INNOVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
(AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM OF
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL)

By
Yusnimar M. Amin
Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe

ABSTRACT

The development of numerous language teaching innovations in applied linguistics leads educators to be very creative in adopting and adjusting with the new innovations. This article aims to know what factors should be taken into account in designing and implementing an innovative curriculum. The curriculum being analyzed is the curriculum of Senior High school, Oemar Dian Islamic boarding school in Aceh Besar. The result is, in general, the curriculum is an innovative one even though it somehow needs some efforts to get the best result in implementation and assessment.

Key words: innovation, English language teaching, curriculum, syllabus

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is defined as guidance for what is to be taught, for what purposes, in which context, how to implement and how to assess it. According to Richards (cited in Graves, 2008, p. 149), language curriculum development is ‘an interrelated set of process that focuses on designing, revising, implementing and evaluating language programs’. Similarly, according to Hall and Hewings (cited in Graves, 2008, p. 149), language curriculum covers ’all issues related to the planning, implementation and evaluation of a series of language learning events conceived as a coherent whole with a specified purpose’.

In recent years, considering a recognized need in language teaching to give adequate attention to language use as well as language form, a communicative curriculum is being advocated. As Breen and Candlin (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 90), points out that the
communicative curriculum defines language learning as learning how to communicate as a member of a particular socio-cultural group. Here it will be discussed a sample of a curriculum that is being used in one of the Boarding school in Aceh, Indonesia. The writer will find out how far the school has put a new innovation in Language Teaching Curriculum. Is that adequate or not? The curriculum discussed is a kind of communicative curriculum but the writer analyzes the syllabus that is developed from that curriculum. This syllabus was designed in the private school where the writer has been teaching for three years. The syllabus that the writer going to discuss is designed for the first year students in senior high school in the first semester.

The curriculum that is developed into the school syllabus is based on the national curriculum of Indonesia. The curriculum is a renewal of the 2004 curriculum (competency based curriculum). The government updated some decisions in implementing the curriculum but the main content in curriculum is still the same as the previous one. The government only gives the authority to the school to suit the curriculum to the local context. The curriculum is still competency-based but some parts of the curriculum are based on the school context. This curriculum which is called Kurikulum Satuan Tingkat Pendidikan (KTSP) has been introduced since it was approved by the Ministry of Education on 11 June 2006.

The Ministry of Education of Indonesia always makes effort in creating innovative curriculum for all levels of education. The curriculum is developed based on the changes of technology and the needs of development of education quality for new generation in order to catch up with the standard of international education. Through this change, the government gives the authority to the school to modify the curriculum based on the standard competencies that are determined by the government.

The components that the school should follow are standard competency, basic competency, and indicator. Some parts such as material development (functional text), learning experience, assessment, time allocation, and material resources can be suited to the school context. For example, the school can add an English lesson hour
in the school by decreasing another lesson hour that is not really important in their context. The teacher also can design the syllabus based on the students’ needs, situation and the school support facility.

Discussion

There are some factors which should be taken into account when talking about innovation in language teaching curriculum. When we analyze and determine one of curriculum, whether it can be called innovative or not we should consider some main factors included in the curriculum itself, in the process, and in the content.

1. It could be seen as an innovation?

The development of the syllabus is based on the communicative approach. As Markee (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 118) points out, the last two decades in applied linguistics—which roughly coincides with the evolution of the communicative approach in language teaching—have seen the development of a number of language teaching innovations, including the notional/functional syllabus, the process syllabus, the Natural approach, the procedural syllabus, and task-based language teaching.

Markee also (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 118), points out that a review of issues that define innovation in the specific context of language teaching will draw on these academic specializations to develop a multi-disciplinary framework, inspired particularly by Cooper’s work on innovation in language planning. The framework consists of the following questions: ‘who adopts what, where, when, why, and how?’ (Cooper, 1989).

1.1. Who adopts what

Who is involved in designing?

In this syllabus, the main components such as standard competence, basic competence, and indicator of the curriculum are designed by Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan (BSNP) ‘The Institution of National education standard’ but the teachers are still a
key player in developing the material and other components such as material resources, learning experience, assessment and time allocation. Teachers are key players in any attempt to promote innovations in syllabus design. At the same time, other individuals will also be involved in the innovation process (Fullan cited in Markee, p. 119).

The development of the curriculum and syllabus is carried out in each school by a school committee that cooperates with teachers in the school. The school committee will ask the approval from the satuan pendidikan (education unit level of curriculum) which takes responsibility at district level. So that is why the curriculum and syllabus can vary from context to context. In this private school, for example, the time allocation is different from the public school. In general, public school allocates 4x45 minutes per week for English subject but this school allocates 6x45 minutes per week for first and second year but for the third year they allocate 8x45 minutes per week for English subject.

In implementing the curriculum, the institution of National education standard, general director of education management, the Monitoring and evaluation institution also take an important role on socialization and monitoring the implementation of the curriculum.

Adopts

As Markee (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 119) points out, adoption has been conceptualized in terms of individuals or institutions engaging in a decision making process which may be divided into a number of different phases. The educator Fullan 1982 (cited in Markee, p. 119) proposes a sequence of four steps which he calls initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome.

This syllabus is designed by a school committee in cooperation with English teachers who are teaching in that school. So the teacher is also seen both as an adopter and an implementer.

From an evaluator’s perspective, adoption may also be conceptualized in terms of “levels of implementation,” a measure which specifies the depth to which any changes have occurred. The teacher is mostly involved in implementing this syllabus, and the expert
or the inspector that also take a responsibility in implementation the syllabus only spends a little time in monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

What

Markee (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 120), points out that innovation itself, as a concept, is central to the implementation and/or evaluation of new ideas and new procedures. Synthesizing what she claims are basic characteristics of innovations, Nicholls states that:

*An innovation is an idea, object or practice perceived as new by an individual or individuals, which is intended to bring about improvement in relation to desired objectives, which is fundamental in nature and which is planned and deliberate* (1983: 4).

In language teaching contexts, innovation will be defined as proposals for qualitative change in pedagogical materials, approaches, and values that are perceived as new by individuals who comprise a formal (language) education system. In this syllabus which is competency-based, the syllabus is designed to develop the four skills of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) by using the communicative approach which leads teachers to teach grammar based on language function and focus on four skills in the same topic.

The teacher realizes how to teach based on the syllabus because the teacher also was involved in designing the syllabus. It makes the teacher easier to understand what approach and what material is suitable to the design of curriculum and syllabus. The development of the communicative approach is implemented more easily in the teaching learning process.

The listening and speaking are taught in two terms. The spoken cycle only focuses on listening and speaking on one topic and the written cycle focuses on four skills in the same topic. So it means the focus on listening and speaking is greater than on reading and writing. Besides that, there is another specific class for reading session because the curriculum allocates 2x45 minutes per week for reading session only. They consider students can learn much from reading. They can learn the other three skills of language through reading.
Where

Sociocultural context is specified as where an innovation is implemented rather than geographical location. As Cooper (cited in Markee, p. 121) said, the question of where an innovation is implemented is conceived in sociocultural terms. The design of this syllabus does consider the sociocultural constraints. The activities that are involved in the classroom obey the rules of culture in Aceh. The arrangement of the classroom also includes boy and girl in the same class but the girl sit with girl and boy with boy.

This school is an Islamic boarding school and has more strict regulations about the culture and religion than public schools but they encourage students to talk in English at school by determining English and Arabic as their spoken language at school. So this school focuses more on the development of language than public school.

In the syllabus, there are activities such as role play which sometimes involves a boy and a girl. This is still allowed in the culture. Although the government of Aceh has a regulation about Islamic rules activities but the activities such as role play between girl and boy is allowed, with limited freedom. For example, students only practice the role play such as a dialogue. The girl cannot hug the boy even if the acting is between mother and son.

When

The teachers in this school are quite quick to adopt the innovation of the new syllabus. However, it needs to take into account that some teachers still feel lazy to prepare the materials because materials can be obtained from the internet, magazine and English newspaper. That is why implementation of the syllabus still can differ between teachers even though they are in the same school because of the teacher motivation. Sometime they even do not follow the syllabus.

Why

Markee (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 122) said that there are individual psychological factors with respect to the persons involved, and innovations themselves possess various attributes that
influence adoptions. The attributes that proposed by Rogers, 1983 (cited in Markee, p. 123), include the following:

*the relative advantage to potential adoptees of adopting an innovation (i.e., costs or benefit), the compatibility of the innovation with previous practice (i.e., how different or similar the innovation is to what potential adopter already uses), the complexity of the innovation (i.e., how difficult the innovation is to understand or use), the trial ability of the innovation (i.e., how easy it is to try out in stages), and the observability of the innovation (i.e., how visible the innovation is)."

Because the curriculum is still quite new, it was introduced almost three years ago, not all schools have adopted the innovation of the curriculum. It depends on the level of knowledge and creativity of the teacher. The government also provides the training to socialize the curriculum so it really depends on the teacher and how quick and creative they are to adopt that. The curriculum is not so difficult because that is a renewal of the previous syllabus, the teacher only needs to suit the curriculum to the school context in developing the material and implementing it based on the context.

**How**

Planning the curriculum is based on the basic research by institution of research and development of national education department. They take responsibility for the research and new innovation to develop curriculum and try out whether it suits all the school contexts in the country or not. They consider the innovation will cost a lot or not because they need to takes into account the amount of the funding. As Havelock, 1971 (cited in Markee, p. 124) points out that it is assumed that the high development costs will be offset by the long term benefits of efficiency and the anticipated high quality of the innovation.

By discussing a number questions of the Cooper’s work on innovation in language planning (who adopts what, where, when, why and how) that has mentioned above we can see the curriculum as an innovation.
2. In what environment the curriculum is taught?

The curriculum is taught within a mainstream environment. Regarding English is considered as a foreign language for Indonesian students, government determines English as a compulsory subject that is taught at school. The learners need to know English to communicate with people from different culture at international level. It is also to prepare them to enter University because many course books that are used at university level are written in English. So that is why government designed the English language curriculum that aims to develop all skills in English (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing).

The curriculum focuses on general English to allow students mastering those four skills, which in turn, they can develop further knowledge about the language to fulfill other needs in daily life, working life or their needs as a member of university community after they graduate the senior high school level.

3. The organizing principles

Regarding the syllabus is skill-based syllabus, hence the language learning components focus on four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which include functions, grammar, notions and topics, communicative situations, pronunciations and vocabulary. There are two categories in implementing strategy to teach listening and speaking. First, those two skills are taught as spoken cycle where only those two skills are combined in the same topic. Secondly, those two skills are also combined with reading and writing skills in the same topic which is called integrated skill among those four language skills.

The syllabus also organized based on the topic. The material is built from simple to complex which is called building principle. As Graves said (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 189), ‘In deciding how to sequence the material, one considers building from the simple to the complex, from more concrete to more open-ended or so that unit or Activity A prepares students for activity B’. It can be seen in the part learning experience of this syllabus. For example in the listening part, first, students are asked to listen to the interpersonal or transactional conversation in tape recorder to know standard of conversation of how
to greet someone; how to introduce themselves; what expression that they will use to greet their friends or what expression is appropriate to say good bye to their friends. Then, they are asked to discuss in group about what they have listened from the conversation. It means activity 1 prepares students for activity 2.

Similarly, it also can be seen in speaking part. The students are asked to read some texts about the way how native speaker interact each other. The texts are provided in various situations. Then, they are asked to repeat and notice how to use those expressions. After that, the students are asked to respond by using the appropriate expression based on the situations that are provided. The first activity prepares students for the second activity and the second activity prepares them for the third activity.

4. **Approach and theory in designing the syllabus**

The approach that used in the syllabus is systemic functional grammar and genre theory. The curriculum is designed to teach grammar based on language function such as expression of happiness, showing affection. Teachers teach the grammar through learning language based on the function. On the other hand, genre theory is also used in the syllabus. The different kind of language is taught based on different situation/purpose of the language use. Teachers teach form of texts such as recount, narrative and procedures in developing four skills and in the spoken cycle (listening and speaking) teachers teach what language is used when learners express happiness, sympathy, and showing affection.

5. **Approach and model of teaching-learning**

The approach that described in the teaching strategy in this syllabus is the behaviourism, cognitive approach and input-interaction-output (IIO). The teacher tends to use behaviourism for some activities but she/he also uses cognitive approach for other activities. IIO is mostly used in the activities.

Behaviourism is approach that believes imitation, repetition, and reinforcement enable learners to develop habits of the second language (L2). The teacher uses this approach only in some activities. It can be
seen in the speaking part, students are asked to repeat some expressions in both formal and informal that they have read from the texts. Then they are asked to respond by using the expression which is appropriate to the situation that is provided.

As Ellis (1994, p. 37) points out that one of learning strategies is cognitive approach, for example, learner relates new concepts to other information in memory. The teacher also uses this approach in many activities. We can see in the activity such as analyzing the picture in the speaking task when they are learning some expressions such as greeting, expression of happiness, sympathy, and showing affection. After they have learnt about those expressions in the listening part, then in the speaking part, students are asked to analyze the picture and giving some comments about the picture. It leads them to think what expressions are being performed in the picture.

Similarly, in the speaking part, the students are asked to discuss the conversation model to prepare a role play. The activity leads students to think how to express the happiness or showing the affection that they are going to perform in the role play. They relate the issues from their daily life to the lesson that they have learnt in the listening. Moreover, in the topic which is combined those four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), for example, the topic that provided is the text in recount form. Students are asked to tell their own experience or fairy tale after they learnt how the story is told in the text that is provided in listening to the tape or CD player.

On the other hand, we can see this syllabus prepares most activities by considering input-interaction-output. Most activities are served by putting the input in the interaction to produce the output. For example, in the speaking part, the students are asked to read texts that provide the information the way native speakers interact by using the expression such as greeting, express their happiness, and showing affection. Then, they are asked to use appropriate expression based on the situation that is provided. To notice the input the students are asked to complete a dialogue and discuss with friend the model of role play. Then, two students perform in front of class to produce the output or to
test the hypothesis by producing spoken language. Others that listen to
the conversation also can receive input from their peers.

We also can see many activities used in the syllabus considering
IIO model. In writing task, the students are asked to correct the spelling
in a text after they learnt about the text form in listening, speaking and
reading. Then, they are asked to work in group to produce a text, based
on the information provided. Through the interaction with their peers
they can produce the written language. This syllabus mostly uses this
IIO models.

6. In what ways syllabus suit its context?

The teacher follows the allocation of time from the school
regulation. Then the teacher suit the time which is allocated 6x45
minutes per week based on the needs of the curriculum standard.

The material resources and tools/teaching-learning aids that are
determined in the syllabus are text book (Look Ahead X) which has
tape script, dictionary, cassette/CD, tape/CD player, OHP/LCD,
photo/poster, picture, English newspaper, magazine, and internet. In the
learning process, not all media are used. The teacher often uses only
tape recorder but it is very rare to use CD player, OHP/LCD because
the limitation of knowledge in using it. The school has the tools but not
all of them are involved in teaching learning process because there is
no Information and Technology (IT) Specialist to support the teachers
and students.

The students only have text book, and dictionary to help them to
learn. Regarding the school do not have internet access so teacher only
prepares the material from the media such as English newspaper,
magazine, and internet and bring it into the classroom. Students only
receive the material from the teacher. They cannot search the material
by themselves and it does not allow them to build their knowledge how
to select material and learning by technology. The internet is only
resource for the teacher to prepare the material.

7. Assessment within this syllabus

Assessment that is done by the teacher in this syllabus meets the
syllabus and curriculum aims. The curriculum is based on
communicative approach in developing four skills and the assessment also done by measuring how effective the approach in the teaching learning process and it reflects on the ability of the students to produce the language in applying four skills. For example, in the listening part, the curriculum aim is expected students to be able to understand and to respond conversation in daily life. The students are expected to understand and able to respond the greeting, expression of happiness, showing affection and sympathy. In the assessment of listening students are also expected to be able to respond the situation by using the appropriate expression.

On the other hand, when the students graduate from the school, there is an examination requirement to graduate the school and in this National examination only assess listening, reading and grammar. So in this case, the final assessment from the government does not meet the curriculum aims. That is why we can see many students that can perform speaking well cannot pass the national examination with a good score. It may leads some students to have lack of motivation in learning four skills of English and they mostly focus on National examination need.

8. **External influences on this curriculum**

Curriculum aims to prepare students to communicate in the daily life. That is may be the reason why the development of curriculum based on four skills. The requirements of a school leaving which force students need to pass the exam to graduate the senior high school level to get the certificate as a requirement to enter university also as a factor that influences of the curriculum.

When students enter the university students are tested English skill as well as the final examination in the senior high school. The students are also tested reading skill and grammar, there are no speaking and writing in the exam. The questions in the test are quite difficult for their level of proficiency in English so not all students can reach that level. If they cannot pass the exam they will be rejected. It makes students frustrated.
9. Other issues

The curriculum’s purpose is good. It allows students to develop all four language skills but when it comes to assessment in the national examination it seems less effective to assess only listening, reading and grammar.

10. Implementation of the syllabus

10.1. Some factors that affect the implementation of the syllabus

Carless (cited in Hall and Hewings, 2001, p. 264) points out there are three main factors are affecting the implementation of innovation in their case study of curriculum implementation in Hongkong. Those are teacher attitudes, teacher training and teacher’s understanding of the innovation.

Teacher attitudes

Teacher’s attitudes obviously affect their behavior in the classroom. When the teacher’s attitudes are congruent with the syllabus, they will be positively disposed towards its implementation. It can be seen in my experience, some English teachers only teach as their duty as a teacher. So it is very common to see the teachers who do not like when curriculum or syllabus always change. So when they have to follow the new innovation of syllabus, they just implement that as a duty. As a result, there is no creativity because their attitude towards the syllabus is negative.

Teacher training and support

Teacher training and support are crucial issues in the preparation of teachers to implement the new curriculum (Verspoor, cited in Carless, p. 264). The Indonesia government always prepares the training permanently and locally available in service-training so the support from the government is very good in providing the training.

Understanding the syllabus

Teacher needs to understand the syllabus very well so they can implement that easily and can encourage the students to learn. Understanding main principle of the syllabus helps teachers to teach using their best strategies.
10.2. Other factors:

Background of the teacher and teacher experience in teaching
The level of teacher’s education is also give big effect in implementing the curriculum. In this context, there are some teachers that are still studying in university. Because the school consider they can speak English well so they can receive them as educator in that school. However, the strategy of teaching takes important part in transferring knowledge to the students. So it is undeniable that sometime students feel bored with the class because no innovation in strategy of teaching due to the level of education of the teachers. Regarding to the school is private, so the students have authority to reject the teacher because they feel that they do not get anything and they ask the director of education of that school to change the teacher.

Teacher-researcher collaboration
Sharing the idea between teacher and researcher also helps teacher a lot to implement the syllabus. When researcher comes to school teacher needs to talk and discusses about the syllabus and the strategy of teaching. This collaboration is really useful.

Teacher reflection and development
It is very rare to see that teachers want their friend to observe their strategy of teaching. However, it can help teacher in improvement their strategy by colleague’s input. I remember when I was in the first year teaching experience, and my friend from Turkey who has many years teaching experience observed and watched my teaching strategy. It was very useful for me to improve my teaching strategy by receiving the input from him.

Recently, it is very useful that the Indonesia government encourages the teachers in the school to do Action-Class-research which aims to assess how effective the methodology that has been used in teaching learning process. The government also provides the funding for that research.

CONCLUSIONS
It can be concluded that the curriculum is designed in a very good way, since the government gives authority to the school to develop the curriculum based on the local context even though they
should follow the three main components: standard competence, basic competence, and indicator.

Teachers cooperate with the school committee to develop curriculum and syllabus by following the standard that is given by the government. This is good because the development of curriculum involved teachers and another individuals and institution that take responsibility on it. However, the teacher needs to work harder because they need to prepare the material such as from internet, magazine, English newspaper to support the process of teaching learning. In this case, the awareness, creativity and positive attitudes of the teacher towards the syllabus play an important role in implementing the new innovation of the syllabus.

One problem that remains and which the government needs to consider is the assessment of the curriculum in National examination does not suit the curriculum aims. This may discourage students in learning English because sometimes they just focus on grammar and such questions of national examination standard (reading and grammar), not four skills as in the curriculum design. This can be a problem for teacher to implement the curriculum because of lack motivation from the students.
REFERENCES


