

The SMU English Teachers' Competence in Developing the Teaching Materials and Strategies According to the 1994 English Syllabus

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Abstract: The 1994 English syllabus has long been implemented at schools. However, information on how far the implementation of the syllabus has been successful is not sufficiently available. The writer thinks information about the implementation of the syllabus is necessary to guarantee success of the teaching English at school. This study explores the SMU English teachers' competence in developing the teaching materials and strategies according to the 1994 English syllabus. It is affirmed that teaching materials and strategies are crucial in the learning teaching process and are not separable from the syllabus.

Keywords: English teachers' competence, teaching materials, teaching strategies, 1994 English syllabus.

The 1994 English syllabus is not exactly the same as the 1984 English syllabus though they basically share similar features. Both of them adopt a version of the communicative approach. However, the design and the format of the 1994 English syllabus differ from of the 1984 syllabus. Besides, the 1994 English gives teachers some freedom in developing instructional materials. Even, the 1994 English syllabus requires the teachers to adjust their attitudes and abilities to a new way of thinking and

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involves in practical terms (Dubin & Olshtain, 1990). Therefore, before doing the teaching, the teachers must make a sound preparation, namely developing instructional objectives, instructional materials, learning experiences, and evaluation items. This may be done well if the teachers have properly understood the essentials of the 1994 English syllabus.

The 1994 English syllabus is essentially a communicative English syllabus. The teachers are expected to help students gain communicative English competence. According to Campbell and Wales (1970), Hymes (1972) and Munby (1978) communicative competence consists of four major components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Accordingly, the study of language in use should not only deal with syntax, but also with the other ingredients of communication, such as non-verbal communication (gesture, posture, eye contact etc.), the medium and channel of language communication, role relationships between the respondents, the topic and purpose of communication (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Being a communicative syllabus, the 1994 English syllabus is affected by cognitive psychology. David Ausubel, one of the proponents of cognitive psychology, asserted that learning must be meaningful and relatable to individual's cognitive structure if it is to become a permanent part of his understanding of the world (Omaggio, 1986). The mind, when involved in meaningful learning, will organize the new material into meaningful chunks and relate them to existing cognitive structure in such a way that they will become 'attached'. Any learning situation can be meaningful if the learner has a disposition to relate the new material task to what he already knows; and the learning task itself is relatable to the learner's structure of knowledge (Brown, 1980).

The instructional objectives of the English syllabus for the lower Secondary Schools (SLTP) are reading, vocabulary, structure, writing, listening, speaking, and pronunciation. The Upper Secondary Schools (SMU) syllabus has the same components except that pronunciation is no longer presented. All instructional materials must be presented integratively. The language components (structures, vocabulary, pronunciation) are selected, to some extent, on the basis of the theme or topic of the reading text (Huda, 1992). Thus, structural and vocabulary items are presented in the reading, writing and speaking components of the same unit.

Structural items are not given in the syllabus but vocabulary items are listed. Teachers, thus, have to choose and develop structural items themselves. To do this, as mentioned before, they have to pay attention to the topic and text chosen. The presentation of structural items must be done to enable the students to understand and make use of the text under a certain topic.

Different from structural items, vocabulary items are listed in the syllabus. The words listed must be well selected, the teachers must not teach all of them but choose the ones required by the topic. In addition to the words provided, they are allowed to discuss words which are considered difficult and important found in the texts taught.

The 1994 English syllabus requires the teachers of English be creative and critical. They must be able to develop instructional materials by themselves, not entirely rely on the textbook. They may select materials different from the textbook or from other sources as far as the materials are still under the same theme. The topics and sub-topics presented, therefore, may be different but not the theme.

The instructional approach adopted by the 1994 English syllabus is 'meaningful approach' instead of 'communicative approach'. This principle suggests that learning-teaching activities must involve the students and use the target language. Such activities are reflected in the communicative activities.

The syllabus provides a list of communicative activities and communicative expressions to be selected. The teachers must select the proper communicative activities as well as communicative expressions required by the language skills taught. Besides selecting communicative activities and expressions, the teachers are allowed to develop communicative activities and expressions that may support the attainment of the objective. In short, the learning-teaching process that should take place in the classroom should be oriented towards the involvement of the students in activities using English in reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

A lesson unit program (LUP), according to the 1994 English syllabus, is developed for one topic with several sub-topics for the four language skills. The materials for one topic may consist of texts. One skill may require one text. The text may be written or spoken. Each skill with its text is completed with learning-teaching activities to attain the Specific Instructional Objectives (SIOs).

The design of the 1994 English syllabus is flexible in that it gives teachers more opportunities to find teaching materials and use teaching aids. The learning resources are not limited to 'official' English text books which are prescriptive in nature, containing prescribed teaching/learning English text, but also magazines, newspapers, products' instruction/direction, tourist guide, booklet, pamphlets, TV programs, radio programs, recorded materials etc. which contain authentic English.

This study describes the SMU English teachers' competence in developing English teaching materials according to the 1994 English syllabus. Specifically, the study describes: the SMU teachers' attitude towards the 1994 English syllabus; the extent of the SMU English teachers' understanding of the basic concept of the 1994 English syllabus; the SMU English teachers' ability to organize the teaching materials and strategies according to the 1994 English syllabus.

METHOD

This study is descriptive and qualitative in nature. It is descriptive for this study deals with a preliminary study. A preliminary study is worth carried out descriptively (McMillan, 1992). This study is qualitative in nature because it describes the observed phenomena in the form of words rather than numbers. Teachers' understanding about the 1994 English syllabus and their ability in organizing the teaching strategies will be identified and qualitatively described and analyzed.

Respondents of this study were the SMU teachers in Surabaya. There were 12 SMU teachers of English from private SMUs. The teachers graduated from the English departments except one from the east of Surabaya. It could be concluded, then, that the quality of the respondents' were not far from what is expected.

The data of this study were obtained from the teachers' responses to the questionnaires, the responses of the observation form, and their LUPs. The data cover the following areas: (1) the teachers' opinion about teaching English according to the 1994 English syllabus; (2) their understanding about the 1994 English syllabus; (3) their ability to select the proper texts according to the 1994 English syllabus; (4) their ability to organize the learning teaching activities according to the 1994 English syllabus; (5) their LUPs for the first year students of SMU; (6) their teaching activities as captured in the observation form.

There are three types of instrument applied. The first is a questionnaire about the 1994 English syllabus. The questionnaire covers knowledge of the 1994 English syllabus; a set of 'test items' concerning the English texts, learning-teaching activities, and evaluation types required by the 1994 English syllabus. The questionnaire is completed with direction explaining how to do the questionnaire and the time the questionnaire is to be taken. The second is LUPs developed by the teachers to teach English to the first year students of SMU. The LUPs analyzed are the ones that have been developed according to the 1994 English syllabus and applied by the respondents of the study. The third instrument is a set of form observing the teachers' teaching activities. The data taken with this instrument are used to crosscheck the teachers' responses to the questionnaire given.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study shows that all respondents have a positive attitude. Their attitude towards 1994 English syllabus is greatly affected by their formal qualification. Their formal qualification which enables them to adjust a new way of thinking is the syllabus (Dubin & Olshtain, 1990:3). They agree that the 1984 English syllabus is replaced because of its weaknesses (Huda, 1992) such as rigidity of the format and the teaching materials, and the misconception of the communicative approach. Accordingly, they think that the 1994 English syllabus is designed either to remedy the deficiencies in the 1984 English syllabus or to expand and improve them (Dubin & Olshtain, 1990:27). Further, the 1994 English syllabus is implemented to alleviate the problems and weaknesses found in the 1984 English syllabus, in addition to meeting the needs of the students and parents (Huda, 1992).

In relation to material development, they are free to develop their own. They do not agree with a prescriptive syllabus in which the teaching materials and their gradation, and the time allocation are determined. The syllabus, then, is not seen as the collection of teaching items. On the contrary, they consider the syllabus essentially as an administrative document that is static. It is, therefore, seen as a guide to adjust to new thinking (Dubin & Olshtain, 1990). Compared to the 1984 English syllabus, the 1994 English syllabus is far more flexible. It gives them freedom to develop the teaching materials by themselves according to the chosen

topics. They know that they have to be creative in modifying and/or creating the content of the syllabus. As a consequence, they have to develop lesson unit programs; it is through developing lesson unit programs modification is done.

The participants' agree with the status of English in the Indonesian educational system in which English is taught as the first obligatory foreign language at schools. The finding suggests that English is taught as having utilitarian purpose, that is, it contributes towards the advancement of science and technology. With varied themes and topics, they are encouraged to have more options on types of English texts. They think that the 1994 English syllabus, as a guide of teaching, can motivate them to equip learners a tool to cope with the advancement of science, technology, and culture.

Although the respondents have a positive attitude towards the 1994 English syllabus, they are uncertain with its implementation. They think that they may get some problems of implementation. These problems are due to the time allotment, the class size, the textbooks, the materials of the final test, and the teaching of the language elements. Implicitly, they think that the 1994 English syllabus still does not consider these problems while these factors are crucial in determining success of the implementation of the new syllabus.

The respondents think that the teaching materials of English are not proportional to the time allotment provided. The number of the themes and topics to be presented, according to them, can not be accommodated to the provided time allotment. Although the time allotment required to present one topic is at least four meetings, that is 4 x 45 minutes, they think that they can not cope with the four English skills and elements. The condition will be worse when the meetings of English are spread out on different days in a week. When this happens, they can not effectively spend the time on learning-teaching activities because they have to review the teaching materials at the beginning of the meeting.

A big class size, about 45 students in one classroom, is a problem for conducting learning-teaching activity. They think that they will get difficulties in applying the meaningful approach. They predict that learning to communicate in English that requires the mastery of language elements can not be carried out if the problem of a big class size is not solved. The students, they believe, will scarcely get opportunity to deal with

English if the number of the students in one classroom is about 45 students while the time allotment is only 45 minutes.

Their prediction of the problem of implementing the 1994 English syllabus meets the study done by Mukhaiyar (1992). He shows that teachers of English at SMU in Padang faced difficulties in applying the communicative approach in teaching English at SMU due to class size and time allocation. Further, he says that the teachers' lack of understanding of the communicative approach and their limited experience in its application made them in difficulties teaching English communicatively.

Based on the findings of this study and Mukhaiyar's findings, time allotment and a big class size can be said to be serious problems that must be solved in applying the communicative approach in teaching English at SMUs. Furthermore, their worries reflect their lack of understanding of the meaningful approach and their limited experience in dealing with communicative English teaching.

Their worries about English textbook can be judged as having relation to their previous teaching experiences. So far, they teach English with an English textbook. Even, most of them teach English as what the English textbook says (Harjanto, 1993). They think that teaching English is delivering the contents of the textbook. Such an attitude should actually not be kept on because it can make them not as creative as expected.

However, the positive meaning of their worries about English textbooks can also be drawn, that is, the respondents awareness of the learning resources. Their worries about the scarcity of the English textbooks according to the 1994 English syllabus suggest that the English textbooks as the learning resources are crucial for the teaching of EFL. They realize that a teacher is not the only learning resource for the students.

Worries about the materials of the English final examination are probably caused by the gap between the materials of the final examination and those of the teaching. Very often what is tested is not what is taught. Besides, it is understood that their orientation of teaching English is 'making' students ready to do the final examination.

Worrying about the materials of the English final examination can be understood in the context of teaching as a system. This means that the teachers pay attention to how the objectives of instruction can be achieved. However, dealing with the materials of the final examination as one of the main activities in the learning-teaching process is not a

good responsible act that should be done by teachers. They, instead, must pay attention to the defined objectives.

The findings of the introduction show that most of the respondents really understand the basic concept of the Introduction. Most of them understand that English is viewed as an instrument to express meaning which means that teaching English is aimed at the development of communicative competence. These respondents read the syllabus with understanding. Their understanding is supported with their English teaching experiences and formal qualifications. This is proved with the facts that those who understand the concept of teaching language (English) are those who are experienced in teaching English and have high formal qualification (Sarjana Degree).

Most of the respondents understand that English in Indonesia occupies a position as the first foreign language. They really understand the role of English in Indonesia as being the only obligatory foreign language at secondary schools. As teachers, they are well informed with the role of English though they may not read the syllabus.

However, some of the respondents still have problems with the essential elements of the Introduction: the curricular objectives and the teaching guidelines. They misinterpret the curricular objectives although the term 'communicative competence' is substituted by 'competence to communicate is English'. They think that the curricular objectives are to acquire English oral communicative competence.

Knowledge about curricular objectives affects teachers in carrying out their teaching activities. Their teaching can not be effective if they do not know what to be achieved. Therefore, the respondents are suggested to learn the curricular objectives and the teaching guidelines in order that their teaching is effective and successful, that is, they can help students to have communicative competence in its broadest sense of the term, which consists of four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Hymes, 1972; Munby, 1978).

The finding of the introduction also shows that some of the respondents are still confused with the teaching guidelines. Their misunderstanding is due to their misinterpretation of the concept of communicative teaching. Their previous understanding about communicative teaching is to help students to get oral language competence. Their concept of com-

municative language teaching does not match to the concept of meaningful language teaching as stated in the syllabus. The gap between their concept of communicative language teaching and the concept of meaningful language teaching suggested by the syllabus makes them confused.

Their problems of understanding the curricular objectives and the teaching guidelines can also be explained by their knowledge of learning and linguistics theories. They seem not to really understand the theory of cognitive learning and the theory of function and notion. Accordingly they are confused with the curricular objectives and the teaching guidelines which are greatly affected by language learning and linguistics theories.

The discussion of this part suggests that some of the respondents who are suggested to learn the objectives and the teaching guidelines must take these problems seriously. The objectives may not be achieved if the teaching strategies adopted by the teachers do not accord with the requirement of attaining the curricular objectives.

The findings of the Instructional Program show that most of the respondents sufficiently understand the Instructional Program of the 1994 English syllabus. Some of them are confused with the communicative function and the English components to be taught. Besides, they do not interpret the teaching objectives, the English skills, the learning-teaching activities, and the evaluation system appropriately.

It is stated that the main problems for the respondents are understanding the communicative functions and the English components. They think that the communicative functions are parallel with the English components. They think to teach them separately. This is so due to their previous teaching experiences in which they taught language components independently. Unconsciously, perhaps, they interpret the communicative functions and the teaching materials the same as what they did in the past.

Similar reasons can also be applied to analyze their problems of understanding the themes and topics. In the 1984 English syllabus, themes and topics are not mentioned. They interpret topics as the teaching materials for language elements and/or language skills. Accordingly, the topics were taught. Such understanding seems to be applied in digesting the themes and topics. They think that themes and topics are taught. This is incorrect because themes and topics serve to guide the learning materials.

Some of the respondents do not really understand authentic texts. These respondents are still not able to differentiate prescriptive texts from authentic ones. The source for their difficulties is probably due to the availability of authentic texts. In other words, these respondents are not familiar with authentic texts.

The findings show that the respondents really understand the instructional objectives and the teaching strategies. They know that the ultimate objective of teaching English is reading ability. They also know that the learning-teaching activities must be student active learning; they must give students chances to deal with English. Their knowledge of the role of English in Indonesia (they understand the role of English for it is stated the same in the 1975, 1984, and 1994 English syllabi) help them to understand the instructional objectives and the teaching strategies well.

The study shows that most of the respondents have mid-ability to develop the required instructional materials. Mid-ability means they are not really competent to organize the materials so that they are not independent or creative in developing the materials. There are several reasons underlying the results, they are (1) the respondents' previous teaching experiences and (2) their knowledge of the concept of communicative language teaching.

Before dealing with the 1994 English syllabus, they dealt with the 1975 and the 1984 English syllabi in which they are equipped with English textbooks. They taught English with English textbooks and treated them as the only learning resource. They believed that teaching English with the textbooks that written according to the syllabus (e.g. 1984) was best done. Consequently, they taught English as what the textbooks say (Harjanto, 1993), and did not develop their own teaching materials.

One of the serious problems that is taken as a consequence of developing the 1994 English syllabus is misinterpretation of the concept of communicative approach. They think that teaching English communicatively means helping students to acquire oral competence. Thus, emphasizing on the spoken ability is taken instead of reading ability. This, of course, deviates from the objective of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Besides deviating from the objective, their misinterpretation of the concept leads them not to care with the required instructional materials.

The respondents, actually, can not be blamed for neglecting the required instructional materials because they do not know what the materials should be. In fact, the syllabus states that the required teaching materials are the ones that are authentic but the information about authentic teaching materials is not complete enough so that they do not understand the concept well. Besides, organizing instructional materials does not only mean to write or to select English texts but also to exploit them to provide students with exercises (Harjanto & Prijambodo, 1993).

The study shows that the respondents have mid-ability to organize the teaching strategies. This means that some of the principles of learning-teaching activities stated by the 1994 English syllabus are not applied in their English learning-teaching activities. The principles not applied in their learning-teaching activities are related to the concepts of students' active learning, language use and usage, and communicative language testing.

Their previous teaching experiences and lack knowledge of communicative language teaching make them not really able to organize the teaching strategies. Instead of interpreting student active learning, that is giving chances to students to deal with English, the respondents are still busy explaining the problems to the students. They seem not to be accustomed to giving tasks in the classroom. Compared with the students, they are more active; they are active explaining the problems so that the class is dominated by the teacher.

Lack of understanding the function and notion of linguistics theory make them not be able to organize the learning teaching activities appropriately. They know that 'use' is not the same with 'usage'; however, they do not really understand that the 'use' of language is the objective, and the mastery of the formal patterns, or 'usage', of that language is a means to achieve the objective. As the finding shows, then, they still have problems presenting the teaching materials in which they are organized using the topic under the chosen theme.

Their limited knowledge of communicative language teaching is also the source of their problems administering communicative English test. It is known that communicative language testing is strongly influenced by the place of 'usage' and 'use' in inter-personal communication (Carroll, 1980). As mentioned above they do not really understand the place of 'use' and 'usage' that they have problems to organize communicative

learning-teaching activities. Because of that, they are still in difficulties administering communicative language tests.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The respondents' positive attitudes towards the 1994 English syllabus are not parallel with their ability to organize the teaching materials and strategies. This means that their positive attitude does not guarantee them to be able to organize the teaching materials and strategies. Their misunderstanding of the basic concepts of the 1994 English syllabus does not make them really able to organize the teaching materials and strategies. Substituting the term 'communicative approach' into 'meaningful approach' does not help them understand the basic concepts of the term. Probably, even, the new term 'meaningful approach' creates more problems of understanding the nature of communicative language teaching.

In general the findings show that the respondents have mid-ability to organize the teaching materials and strategies. Besides their mid-understanding of the basic concepts of the syllabus, the form and the explanation of the content of the syllabus make them not really able to organize the instructional materials and activities.

Suggestion

Taking the cause into consideration seven recommendations are given here. (1) Information about the form and scope of the final examination must be given soon. (2) Further information about the place of the communicative expressions and the vocabulary items listed in the syllabus is needed. (3) Further information about the role of communicative expressions in the development of instructional materials should be mentioned. (4) Authentic texts should be available at schools (SMUs). Regardless of its high cost, they help the teachers to understand the concept of authenticity. (5) Substituting the term 'communicative approach' into 'meaningful approach' is not a must. What is urgent is helping them to understand the basic principles of the communicative approach and then translate them into practice. Accordingly, service training on communicative language teaching and testing must be conducted. (6) In line to the previous recommendations, the English Department of Teacher's Train-

ing Colleges is urged to give a hand to the schools. Because their main problems are due to translating the authenticity of the teaching materials, and the nature of communicative activities and testing. The program is effectively done in the form of workshop. (7) This study is a preliminary study in nature, therefore, a further study on the same topic should be done. The future study is to confirm the findings of this study. In order that the study can uncover more detail data and findings, a classroom research is recommended.

This study mainly deals with the theory of communicative language teaching. The findings show that some of the elements of communicative language teaching are not well digested by the respondents. As a result, they have difficulties in organizing the teaching materials and strategies. Based on the findings, the experts in communicative language teaching are expected to develop the theory of communicative language teaching. They are expected to make clear the meaning of each element of communicative language teaching. Among the elements that must be clarified is the nature of authenticity and communicativeness.

The English Department of Teacher's Training Colleges, must pay attention to the teaching of English Syllabus (TEFL). As indicated by the findings, many respondents of the study, who are teachers of English, have difficulties understanding the concept of communicative approach. Accordingly, they may not be able to develop communicative teaching materials and strategies. In line to this, the English Department, which is responsible for preparing English teachers, is suggested to review the course outline of TEFL whether it is suitable with the society's needs or not. This is to be done in order that the teachers to be are competent in teaching English according to the requirements of the syllabus.

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