A REVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

A review of the current literature on curriculum development elucidates that much of the existing work either: (i) focuses on the development of educational resources; (ii) rectifies the concept of curriculum; (iii) or identifies desirable features of development methods without providing any practical guidance that synchronizes the needs of any particular education systems and geographical status where students are living. This paper scrutinizes the development of the Department of English Language Education curriculum of Ar-Raniry State Islamic University (Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh) Indonesia in line with Aceh context. It is flexible and evolutionary, and is soundly underpinned by proven theory and practices from contemporary curriculum development concepts. Systematically this article explores three pivotal aspects: educational foundation in Aceh, curriculum development in Indonesia, and an ideal curriculum of the Department of English Language Education, particularly in Aceh context.

Keywords: *curriculum; curriculum development; English language teacher education; higher education*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is a means to delineate the philosophy, objectives, teaching and learning materials, teaching and learning approach, and assessment of a specific educational program (McFadden & Roehrig, 2017). It is through the curriculum that an educational institution formulates the skills and experiences that students could master after accomplishing a certain study program. Students will be equipped with

particular skills that enable them to achieve their gleaming future and get involved with development process if curriculum is well developed and taught. However, it is not impossible that students will be powerless and unskillful if specific graduate attributes fail to be integrated in education curriculum. Hence, to empower students to reach their promising future, educational institutions should be able to develop their curriculum that enables students or learners to enhance their skills and competences, and implement such skills and experiences in real life.

In fact, curriculum development in Higher Education institutions (HEi) has multiple functions. The responsibility of ensuring that students obtain updated information regarding educational advancement is one of the tangible reasons. As such academic has an obligation to adapt to new circumstances including reviewing the programs offered to students, and priorities to be placed on the programs. Academic community also "has moral compulsion to discharge their fiduciary responsibility to students and community for developing and maintaining quality, current, and relevant curricula" (Kupperschmidt & Burns, 1997, p. 91). To meet the current educational and employment prospects and students' needs, curriculum should be periodically assessed and developed.

At baseline the purposes of developing curriculum at academic level is to adjust with the institution missions and visions. In this sense, academic entails the need to become familiar with institutions' missions and visions, and to understand the educational values adhered in the community where the educational institution is constructed. Therefore, academic community should ensure that the development of curriculum accommodates appropriate values generated from institution missions and visions, state mission, student's needs, and employment orientation.

To this end, Barnett vigorously urged academic to contemplate the curriculum in the light of generating learners not only to have an ideology of academic "knowing-that", but also "knowing-how" (Barnett, 1994). This enables them not only to know things, but also to do things. The application of these approaches into curriculum development does not mean that this reforms the traditional education purview, but this is to put new emphasis in the curriculum upon skills, competence, experimental and problem-based forms of learning (Nicholls, 1995). This paper attempts to answer the following main questions: (1) What is

Indonesian HEi curriculum? (2) What is the curriculum foundation of Aceh? and (3) What is an ideal curriculum of the Department of English Language Education of UIN Ar-Raniry?

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA

In developing curricula, Indonesian HEi is required to refer to the Ministry of National Education Decree number 73, Year 2013 regarding the core curriculum. HEi should apply a Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia (KKNI) curriculum that empowers learners to have a specific skill after graduating from a university or a college. The KKNI curriculum is defined as a curriculum that emphasizes on a particular disciplinary study focus. Additionally, the study focus will forge learners to master such the skills to be able to handle certain tasks based on the focus of their study.

This regulation also legalizes the HEi throughout Indonesia to design and develop their curriculum in line with the missions of the HEi and the focus offered programs. Despite consenting HEi to freely develop their curriculum content, the department requires HEi to accommodate three basic competencies in their curriculum development. This is intended to provide a wide access to local authority both as the government and educational developers and practitioners to design educational curriculum that matches the local context. It means that curriculum should be developed based on the exclusiveness of local needs and strategies to empower students as an integral part of human empowerment based on particular condition and local geographic circumstances.

In this sense, the Department of English Language Education for instance should learn particular English courses as the core competence. Core courses consist of four English language skills; Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. In addition, as the teacher students, they should also learn certain pedagogical courses as the supporting competence to be teachers. This includes teaching methodology, teaching evaluation, and curriculum analysis. Other additional competences emphasize on local values and traditions as well as the visions and missions of the institution. In this regard, UIN Ar-Raniry offers some elective Islamic courses that

students can choose to study as part of their courses. The courses are ranging from Islamic law to Quranic interpretation and recitation.

As stated in national strategic planning, the focuses of national educational empowerment rely on three conceptual frameworks; affective, cognitive, and psychomotor. The regulation affirms that affective domain should nurture learners' competency in enhancing spiritual values, noble *akhlak* (moral) and other aesthetic values. The cognitive domain on the other hand should sharpen learners' competency in empowering intellectual to master, develop, and apply specific knowledge and technology. Finally the psychomotor domain stresses on the ability of learners in term of specific technical skills acquisition, and kinesthetic competency.

All those values, indeed, ensure that students should have particular competence and should also behave as a noble person after they graduate from an educational institution. However, it seems that the regulation does not clearly illustrate the specific knowledge and graduate attributes that students should master. Therefore, educational institutions must be able to formulate the skills students should master in order for them to be able to expand their knowledge and experiences to be applied in their life. Nevertheless, to synchronize the basic concept of education across the country, educational institutions are expected to accommodate the above three conceptual frameworks.

Over the years to unite students in the distinct archipelago, the Indonesian government adopted the national curriculum based on the principles of *Pancasila* (Indonesian national philosophy). These principles emphasize on the belief in one god, human rights, national unity, democracy, and social justice (Kopong, 1995). This approach strongly influenced the development of curriculum throughout the nation.

The enactment of regional number 22/1999 regarding the empowerment of local government has significant influence on educational empowerment (Tilaar, 2002). This regulation shifted the state centripetal power to local actors and institutions (Bjork, 2006). Under the management of General Directorate Higher Education in Jakarta, HEi may develop their own curricula and course to adjust with the local conditions. This enables HEI to decide and assess the programs in the light of local needs and local contexts. As a result, HEi can develop various programs

and accommodate local values in developing their curricula. By accommodating the local needs, HEi can maximally empower its curriculum in providing life skills to its graduates.

"*Dalam konteks otonomi, lebih baik lagi apabila pendidikan yang diselenggarakan lebih diarahkan ke potensi yang dimiliki oleh daerah dan dalam konteks kemandirian lokal*" [In the context of autonomy, it is better that education is directed towards the potential of the region itself and in the context of local independence] (Tilaar, 2002, p. 228).

This regulation, in principal, provides a wide opportunity for all educational institutions throughout Indonesia to empower their own schools and people based on the heritage and culture of its community entities. By accommodating the local needs into a specific educational empowerment, it is expected that the local community will be well developed. Educational developers at local level may have sufficient knowledge in formulating the target of education for every individual and school. Through the implementation of this regulation, it is expected that the education quality throughout Indonesia can be empowered without facing any significant difference.

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION OF ACEH

The *Aceh self-governed regulation* (UUPA) stipulated in the national regulation number 11 of 2006 (Undang-Undang Pemerintah Aceh, 2006) that there is a special regulation on the Aceh government. The regulation affirms that Aceh has its self-governed government that enables the local government to develop and manage its own government policy. The regulation also includes provisions concerning political issues, human rights, rule of law, educational systems, and economic matters (Aspinal, 2005). Some politicians believe that this regulation is the result of political will from central government in Jakarta to hush the political flaming in Aceh regarding the potent demand of Acehnese for an independent state; Aceh vigorously wanted to get free from Indonesia.

Regarding the education, the regulation affirms that the foundation of Aceh's education should be based on Islamic values, Quran and *Sunnah*, national state philosophy, national regulation 1945, and local culture (UUPA, 2006). However,

there is no specific information confirming detailed concept of those essences. As such, higher education institution (HEi) may interpret and apply those concepts loosely, depending on the visions and missions of respective institutions.

As Aceh region is inhabited by Muslim majority, Acehnese view education from Islamic perspective in which education is a form of worship (Qanun No. 23, 2002). Education in Islamic standpoint means "a lifelong learning process of preparing individuals to actualize their role as a *Khalifah* (vicegerent) of Allah on earth and thereby contributes fully to the reconstruction and development of their society in order to achieve well-being in this world and hereafter" (Hashim & Langgulung, 2008, p.1).

From Acehnese cultural perspective, education is the righteous media in empowering students' personality as part of the process of forming Acehnese society at large to be civilized, and increasing their dignity (Qanun Aceh No. 5, 2008). Education should be an active vehicle to improve society's welfare by means of transforming religious and science values into community lives. Therefore, HE should nurture students not only in scientific spheres, but more importantly in moral principles. Universities should play more visible roles in the educational, social and economic well-being of local communities (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008).

Graduates of universities are regarded as individuals who have certain competencies and they are professional in their fields. This is in accordance with the strategic planning of Aceh education in which it ensures that all secondary and higher education graduates are able to work in increasingly competitive global, regional, national and labour markets. Graduates should be well prepared to contribute to the development of social, economic, political and community life of Aceh (NAD strategic planning, 2007). If they are teachers, for instance, they should be able to teach students appropriately; they should be able to add values by being teachers. The added values can be tolerant, abiding by law, care towards others, generous, skillful in their study field, honest, trustworthy, and other social attributes.

To answer this need, it is imperative that the academic at this department work very seriously to integrate the Islamic teachings, which has sacral values for Acehnese, and general knowledge into a comprehensive format. It is well understood that the integration of knowledge is well accepted by most scholars

throughout the world. There is no more knowledge segregation to be proposed to make a specific barrier between one specific knowledge concentration and other study fields. Students need to study Islamic religious teachings to strengthen their knowledge on religious values. Through these values, it is expected that students may have good moral to act and behave wherever they are.

Furthermore, from Acehnese cultural perspectives, it is believed that knowledge is a means to make people reach their happiness both in this world and there in hereafter. To reach this happiness, both Islamic knowledge and general knowledge should be studied and mastered by students. Department of English Language Education, a department that integrates Islamic teaching and general knowledge, must be able to answer this challenge. The department should be able to produce graduates who have good understanding on Islamic values as a core mission of Acehnese culture and Ar-Raniry Institute, and English skills as a core competence of the department.

Department of English Language Education as part of Islamic education institution must be able to play pivotal roles to fulfill the need of this expectation; to provide strong Islamic knowledge foundation and excellent English education knowledge for the students studying at this department. To reach this objective, there are various steps to be taken into serious consideration by all stakeholders at this department. Curriculum is part of it. The curriculum of this department should be able to provide students adequate life skills. It should also be able to produce graduates who have satisfactory Islamic knowledge to be good Muslim citizens.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION CURRICULUM

According to Malgoire the "common purpose of general education is to provide students with fundamental basis of knowledge, skills, and experience that will enable them to thrive professionally, personally and as citizens" (Magloire, 2010, p. 24). Department of English Language Education of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh is one of the departments under the management of *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan* (Teacher Training Faculty). The primary objectives of the department are to educate students to be professionals in English language and to be professionals

English teachers, who will teach at junior and senior schools (*Panduan Akademik Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry*, 2016).

Despite the department has proposed to implement the KKNI curriculum for students enrolling in academic year 2017/2018, the department still uses the former curriculum. The former department's English Language Education curriculum states that to achieve a bachelor's degree in English language and to be able to teach at senior and junior high schools throughout Aceh province, students should complete 144-160 credit hours. In shaping its graduate to be professional in English language, the department offers three course components; core competence comprises of English related subjects, supporting courses emphasize on pedagogical related courses, and elected courses focus on certain Islamic teaching values.

The compositions of these courses are recognized as the three basic elements of general education structures (Zeszotarski, 1999). The structures enable students to concentrate on the core coursework while they are free to select other courses that they may be interested in. However, it is essential to stipulate particular knowledge students should learn and how the performance is to be displayed (Biggs & Tang, 2007). If those courses are poorly designed, students may fail to develop their particular competence and the university itself cannot assure the quality of its graduate in this regard.

At the department, students are offered some core courses as well as optional courses. Students can select optional courses that meet their preferences. As a matter of fact, this concept provides students greater freedom of choice and enables courses to be constructed flexibly. Yet, most of the provided courses are often lack of coherence between the concept of teaching and learning, and how to improve students' competence to be good Islamic citizens. In addition, when students are requested to study so many subjects, this can lead them to study a course at a superficial level. As a result, shallowness of learning and inadequate opportunity for students to grips with a specific knowledge discipline is unavoidable (Rowland, 2006).

Rowland illustrates that asking students to pick up some courses for the sake of their knowledge development interest is the same as we treat students as consumers in a supermarket. These students pick and mix their educational

commodities with little sense of continuation and development. To some extent, the intention of HE to offer some elective courses is worthwhile in which students may freely select the courses that match their interest. However, when students study only a few credit hours, they are studying at superficial level, their depth study is insufficient to enable them engage in critical approach and values of any particular scholarship.

An ideal content of curriculum for this department should accommodate a comprehensive concept how to teach students to be good citizens, namely the citizens who have strong Islamic faith as the primary values acknowledged by UUPA (Habiburrahim, Orrell, Conway, 2016). The department should reconceptualize some specific subjects in the light of UUPA and local culture mainstream. This concept does not mean to add more irrelevant subjects for students studying at the department, but some existing irrelevant subjects can be omitted, and then more appropriate subjects can be added. Apart from this specific academic metaphor, higher education students should be educated to be individuals having critical abilities to be a democratic society to enable them make changes in community lives.

Higher education should "both comply with the demands of disciplinary knowledge and also contest its assumptions and transgress its boundaries" (Rowland, 2006, p. 39). As candidate of teachers, students studying at the department should master necessary skills to acknowledge the practicality of teaching as core to the nature of their future career. Students then can apply this knowledge within professional development experiences for being qualified school teachers.

Barnett and Coat proclaim that within the scholarly context, any formal course at HE institutions should be able to be assessed in terms of its capacity to promote and develop *knowing* (dealing with teaching and learning), *acting* (applying the mastered knowledge into practice), and *being* (integrating the knowing and acting into oneself in order to contribute to the real world) (Barnett & Coate, 2005). This notion is acknowledged by Stein and Walker (2010) stating that HE curricula should support the development of learning and the application of knowledge in a variety of contexts and situations. Teaching and learning process should become an

integral part that may influence students' thought and actions. Ultimately, this process brings positive implication toward students' social lives and works.

In the contemporary workforce world, university graduates are required to master several practical important abilities. As such, curriculum developer at this department should be able to envisage this requirement. Self-directed learning, critical thinking and reasoning, finding and using appropriate learning resources, information and technology, teamwork, and leadership skills are part of the core skills that are highly demanded nowadays (Kwan, 2009). All these skills can be best acquired through IBL (inquiry-based learning), EBL (enquiry-based learning), and PBL (problem-based learning) learning approaches (Dickson, 2010).

Ramsden (2003, p. 141) reminds us that though the PBL approach is "more applicable in professional fields and discipline, the key to its use in all fields lies in its focus on realistic issues that bring together teaching, research, and practice". Since the graduates of this department are trained to be professionals in English language, they should possess these skills to also work in non-pedagogy domain realms. Some of the graduates are actively involved in non-pedagogical world. They are serving as key players at private international companies such as Exxon Mobile, Chevron, and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Oxfam, Islamic Relief, and International Relief Development. This is a part of prestige that has been recognized by people in Aceh, particularly those who graduated from the department. To more enhance the quality of education at this department, those mentioned skills should be part of curriculum content of the department of English Language Education.

Recent research conducted on students' opinion on the department curriculum elucidates that students are not satisfied with the ongoing curriculum (Habiburrahim, 2017). Most of research participants claim that there are courses that overlap and are not interrelated. Regarding the Islamic courses, department should assess the current offered courses. Some of the courses are obscure in terms of content and focus. Even, some of the courses have different names but they have similar goals. Indeed, the department should be able to justify one course based on the needs and the objectives to be achieved after students learn such the course.

Students also expect that lecturers who handle the Islamic courses should be able to actively communicate in English. This means while lecturers transforming

their Islamic knowledge, they are actively communicating by using English as the recommended language of the department. This brings multiple advantages for students in which they can study English while they are learning Islamic values. If department has strong intention to implement students' expectation, the department can assign lecturers who have adequate Islamic knowledge graduated from various overseas universities. If the department does not have sufficient lecturers who have good Islamic knowledge on Islamic substances, it should find others who have both skills in English and religious knowledge.

In accordance with the general knowledge, students claim that the department does not offer updated life oriented-skills that students can acquire. For instance, those who want to be translators should be provided extra hours and courses on being able to empower their competence to be translators. In this regard, students also expect that the department should foster a strong collaboration with other institutions that may bring mutual benefit. The department should have initiate cooperation with both government and non-government organizations which in the end may use services of students from the Department of English Language Education. For example, those who want to deepen their life skills on translation can do some internship programs with English course institutions that have translation project, or those who want to be English writers can do some internship programs with English magazine or newspaper agencies.

The curriculum of the department should also encourage students to learn practical knowledge. Students after having adequate knowledge on theoretical aspects should implement them into a real practice. This can be done by recommending students to do some practical works after taking a particular course. A literature course for instance should stress on empowering students to be able to produce a drama or other entertainment programs. When students have this skill, they may have another non pedagogical competence to play. And there is no doubt that this will open positive employment prospects for students.

In terms of ICT, the department should incorporate communication and computer skills into its curriculum. Students have to be trained to master enough communication skills that may help them to mingle with different background and ethnicity of people working in an organization. Students should be trained to master

interpersonal skills to be able to successfully adapt with various organizational cultures. Computer skills in addition should be part of integral competences that students should master. To this end, the department should be more aware of integrating computer skills into its curriculum. Students are expected to be able to have at least basic skills in drawing and calculating. This may include skills to operate common use of Microsoft Offices. It is arguable that computer skills have become critical values for those seeking job nowadays. All those things will be true, and increasingly true, as far ahead as anyone can see.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum plays a critical role in equipping students to have practical skills and competencies after studying at an educational institution. To provide updated information and skills that match the current employment markets, educational developers assert that curriculum should periodically be assessed and developed. As a state Islamic university, UIN Ar-Raniry through its faculty and department could integrate Islamic and general education into one educational concept. This enables students studying general education to also study some Islamic courses to strengthen their religious understanding.

The Department of English Language Education of UIN Ar-Raniry is responsible for preparing its graduates to master adequate knowledge both in English and Islamic field. Therefore, the department must be able to integrate its curriculum that matches the needs of students and the expectation of Acehnese educational values. To widely open employment prospects for its graduates, in addition, the department should also foster a strong cooperation with various institutions in order for students to have opportunities to do internship programs. Finally, ICT, interpersonal skills, problem solving skills, and communication skills as part of bachelor's generic skills should be incorporated into the department curriculum.

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