The introduction explains the overview of CBC, its aim and implementation, the relationship between English curriculum and environment, and English language syllabus. The second part discusses the main principles of the curriculum, the theoretical approach that relates to language description and some theories of second language learning that underpin the curriculum. Additionally, other factors that relates to curriculum such as the context and the assessment system including language curriculum innovation are also explored. The third part is the conclusion and identification which reports some of the unsolved issues that relates to the implementation of the curriculum.

*Corresponding author: hendrisa@unsyiah.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum design in Indonesia has experienced 8 changes and 2 renewals. A generally strange pattern is that whenever a new minister of education rose to power, a new curriculum is proposed. However, many are appreciative on the government's aim of the curriculum change that represents a clear intention of increasing the quality of education in Indonesia in order to obtain high level competent and good performance human resources that are able to compete on the global scale. Based on the research findings and surveys that were conducted by the Department of National Education and several NGOs show that Indonesian education is left behind compared to other countries in the world, particularly in Asia such as Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore. Therefore, it is reasonable if the government continuously endeavours their approach to enhance the educational system to improve the quality of human resources.

Competency-based curriculum is the national standard and compulsory curriculum used by all schools in Indonesia. It was introduced in 2001 but was officially implemented in 2004 after it underwent some renewal processes. Prior to its implementation, competency-based curriculum had been used in 2001 albeit on a limited degree at the time since it was only utilized in particular schools (5 schools). These schools had been chosen by the central government through the Department of National Education based on a number of criteria, such as adequate human resources and facilities as well as sufficient funding. In addition, the schools became the pilot project to other schools in Indonesia. The purpose of this project is to empirically and directly examine the implementation of competency-based curriculum, the syllabus and its learning.

Competency-based curriculum emerges as a result of policy changes in which the government wants to increase Indonesian education system. The changes were based on consideration that developed countries and developing countries are currently striving to advance the quality of education through the implementation of competency-based curriculum. Based on this consideration, the purpose of this curriculum is to achieve one main competency, namely discourse competence for communicative purposes. It was developed

together with other competencies such as linguistic competence, actional competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence. There are some criteria of competency -based curriculum implementation; for example, standard competency, basic competency and some indicators related to English lesson. In terms of standard competency, competency -based curriculum follows the national competency but the central government gives the local governments and schools independent authority and policy to interpret the instruction in accordance with learning experience, teaching materials, time allocation, class management, media, learning resources, and the evaluation of student's achievement including the characteristics of each area. Hence, the teachers have to find teaching materials from various resources that can support the competency.

It was previously explained that competency -based curriculum is the national standard competency that is used as a guideline for syllabus arrangement. The syllabus is based on the functional syllabus, in which the content of language teaching entails 4 language skills that are taught by communicative approach. However, the government gives the local government and school independent authority to design their own syllabus in accordance with the school's characteristic and some other aspects, such as its ability, teacher, student, facility, etc. There is no specific format in syllabus design, including factors regarding the content of the syllabus itself. The government asks each of the school to interpret the curriculum based on its distinctive needs. In designing a syllabus, the school may involve some community members, government, school committee, education council, state and private industry/company.

DISCUSSION

Main Principle of Competency-Based Curriculum

There are three main principles underlying this curriculum namely (a) model of competency; (b) model of language; and (c) level of literacy:

Model of competency

Celce-Murcia, Dornye and Thurell (1995) stated that language is a communication and it is not merely a number of grammatical rules. This curriculum aims to develop a competency that can help and

prepare the learners to communicate in English with and within the English speaking community. Therefore, this curriculum uses the 'communicative competence' approach proposed by Celce-Murcia et al., (1995). The main competency focuses on 'discourse competence'. If a learner involves in any type of communication either spoken or written, he/she is involved within one discourse. Discourse here refers to a communicative situation that depends on the topic being communicated. Furthermore, Celce-Murcia et al., (1995) explained that discourse competence can only be achieved if the students familiar with 4 other competency components, such as linguistic competence, actional competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence. Pedagogical implication is the competency and some indicators of English lesson based on 4 components above in order to achieve the main competency (discourse competence).

Model of language

Competency-based curriculum views the language as the social semiotics (Halliday, 1978). He pointed out that there are three aspects that should be considered in language, namely the context, text and language system. In whatever context the communication is, there are three language functions involved. The first one is ideational function; it is used to express or construct ideas or information. The second one is interpersonal function; it is used to interact with other people in a communicative context. The third one is textual function; it is used to organize the language of a text in a cohesive and coherence way so that it can be easily understood by others. Thus, an ideal language program can develop student's ability to use the language functions above. In relation to text and the language system, competency-based curriculum emphasizes on how the learners should be able to communicate in English correctly in accordance with the context as well as an acceptable text that was written with the right use of the grammatical rules. Basically text is a communication activity that can be done either by spoken or written; thus, a language learner who communicates in English not only to use a right vocabulary but also a correct grammatical rule to be understood by native speakers.

Level of literacy (spoken and written)

Competency-based curriculum also takes into consideration about what level of English literacy that must be achieved by both junior and senior high school students. According to Wells (1987), there are 4

level of literacy; they are performative, functional, informational, and epistemic. In this curriculum, the junior high school students are expected to be at the functional level, whereas the senior high school students to be at the informational level in which they are expected to be able to access the knowledge by using English. This high expectation is based on the consideration that the senior high students are on their ways to the university or higher education. Therefore, literacy is the focus of learning development. The types of literacy that are used are texts that related to academic literacy since the reading materials that are developed are in this type of genre.

Theoretical approach that relates to language description

This curriculum believes that language is a combination of language function and grammatical rules. For this reason, learners are not only taught about some specific types of language functions, such as asking, requesting, describing, and identifying, but also how to use it correctly. Therefore, the grammatical structure that was taught in the classroom should agree with the language functions (Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985). Furthermore, Richards et al. added that the syllabus should be based on several factors such as frequency, usefulness, or a combination of those.

Theory of second language learning that underpins the curriculum

Competency -based curriculum is designed by utilizing the combination of both cognitive and input-interaction-output theory. It means that this curriculum emphasizes on students' ability of information or knowledge processing that is given to them and uses the input through interactional communication to produce more input. Cognitive theory is one of the learning theories that compatible with competency -based curriculum. Takac (2008) stated that cognitive theory of learning which is based on the theory of human information processing, deals with mental process involved in learning. He also explained that this theory refers to the three fundamental cognitive aspects of learning: how knowledge is developed, how knowledge becomes automatic and how knowledge is integrated into an existing cognitive system of the learner. It means that the language learning actively entails the mental process by processing information and knowledge that the students attain through learning. McLaughlin (1987) pointed out that language learning is a cognitive process

because it involves internal representations that regulate and guide performance. He added that in the case of language acquisition the language system and the procedures for selecting appropriate vocabulary, grammatical rules, and the conventions of pragmatic that govern language use are the representations in cognitive process. It can be said that in learning a second language, cognitive process plays an important role in organizing the language components that are learned as well as monitoring the application of said components in language performance. Apart from that, cognitive theory pays more attention on meaning rather than habitual formation as proposed the behaviourists. According to Ausubul, cognitive theory emphasizes on 'meaningful learning', namely learning with understanding and it is not manifested in behavior (as cited in Takac, 2008). It can be concluded that second language learning pays more attention on the semantic rather than the habitual formation; and understanding the meaning is more important than stimulus and response that are given.

Interactive theory is one of the theories that was used for the blueprint of the competency-based curriculum. Pietro (1987) cited that a language learner will succeed in learning second language if he or she can interact with others through the target language. He believed that in language learning, interaction must be followed by meaning and finally structure. It means that it is better for students to interact as much as possible whether it is between teacher and students or among other students so that they can receive meaningful input and get more input from others. In this way they can automatically try to produce more output for their communication. Similarly, Ellis (1986) asserted that interaction is the discourse that comes together between the learner and the interlocutors. It can be said that the input the learners received or heard is the product of an interaction that they accomplished from contact with teacher and other students.

Apart from cognitive and interactive theory, input also plays an important role in second language learning. According to Cook (2001), the purpose of language teaching is to provide optimal samples of language for the learners in order to get the best 'input' to the process of language learning. It appears that input has a tremendous role in helping learners learn a second language. Therefore, it is better if they get as much input as possible during the teaching and learning process. Additionally, the teacher has to provide an adequate input that can be easily understood by the learners. The learners receive the input from the teacher, teaching materials, or even from other students. It is very

common that the students receive the input from both the teacher and their peers.

Therefore, comprehensible input hypothesis plays an important role in language learning. The term of comprehensible input is popularized by Krashen. According to Richards, Platt and Weber (1985), input refers to the language which a learner hears or receives and from which he or she can learn. Whereas, Allwright and Bailey (as cited in Boulima, 1999, pp. 22-52) point out that 'input' refers to the language which the learners hear or read; that is the language samples to which they are exposed to. It can be said that input is the language data that the learners hear, receive, read, or learn from different sources. It also refers to samples of target language that can be understood and used by the learners.

Krashen (as cited in Cook, 2001) claimed that humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding message or by receiving comprehensible input; they acquire language by trying to understand meaningful messages. Krashen (as cited in Boulima, 1999, pp. 22-53) also argued that L2 learners “acquire structure by understanding messages and not focusing on the form of input, by going for meaning”. In addition, he explained that in order for acquisition to occur, the input the learner receives has to be comprehensible. Similarly, Krashen (as cited in Ellis, 1985) pointed out that understanding means that the acquisition of input is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message. It can be concluded that in L2 learning the important thing is how the learners can fully understand the meaning of messages that are addressed to them. However, the input that the learners receive will be useless if they are not used inside or outside the classroom. Thus, the learners should interact more with native speakers, teachers, or their peers. It is an essential factor so that the learners can produce and develop more input for language development and use.

In terms of language use and language production, Swain stressed out that 'comprehensible input' is not enough to cover L2 development. She offered us one hypothesis, the 'comprehensible output hypothesis'. Swain (as cited in Boulima, 1999, p. 22-53) claimed that L2 development triggers a more frequent, accurate, and a wider variety of circumstances language production. It means that productive competence can be extended and advanced if the learners continuously use and practice the target language in various situations, contexts, and

linguistic environment. Furthermore, Swain explained that there are two functions of output in second language acquisition. The first function is as a means to express and see if it works. The second function is to use the language rather than to comprehend it; and it forced the learners to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing. For this reason, Swain argued that learners inability to achieve the same level of productive competence of native speaker is not because the inadequate comprehensible input but rather the limited comprehensible output. It means that language use becomes more important than comprehensible input because learning a language does not only understand its meaning but also how it can be used in social interaction both inside and outside the classroom.

Context of Competency-Based Curriculum

In general, this curriculum is contextually appropriate for Indonesian culture. The curriculum covers a range of different genres that is deemed to be acceptable in Indonesian community seeing that the language employed in this curriculum is intended for communication purpose. In addition, this curriculum attunes to the situational context of different specific topics that are spoken, the relationship between the language users and the interlocutors, as well as the form of communication; spoken or written. It also emphasizes on how the learners can use language in accordance with their native culture, context and situation in which communication take places. However, there are some problems regarding the textbooks that are used in the implementation of this curriculum which will be explained latter.

Assessment System

The assessment system of this curriculum focuses on teachers direct monitoring on students who participate during the process of teaching and learning that take places in the classroom until the end of the lesson. In order to know whether the learners are able to communicate in the target language (both spoken and written), the teacher uses 'check list' that contains a number of indicators and criteria as an instrument of observation for the long term-assessment. In addition, teachers can also evaluate students' performances through individual work; such as portfolio, project, product, performance, and written test. Its aim is to get information on the students' learning

process and achievement. The report of the students' marks will be sent to their parents thus they will be aware of their children competency.

In terms of the evaluation process, it covers not only the students' learning process and progress but also the planning and the implementation of the curriculum, student progress report, facility, and learning resources. To ensure the success of the curriculum implementation, the Ministry of Education will send its professional assessors for the evaluation. They will do the overall check-list checking of the successfully implemented indicators of the curriculum. The indicators include the socialization of the curriculum, syllabus order, annual and semester program, lesson plan, teaching materials, and teaching and learning activity.

CBC as a Language Curriculum Innovation

Competency -based curriculum can be categorized as a language curriculum innovation because it involves different stakeholders in designing the curriculum. Fullan (as cited in Makee, 1993, p. 230) stated that teachers are the key players in any attempt of promoting innovative syllabus design but there are other individuals that involve in the process. There are some stakeholders that participate in designing this curriculum, namely the pre-service training (university, teacher training institution), in-service training (Department of National Education), the centre of curriculum, school (teacher, headmaster, student's parents), community (education analysts, NGO, and political party), education council, school committee, private university association.

Nevertheless, this curriculum does not entail in the process of curriculum decision-making. Nunan (as cited in Kostogriz, week 3) pointed out that "the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process". Thus, it is better to involve the students in designing a curriculum and syllabus because we can directly hear from them of what they really want to study that is also in accordance with their needs. Kennedy (as cited in Markee, 1993, pp. 230) suggested that there are other roles in the context of a material project. He mentioned that teachers are the implementers and students are the clients.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aim of the competency-based curriculum is to prepare students to communicate in the target language. Therefore, the focus of this curriculum is to achieve one main competency that is 'discourse competence'. This competence is supported by other competencies such as linguistic competence, actional competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence. This curriculum consists of some criteria in its implementation, such as standard competency, basic competency and some indicators related to English lesson.

All school in Indonesia implements the same curriculum. However, the local government was given the independent authority and policy to design syllabus that agrees with the school's characteristic and other aspects such as school capability, teacher, student, and facility. In designing a syllabus, the school may involve other parties such as the community members, government, school committee, education council, state, and private industry/company.

The assessment system that is used in this curriculum is 'check list. This instrument is used to know whether the learners are able to communicate in the target language, both spoken and written. In addition, the teacher can also evaluate students' performances through individual works, for example portfolio, project, product, performance, and written test. Its aim is to get information on the students' learning process and achievement. The report of the students' marks will be sent to their parents thus they will be aware of their children competency. Finally, this curriculum is an innovative language curriculum seeing that the teachers are involved in designing the curriculum, as well as some stakeholders that have been mentioned above.

However, there are some problematic issues remain. First, there is no socialization from the government to the local government about the implementation of the curriculum. Consequently, the teachers do not know how to implement this curriculum in the field since it always changes in every 5-year. Apart from that, the school and the teachers are not ready to design the syllabus because they do not have enough knowledge, particularly schools that are located in the rural areas in which English teacher is vacuum personnel. Second, the government pays less attention to the training about how to design a good syllabus and its implementation in the classroom. Third, the English textbooks that are used in schools are the books that were designed in Jakarta.

The problem is there are some particular cultures, like Javanese, that entail to the district only but different to others. It may feels uncomfortable for other districts since their own cultures are poorly represented in the book as well as the need for inclusivity. There were personal encounters regarding Acehnese teachers and students that complain about their reluctant on the Javanese cultures exclusively included in the textbooks that are used in schools. The source of this declination might be comes from the past sentiment of Aceh conflict. Furthermore, the assessment system is not suitable because it only uses check list as the instrument to assess whether the students have achieved the competency that was intended. The last issue is the annual national examination. The test failed to include two skills that are taught at the level of senior high school, namely speaking and writing skills and none of the four language skills that are tested at the level of junior high school. At the high school level, the government only examines the students' listening, reading, and structure skills. It is quite strange since there are four skills that included in the curriculum for language learning.

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