

Development of Communicative Competence in English Language Curriculum of ESL Secondary Schools

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Abstract. This study aimed to describe the English Language Curriculum of English as a Second Language (ESL) secondary schools and examine learners' communicative competence development. The researcher utilized a qualitative systematic literature review with the inclusion of studies that (1) assessed the implementation of English Language Curriculum in secondary schools, (2) conducted in countries implementing the K-12 Curriculum, (3) published in the year 2014 up to the present, concerning to language or publication type; and (4) involved teachers and learners as the participants and respondents. The research began with electronic searches of bibliographic databases and relevant journals, supplemented by citation chasing, internet searches, and targeted exploration of specialized websites. Next, citations were reviewed to identify relevant studies and excluded irrelevant ones. The researcher employed thematic synthesis, a three-step process: (1) line-by-line coding of the extracted data; (2) development of descriptive themes closely aligned with the primary text; and (3) generation of analytical themes through the addition of interpretative constructs and hypotheses. Three themes emerged from the review: "Salient Features," delineating the characteristics of the English language curriculum across different countries. "Steering Towards the Development of Communicative Competence of Learners" focuses on the contribution of curriculum to learners' communicative competence. Lastly, "Soundness and Strength of the Curriculum" presented supporting data on the curriculum's effectiveness. With these findings, the researcher hopes it may help teachers and administrators develop and enhance the programs and policies to help improve the English curriculum's facilitation.

Keywords: Curriculum; English Language; Communicative competence; Listening; Speaking.

1.0 Introduction

In the 21st- century, English has become an indispensable part of the educational curriculum. Also, it is widely considered the lingua franca of the world. It is the standard language in various fields, such as international business, technology-revolving, and higher education (Domingo, 2020). With approximately 1.4 billion native and non-native English speakers worldwide, international business, diplomatic relations, tourism, aviation, and technology have predominantly used English. It also emerges as the most used language in scientific studies and one of the most sought-after foreign languages to learn. With this, it is considered the language of opportunity and thus the world's language (Nanquil, 2021).

English's ubiquity fosters communicative competence, a synthesis of grammatical principles, and knowledge of language use in social contexts to perform communicative functions (Salvador et al., 2023). Moreover, communicative competence encompasses grammatical competence (knowledge of inter-sentential relationships) and discourse competence (knowledge of rules and norms governing speech act timing and realization) (Obaidul et al., 2013). However, most students in English as a Second Language countries find communication skills challenging (Roslaniec, 2018). In particular, the Philippines has been acknowledged globally as an English-speaking country and was ranked 14th in the global English Proficiency Index (EPI). However, there is still a need to improve the English language teaching and learning and eventually develop English as a vital skill of the Filipino workforce in the global area (Cabigon, 2015; Baclig, 2020).

In response, the Philippines implemented the K to 12 Curriculum in 2013; the goal of English language teaching was focused on producing graduates who apply the language conventions, principles, strategies, and skills in interacting with others, understanding, and learning other content areas, and finding themselves in their future endeavors. Also, the outcome-based curriculum targets communicative competence and multi-literacies as its expected outcomes for 21st-century learners (Department of Education, 2016). One commendable feature of the current English curriculum is the specification of various standards (i.e., essential standards, grade level standards, content standards, and performance standards) that learners across levels need to attain. The feature shows that among the 21st-century skills, much of the focus is on effective communication. One strength of the current English curriculum is its emphasis on holistic assessment, which refers to an ongoing collection of qualitative and quantitative feedback from various sources (Barrot, 2018).

The K to 12 English Curriculum Guide 2016 integrates language across domains in Senior High. This includes grammar and reading comprehension, enabling learners to progress from foundational to advanced language use. Eventually, English proficiency in the Philippines is weakening due to graduates' declining English language competency. The Philippines had the lowest reading comprehension in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the lowest in the 2019 International Mathematics and Science Study (Pueente, 2022). It has been found that a strong English language foundation in elementary and secondary education leads to tertiary-level English proficiency. However, more than ninety percent of college graduates in the Philippines still need to be equipped with English proficiency, as revealed in the test conducted by Hopkins (Domingo, 2020).

The aforementioned factors can hinder curriculum implementation, preventing teachers from fully practicing principled teaching due to a lack of essential 21st-century language pedagogy principles. The curriculum's lack of specificity and clarity may contribute to a mismatch between teachers' and learners' instructional goals. As such, policymakers should clarify provisions and specify how the new English curriculum translates into classroom practices. The necessity of incorporating examples of classroom practice after each outcome statement can show the relevance of various components (Rahman, 2014).

Another potential challenge is shifting teachers' views of their roles as learning facilitators, students' roles, and the teaching-learning- assessment process. Pre-service teacher training and education courses must include training and orientation. These trainings should be continuous and developmental to provide them sufficient support and knowledge in implementing the changes. Since teachers interpret curriculum in the light of their teaching style and embedded framework, training should also focus on helping teachers embrace new ideas in teaching English (Barrot, 2018).

In addition, limited instructional time is a concern. Learners spend only 160 instructional hours over the 40-week academic year -- four hours per week of contact. This reduction to fewer than 200 annual contact hours -- the minimum needed for measurable progress (Barrot, 2018) -- is a problem. Moreover, with only four instructional hours per week, teachers struggle to cover eight to ten different learning competencies in one week. To address this, lower-grade English curricula prioritize fostering positive communication attitudes rather than initiating formal English language education (Salvador et al., 2023).

The Department of Education acknowledged the need for regular curriculum assessment and faster facility provision, as these key elements influence Filipino learners' performance. Despite all the government's efforts, Filipino learners are less successful in learning English than expected. In other words, learning English as a second

language remains a challenging task, requiring sustained, collaborative effort from learners and teachers (Ying et al., 2021). On another page, learning English becomes difficult because the learners do not feel the immediate need to use English outside the classroom, and no environment will make them familiar with the language. Furthermore, many learners disregard learning and mastering a foreign language, and only a few succeed because they use strategies to learn the language (Akbari, 2015). It is revealed in the study of Blas et al. (2018) that attitude, motivation, emotions, and the learner's background could affect English Language proficiency. The study showed that highly motivated students achieved more than less motivated students.

Moreover, most learners reportedly encountered communication problems that affected their studies. Communication problems included speaking skills related to oral presentations made by learners and classroom participation while listening skills consisted of lecture comprehension and note-taking skills. The abovementioned skills relate to the competencies necessary to master English (Alhassan et al., 2021). A study concluded that the common problems learners face include fear of making mistakes, incorrect pronunciation, lack of understanding of grammatical patterns, limited vocabulary mastery, minimum opportunities, students' interest, mother tongue use, frequent practice, and less discipline (Rahayu, 2015). Additionally, the study by Blas et al. (2018) revealed that self-confidence and self-esteem contribute to the success of learning the language.

Similarly, a case study by Alhassan et al. (2021) showed that teachers have difficulty teaching the subject because of their slow understanding of basic concepts. Meanwhile, a study also revealed that students failed to write better because the teacher did not provide input. Teachers correct the papers and assign scores but provide no feedback. The study suggested that teachers should provide positive feedback and encourage learners to practice writing and reading rather than judge learners' mistakes (Novariana et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, since the new English curriculum consists of elements from the tertiary curriculum, the implementation of the new curriculum also involved an inevitable transition of faculty from tertiary to senior high and junior high to senior high. This transition took most faculty to adjust and adapt new methodologies in teaching, which caused a negative toll on senior high school learners. In particular, some learners were unprepared for a sudden shift and curriculum change as they experienced difficulties keeping up with the complexity of the topics. Consequently, as grammar and sentence construction are necessary for English proficiency, learners' weak foundation in these areas affects their general ability to comprehend, construct, write, and speak English (Aranda, 2022).

Recognizing the merits of the previous findings by Lasala (2014), Tuan (2017), Magcamit (2018), and Calopez (2019), the researcher deemed it significant to assess learners' communicative competence, especially at the Senior High School level. While these related studies aimed to deepen understanding of communicative competence, few proposed a program to address learners' language learning needs directly. The previous findings proved that learning the English language challenges the participants. Understanding these challenges may help teachers and administrators develop and enhance the programs and policies to help improve the English curriculum's facilitation. Determining the experiences of senior high school learners can improve teachers' methodologies and approaches inside the classrooms.

As an English language teacher, the researcher observed that both written and oral communication in English was challenging among senior high school learners. Exposed to the varied learning circumstances of the learners and compelled by a sense of commitment to augment teaching outputs, the researcher ventured into finding practical solutions to students' difficulties in English language learning. In conjunction, the researcher aims to provide inputs for developing an evidence-based curriculum that is firmly established, teacher- and learner-friendly and effectively balances macro-level policy with micro-level implementation.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This review utilized a qualitative systematic literature review design. A systematic literature review is a laborious and thorough process that starts with exploring published literature and ends with conducting an analysis concerning a myriad of collected references on a specific topic (Chen et al., 2016; Grewal et al., 2016). It is a type of

literature review that seeks to identify all the available evidence about a specific topic to reduce the effect of bias on the review findings (Booth & Papaioannou, 2016).

2.2 Research Criteria

The selection of studies was made according to a set of inclusion criteria, which include (1) assessing the implementation of English Language Curriculum in secondary schools; (2) conducted in countries implementing the K-12 Curriculum; (3) published in the year 2014 up to the present, concerning language or publication type; and (4) involved teachers and learners as the participants and respondents.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The literature search included electronic searches of bibliographic databases and relevant journals, citation tracking, internet searches, and examination of specialized websites. The search yielded numerous citations and abstracts; however, many were excluded because they were irrelevant to this review. The author reviewed citations and determined if the cited studies were potentially applicable. The researcher retrieved the full-text documents on the relevant studies. After determining a study's eligibility, the researcher reviewed it again to confirm that it met the inclusion criteria.

While identifying potentially relevant studies, the researcher searched significant databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, and Wiley Online Library. The researcher also manually searched Google Scholar to identify additional publications that were not indexed in traditional databases. The search terms include identified keywords such as English Language, Curriculum, Communicative Competence, and Secondary Schools and also examined the reference lists of articles eligible for inclusion in the review. Moreover, during the initial search, the researcher manually searched for full-text articles corresponding to abstracts identified as eligible. The researcher conducted the initial database searches and screened the titles and abstracts presented. Afterward, articles that passed the full-text screening stage were reviewed against the inclusion criteria. This process resulted in 26 studies remaining for further review.

2.4 Data Coding and Analysis Process

The researcher used thematic synthesis to identify key analytical themes. This method is a flexible approach to qualitative evidence synthesis designed to explore people's perspectives and experiences. It is particularly suitable for exploring participants' views of interventions and identifying factors influencing their success (Matney, 2018). The researcher extracted the author and year of publication, study setting, research aims, sample characteristics, methods used, and the results or findings from each study. The researcher employed thematic synthesis to analyze the extracted data from each study inductively. This process consists of three steps: first, conducting line-by-line coding of the extracted data; second, developing descriptive themes that closely reflect the original text; and third, generating analytical themes by introducing new interpretive constructs and hypotheses. Line-by-line coding involves carefully reading each sentence or paragraph and assigning one or more codes. Descriptive themes were then developed by identifying relationships between codes and organizing them into conceptual groupings. Generating analytical themes overlaps with developing of descriptive themes often, which adequately respond to the research question (Thomas et al., 2017).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The primary data consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles. To maintain ethical research practices, all sources were cited in the reference section using a consistent citation format. In-text citations accurately reflected the reference list.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Salient Features

A secondary school English Language curriculum, where English is a second language, is defined by several key characteristics that set it apart. These Salient Features form the curriculum's unique identity and are crucial to its design and implementation. They act as the defining elements that shape the entire learning experience. As an instrumental subject, English helps students develop communicative competence and contributes to broader competencies needed for practical work and learning throughout life. The main objective of the English Language

Curriculum is to enable learners to formulate and develop their communicative competency through practicing listening, speaking, reading, writing, and linguistic knowledge (Hanoi, 2018).

The current English Language Curriculum in Indonesia is organized around macro-skills, communicative skills, and interpersonal development. It focuses on language and learning since it covers some grammatical features combined with or inserted in other language skills. However, the curriculum emphasizes linguistic knowledge, with communicative skills only partially developed through a lexical syllabus (Mulyani, 2018). While the Indian language curriculum emphasizes English language learning, contradictory policies prioritize state languages, creating tension in its promotion. English is ambiguous, simultaneously valued, and viewed with suspicion (Jayendran et al., 2021). Secondary students typically receive up to five hours of English instruction per week. While India has a national curriculum, schools are not mandated to use uniform textbooks; some schools utilize a wider range of resources. Among the language skills, reading and writing are emphasized more than listening and speaking (Meganathan, 2019).

In Japan, diverse English teaching strategies have been developed across different regions (Inagawa, 2015). A shift from grammar-focused, teacher-centered instruction to a communication skills approach is underway, encouraging more active student interaction (Jennings, 2018). The ongoing educational policy reforms aim to motivate learners to engage in the learning process with lessons based on active learning (Yamamoto, 2021). At the secondary level, entrance examinations assess English proficiency, which frequently tests vocabulary and grammar (Saito et al., 2022).

Moving on to China, English is one of the major courses taught from primary school to university level (Wu, 2020). Its English Curriculum standards are programmatic documents guiding English education and teaching, which help teachers to fully understand the tasks and help them play a better role in teaching English. It briefly discusses the importance of English, the effects of compulsory English education, and the dual nature of instrumental and humanistic approaches to English curriculum design (Chen, 2023). The curriculum aims to cultivate learners' language, cultural awareness, critical thinking skills, and learning ability (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Singapore's education system prioritizes English language proficiency for communication and employment (Loh & Pang, 2022). The curriculum emphasizes reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Learners learn to communicate effectively, express their ideas coherently, and appreciate various forms of literature. Moreover, emphasis is placed on language acquisition, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, and communication skills (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Australia considers English language study a central point to the learning and development of learners. Its English language curriculum includes literature study, facilitating effective communication in written and verbal modes, appreciating and using the English language in all its variations, and developing a sense of its richness and power (Nguyen, 2014).

In the Philippines, the K to 12 English Curriculum Guide 2016 integrates language across domains in Senior High School. Grammar, structure, and reading comprehension instruction enables learners to progress from foundational to advanced language skills. In a more profound sense, the English Language Curriculum consists of Oral Communication in Context and Reading and Writing Skills in the senior high school curriculum. The two subjects are taught for 80 hours per semester. The oral communication curriculum develops students' listening and speaking skills, complementing their reading and writing abilities. Senior high school students are expected to integrate communication and language skills, using oral and written texts across various genres and contexts for personal and professional use (Barrot, 2018).

With the characteristics mentioned above of the English Language Curriculum across countries that are implementing K-12 curriculum, there is an excellent emphasis on appreciating and learning the English language by heart. Many English language programs focus on developing learners' speaking and writing skills but also emphasize the broader applications of English in professional and future pursuits. Recognizing the significant benefits, numerous countries integrate English language instruction into their curriculum from primary school through university.

3.2 Steering Towards Development

Steering towards Development embodies how the curriculum contributes to developing learners' communicative competence. It is inclined that the curriculum's methods directly influence the development of communicative competence, much like the steering wheel of a car's direction.

Communicative competence blends grammatical accuracy with understanding how language functions in a social context to achieve communicative goals. It also involves effectively combining utterances and communicative functions within a larger discourse (Canale & Swain, 1980, as cited in Salvador et al., 2023). It is one of the most essential notions in languages for specific purposes. At its core, communicative competence encompasses not only a speaker's knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic rules but also their ability to apply this knowledge effectively during interactions (Whyte, 2019).

Research by Tuan (2017) revealed low communicative competence, particularly in discourse, among Vietnamese English language learners. This deficiency was linked to limited English language exposure and insufficient emphasis on discourse in English language instruction. The study attributed the low discourse competence, in part, to the treatment of English as a foreign language, hindering the development of overall language proficiency.

A study in Mandaue City, Philippines, assessed the communicative competence of senior high school students, finding their oral and written skills acceptable. However, Lasala's (2014) research indicated that improvements in communicative and sociolinguistic competence were still needed.

Furthermore, research conducted at Bacolod City disclosed that female students perform better in written and oral communication than male students. Overall, high school learners know and use basic grammar rules with occasional errors and simultaneously can speak clearly and comprehensively with minimal difficulty. Additionally, the results revealed significant differences in the respondents' linguistic and discourse competence when grouped according to sex. Finally, based on the important findings, a remedial program in English focusing on written and oral communication in an actual setting was proposed to improve the communicative competence of senior high school students (Salvador et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Bautista and Del Valle's (2023) research indicated high levels of communicative competence among the learners. The respondents proved that they frequently used the English language at home, on different platforms, and in the community. In addition, a significant positive correlation exists between communicative competence and oral language proficiency. As a result, they could accurately apply their communicative competence at home, on different platforms, and in the community.

Similarly, research in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan, showed very satisfactory levels of English language competence among learners across linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse dimensions. Despite significant challenges in English communication, learner engagement with the language remained high (Samosa et al., 2021).

A study conducted in Davao City revealed a significant relationship between communicative adaptability and cognitive communication competence. Conversely, the relationship between communication apprehension and cognitive communication competence proved inconsistent. Through multiple linear regression, the findings corroborated the three domains of communicative adaptability and communication apprehension: social confirmation, appropriateness, and apprehension in small groups significantly predict cognitive communication competence (Canada & Miralles, 2023).

Overall, the implementation of the English Language Curriculum for Senior High School students has significantly influenced the development of their communicative competence. The curriculum has effectively fostered the development of various aspects of communicative competence, including linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence. However, particular areas require increased attention to ensure the balanced development of all aspects of communicative competence, thereby maximizing students' future potential.

3.3 Soundness and Strength

The soundness of a curriculum provides its foundational structure, like a human skeleton. It refers to the curriculum's fundamental building blocks and design. In contrast, the strength of a curriculum lies in its effectiveness in secondary schools—its practical application. Today, evidence-based practices are crucial across all fields, including the English Language curriculum. The analysis of Mulyani (2018) concluded that Indonesia's English language curriculum is appropriate and effective for classroom instruction. The curriculum successfully achieves its primary goals while addressing learners' needs and interests.

In India, it lacks dedicated assessment systems for English language proficiency. English assessment is partially integrated into the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) and is used across all subjects (National Training Council, 2017). A recent survey highlighted the urgent need to improve reading skills in both regional languages and, mainly, English. Classroom assessments reveal a significant lack of focus on speaking and writing skills. Furthermore, a study found limited opportunities and training for aspiring English teachers (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021).

Meanwhile, a study established that English education under the guidance of the curriculum standards attaches high importance to stimulating learners' autonomy and cultivating their self-regulated learning ability. This finding has significant implications for future English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning in China. A policy focusing on self-regulation could increase engagement among English learners in schools (Zou et al., 2024). However, other factors hinder the curriculum's effectiveness in China, including insufficient learner engagement and a lack of content understanding that would facilitate better English comprehension (Guerrero, 2019).

In the Philippines, a study revealed that Senior High School students demonstrated proficient English language skills, particularly in grammar and reading comprehension. Despite English not being their native language, their performance in these areas was commendable, indicating mastery of fundamental linguistic units crucial for English language acquisition (Manuel, 2022)

In another study, the learners described their everyday English learning experience inside the classroom as challenging because of various factors. Since this group of learners is the first batch to receive the new English curriculum taken from the tertiary curriculum, they first experienced the transitory period of the contents and topics of English subjects. This situation has posed a significant challenge to some learners because, from more straightforward and effortless issues from junior high, they have now taken more profound and complex topics in senior high. In addition, some learners expressed apprehension about learning English, viewing it as unnecessary given their predominant use of Filipino or Tagalog at home. As the Department of Education projected, subjects in the new curriculum, such as Reading and Writing and Oral Communication, contributed to newly developed proficiencies in learners' oral speaking and research writing. The findings revealed that some learners struggled to adapt to the sudden curriculum changes, finding it challenging to keep pace with the more complex topics (Aranda, 2022).

This suggests that teachers' effectiveness and efficiency in implementing the curriculum might be linked to various countries' initiatives to invest in teacher training and development. Moosa and Shareefa (2019) found that teacher efficacy and knowledge significantly impact curriculum implementation. Furthermore, a study indicated that positive attitudes among master teachers contribute to improved learner performance (Rattanaprom, 2019).

Implementing the curriculum requires effort from different areas, including the teachers and the learners. The effectiveness of the curriculum is heavily reliant on the efforts provided by the implementing body and the response of the receiving body. It is a give-and-take scenario in which the success and effectivity are well-determined if both parties comply with the objectives set.

Local and international studies suggest that successful curriculum implementation relies on utilizing facilitating factors as strategies. Conversely, unaddressed hindering factors lead to less successful outcomes. This curriculum's effectiveness in fostering learners' communicative competence varies wildly, depending heavily on

the implementation of objectives and other aspects. Success requires the collaborative efforts of teachers and learners, working within the framework established by the educational body that designed the curriculum.

4.0 Conclusion

The salient features of the English language curriculum are simultaneously the same and different across different countries. In common, the curriculum focuses on developing learners' competence in speaking and writing. The adoption of these curricula reflects a global trend, including within the Philippines, toward enhancing the communicative competence of senior high school students to facilitate their future academic and professional pursuits in English-speaking contexts. A review of relevant literature reveals a dichotomy in curriculum design: some curricula demonstrably support the development of communicative competence, while others require significant revision to align with stated objectives. The efficacy of any given curriculum is ultimately determined by empirical evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in achieving intended learning outcomes. Consequently, a critical analysis of existing curricula necessitates identifying best practices to be maintained alongside areas requiring modification and increased support for effective implementation.

The above findings proved that learning the English language challenges the participants. Understanding these challenges may help teachers and administrators develop and enhance the programs and policies to help improve the English curriculum's facilitation. Determining the experiences of senior high school learners can improve teachers' methodologies and approaches inside the classrooms. Moreover, the result of this study can enlighten teacher education institutions to emphasize the development of English learning materials and teacher training. Future research could profitably investigate learner outcomes about curriculum objectives. Such studies would be valuable in identifying levels of achieved competence, areas of strength, and weakness, thus contributing significantly to our understanding of curriculum effectiveness. Further research exploring teacher experiences with the curriculum would also enrich the field, broadening the scope of existing knowledge and providing valuable insights into practical implementation. This dual focus on learner performance and teacher perspectives would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's impact.

5.0 Contributions of Author

This research leverages the researcher's expertise in teaching the English language to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of language curricula. Employing a methodology that combines literature review, document analysis, and manuscript writing, the study integrates perspectives from language teaching and curriculum development to offer a nuanced understanding of the secondary school English language curriculum and its effectiveness in fostering learner communicative competence.

6.0 Funding

This research was conducted independently and without external funding. The author's personal interest in exploring the English Language Curriculum motivated the study, and all research activities, including data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing, were self-funded.

7.0 Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this research. The study was conducted independently without financial or personal ties that could influence the findings or interpretations.

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