



The Effectiveness of the Involvement of Teachers of English in the Curriculum Development Process at Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta

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Abstract

Teachers are becoming more and more involved in the curriculum development process because they believe that their involvement will help learners improve their academic learning outcomes. Unlike teachers of English in public schools in Vietnam, teachers at Centers for Foreign Studies do not have to rely on curricula stipulated by Ministry of Education and Training and they have more autonomy in selecting or designing curricula of their own. This study aimed to measure the efficiency of the involvement of teachers of English in the curriculum development process at the Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta. The findings showed that the majority of teachers were willing to take part in the curriculum development process and they affirmed that their learners made progress when the curricula were modified.

Key words: Curriculum, Curriculum Development, Process and Models.

Introduction

It appears that most of the textbooks and curricula being used in basic education schools in Vietnam are designed and written by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)¹. As a result, teachers in Vietnam have limited opportunities to design their own curricula or to take part in the curriculum development process though they are actual implementers of those curricula in their classrooms². In other words, teachers themselves are able to envision what points their students need to practice more and as facilitators of the classrooms as well as those working directly with students, they feel the need to spend more time with their students on those things; nevertheless, MOET controls the content, the evaluation procedure as well as the amount of time on the delivery of instruction on each lesson³.

Le⁴ contended that "Put simply, the textbook becomes the curriculum, and it is understandable that instruction is largely, if not completely, textbook-driven" (p. 197). Therefore, such a modality of teaching has a negative impact on student learning. According to Education Bureau (2013) and Ornstein and Hunkins (1998)⁵, teachers need to participate in various stages of curriculum design and development in the purpose to remediate students' academic weaknesses. Furthermore, to help enhance teaching capacity and student learning outcomes, it is recommended that both teachers and students provide feedback on school curricula in order that they are modified to better cater for student learning purposes. Much as teachers in public schools have to follow the curricula stipulated by MOET, their

colleagues at Centers for Foreign Studies have more involvement in the curriculum development process because each training Center has better autonomy in selecting or designing curricula of their own. More importantly, the ostensible elements which draw more learners' participation to the Centers are good curricula, reasonable tuition fees and efficient teachers. Realizing this, there is no doubt that the training Centers frequently modify and develop curricula which are beneficial to the improvement of learners' academic learning. This study was to measure the efficiency of the involvement of teachers of English in the curriculum development process at the Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta.

Review of Related Research Literature: There are many definitions of the term "curriculum" and each denotes different conceptualizations. Su⁶ defined the curriculum as "a means of achieving specific goals and objectives" (p. 154). Teachers are supposed to realize educational goals in their teaching performance; as a consequence, the term "curriculum" is more teacher-oriented. When the curriculum is designed without the involvement of teachers, they do not feel their sense of ownership of the materials or textbooks that they are required to teach anymore⁷. This partly blocks their enthusiasm for teaching and students will have to suffer. Rogers and Taylor⁸ indicated that curriculum development is all about planning and guiding. Wood and Davis⁹ regarded curriculum as the process of opting for courses of studies. So, curriculum is known to be more than a goal or an objective. No matter how curriculum is defined, it

elicits the content of learning, methods and materials utilized, and the modality to evaluate the process of student learning.

In the past few years, they have been lots of studies related to the curriculum development. There have been many models for curriculum development which have been initiated, each of which has a great diversity of steps or stages. Some of the curriculum development models are quite simple while others are very sophisticated. Some are deductive and some inductive. Rogers, as cited by Hall¹⁰ mentioned one basic curriculum model.

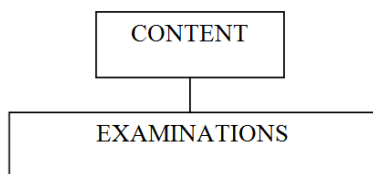


Figure-1
Popular Picture of Curriculum

The figure 1 articulated the interrelationships between what was taught and the output of the process. Hall (1975)¹¹ highlighted that education was evaluation-based. Hall (1975)¹² also agreed that “*knowledge is the accumulation of brick upon brick of content and information*” (p.63). More specifically, the first part of the figure was dealt with the content of training and the second with examinations. Tyler (1949)¹³ stated fundamental questions in the curriculum development and instruction plan as follows: i. Which objectives would the educational establishment like to reach?. ii. Which pedagogical incidents are embodied to meet the objectives?. iii. In what effective way can pedagogical incidents be conducted?. iv. How can curriculum designers/ developers specify whether objectives are being met? (p.1)

Tyler (1949)¹⁴ took into account four pivotal factors in the process of curriculum development, including: i.educational objectives of institutions, ii. pedagogical incidents relating to the objectives, iii. effective conduct of pedagogical incidents and iv. modalities of evaluating objectives. Another curriculum development model which is popular was initiated by Hunkins¹⁵. There are seven crucial stages in Hunkins’s model which is presented in Figure 2.

It is undeniable that no matter what model teachers are optimizing, their role in the curriculum development process is momentous. Ornstein and Hunkins¹⁶ asserted that:

Teachers must be actively involved in the curriculum. It is the experienced teacher who has a broad and deep understanding of teaching and learning, the needs and interest of students, and the content, methods, and materials that are realistic; therefore, it is the teacher (not the supervisor or administrator) who has the best chance of taking curriculum making out of the realm of

theory or judgement and translating it into practice and utility (p. 27).

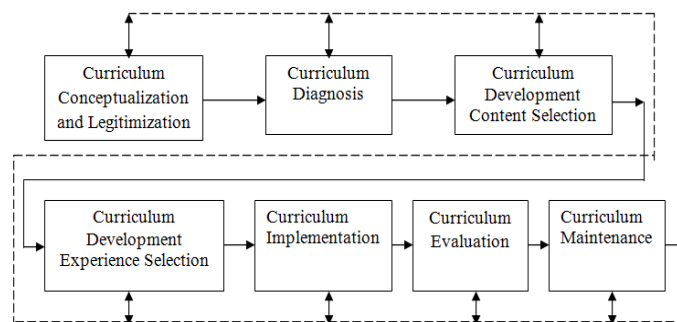


Figure-2
Hunkins’s Curriculum Development Model

Teachers are seen as implementers of the curriculum; nonetheless, teachers do more in classrooms. Despite the fact that in several schools, curricula have been already designed, teachers will know exactly how the curriculum is since they work with their students and know benefits as well as downsides of the curriculum. As a matter of fact, to design appropriate curricula, it is recommended that teachers be actively involved in every step of the process (Handler, 2010)¹⁷. Additionally, teachers are able to gauge allotted time-frame for each activity and know how to engage their students in each activity. When teachers’ involvement in the curriculum development process creates the product, they will feel more assured in their classrooms, figuring out that their students will benefit¹⁸.

Materials and Methods

This study investigated 98 teachers of English who were teaching English at Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta. They were selected via master teacher training programs conducted at the provinces. The questionnaires and interviews were used for the study. The questionnaire was in English. As all the teachers taking part in the questionnaire were teachers of English, it is certain that they had no difficulties understanding all the articulated items. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section queried respondents about demographic information relevant to the participants, including such items as: gender, age, years of teaching, and the highest degree obtained. The second section encompassed Likert-type response scale questions to explore teacher attitudes and perceptions toward their involvement in the curriculum development process. These items were rated utilizing a 4-point Likert-type scale. Number 1 indicated that participants strongly agreed, number 2 agreed, number 3 disagreed and number 4 for strongly disagreed. A neutral point was not provided for teachers who did not have any opinion. As teachers, respondents needed to articulate their opinions about items researched. The third section indicated teachers’ self-evaluation of their participation in the curriculum development process.

Results and Discussion

The study targeted 150 teachers of English who were teaching at Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta. These teachers took part in master-teacher trainings at provinces. To facilitate the survey, the questionnaire was handed to all the surveyed teachers. Of 150 teachers, 98 (37 males, 61 females) responded yielding an overall response rate of 65.33%. Though the researcher did not collect all the distributed questionnaires as scheduled, it was fine for the analysis.

The largest number of the respondents (52%, n = 51) spread from 22 to 35 years in age. 37 (38%) were from 36 to 45 years old whereas only 10 (10%) were above 45. Among 98 teachers, only 2 (2%) obtained their Master degree and the rest (98%) graduated in Bachelor degree from teacher training colleges or universities. The majority of the teachers (78%, n = 77) pursued English teaching as their career for more than 5 years.

Concerning the percentage of teachers engaging in the curriculum development process, only 33% respondents (n = 32) answered that they had taken part in the curriculum development process. Nearly all of them were requested to be members of the curriculum team. 67% respondents (n = 66) did not join in the curriculum development process. In response to the query as to whether they would like to join when requested, 76% (n = 50) agreed to join as compared to 16 respondents' refusal (24%).

35% (n = 34) of the respondents strongly agreed that they needed to join in the curriculum development for the benefits of

their learners and 47% (n = 46) expressed their agreement. 65% (n = 64) agreed that their knowledge about the stages of curriculum development would be gained when they participated in this process. As for the confirmation whether they could work with their colleagues to hear from them drawbacks of the curriculum which they failed to notice, 27% (n = 26) was within the range of disagreement and total disagreement. Even though more than half (54%) agreed that they could study from teaching experiences their colleagues had gained in the implementation of the curriculum, 35% (n = 34) expressed their disagreement and complete disagreement. 67% (n = 65) showed their agreement and complete agreement that they were able to contribute their ideas to improve the curriculum which was in current use. Nevertheless, 44% (n = 43) disagreed and altogether disagreed that they could share with their colleagues the downsides they had detected in the implementation of the curriculum. The percentage of respondents who expressed their agreement and complete agreement that they could adjust the curriculum more conducive to their learners' learning stood at 76%.

Concerning the evaluation of teachers about their participation in the curriculum development process, only 32 teachers answered this question. None of the curriculum development members thought that their participation added no value to the process. The majority of the curriculum development members indicated that their participation was valuable (84%, n = 27) and the rest (16%, n = 5) self-rated theirs as from "very valuable" to "extremely valuable".

Table-1
Number and Percentage to Respondents' Attitudes towards Participating the Curriculum Development Process

Focus Topics	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Participating in the curriculum development process is necessary for the sake of learners.	34	35	46	47	15	15	3	3
I can gain my knowledge about stages of curriculum development.	12	12	64	65	18	19	4	4
I can work with my colleagues to hear from them drawbacks of the curriculum which I fail to notice.	15	15	57	58	10	10	16	17
I can study from teaching experiences my colleagues have gained in the implementation of the curriculum.	11	11	53	54	21	22	13	13
I can contribute my ideas to better the curriculum which is in current use.	19	20	46	47	17	17	16	16
I can share with my colleagues the downsides I have figured out in the implementation of the curriculum.	21	21	34	35	39	40	4	4
I can adjust the curriculum which is more conducive to my learners' learning.	33	34	41	42	16	16	8	8

N 98

In interviews conducted, one teacher in Vinh Long Province completely agreed that his participation in the curriculum development process was needed as this was a great chance for him to talk with others in the curriculum team inappropriate parts in the lessons which were confusing to his learners. He believed that it was also the time for colleagues to talk together as well as to share experiences gained in the implementation of the lessons. He also highlighted that the meeting about the curriculum development process had to be more constructive rather than critical. As for the effectiveness of the process on his learners' academic improvement, he mentioned that his learners studied more effectively when the team agreed to spend more time on different grammar parts. Moreover, he agreed that his adding more self-designed activities in the lesson helped his students have more time to practice and reflect. He felt that he could afford to introduce more communicative activities for his learners and help keep track of their progress day by day. For him, this was something unachievable before. Another teacher in Can Tho Province supposed that her participation in the curriculum development process was necessary. She felt that the curriculum developed by the team better met the requirements for her learners. The results of their mid-term and final exams were much better, which shows that they had added more pertinent activities to the lessons as well as left out unnecessary ones. Nevertheless, she thought that not all the curriculum development was suitable. She would like to be more autonomous in deciding what her learners needed to be instructed. She also expressed her opinion that the curriculum was good, but what most of the teachers were faced with was their unsuitable implementation of the curriculum. Besides, she mentioned that factors which functioned as a deterrent to teachers' participation in the curriculum development process were inconvenient meeting dates, self-doubts about their contribution to the meeting as well as the inefficiency of the curriculum development teamwork.

Conclusion

This study was to measure the effectiveness of the involvement of teachers of English in the curriculum development process at the Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta. Most of the teachers taking part in the survey were young and all of them obtained at least Bachelor degree in English. Though young, more than three fourth of them were experienced teachers teaching English for more than 5 years. On the whole, 84% teachers who had joined the curriculum development process at the Centers for Foreign Studies self-rated their participation "valuable" and the rest evaluated theirs as "very valuable" and "extremely valuable". This illuminates that those who had served or were serving as members of the curriculum development team possessed a positive attitude towards the process. Besides, the possibility for others to engage in this process could be achieved since 76% showed their interest to join if requested even though 24% of the respondents refused to be members of the curriculum development team. Generally, the

majority of the respondents showed their willingness to join the team.

Specifically, when asked to rate their opinions as to what they perceived about the curriculum development process, teachers yielded positive data. 82% expressed their agreement and complete agreement that participating in the curriculum development process was necessary for the sake of learners; 77% agreed and completely agreed that they were able to gain their knowledge about stages of curriculum development when participating in the process; and 76% supposed that they could adjust the curriculum which was more conducive to their learners' learning. These data denote that a large number of teachers taking part in the survey not only had a positive attitude towards joining the process, but they were also aware of the good points the process would bring to their teaching and especially to their learners.

Findings from the interviews showed that though the respondents appreciated their participation in the curriculum development team and considered the opportunity to join in the process as valuable, it also co-existed some factors which somehow deterred them from participating. Inconvenient meeting dates, self-doubts about their contribution to the meeting as well as the inefficiency of the curriculum development teamwork were chief factors that tremendously affected teachers' working as members of curriculum development team. Teachers taking part in the interviews agreed that their voice in the curriculum development process was heard and their learners made progress as they had more time to learn and practice more. Thus, it is evident that their participation in the curriculum development process was effective, helping to improve their learners' academic achievements.

It appears that teachers' working as members of the curriculum development team helps figure out drawbacks existing in the current curricula used at the Centers for Foreign Studies in the Mekong Delta, so the leadership of these training Centers need to strongly encourage their teachers to take active part in the process. Additionally, they have to listen patiently to their teachers' ideas, feelings and contributions so as to achieve success with the curriculum development and implementation. If it is feasible, they should recognize teachers who spend more time working in the curriculum development team by concrete actions.

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