

Chapter One

Introduction

Curriculum reform has been a popular issue in educational settings because it concerns values and knowledge that are considered worthwhile for learners to move toward better lives. As curriculum usually has its ideological determination and its content will be rapidly updated after decades of isolation in each studying field (May, 1989), to renew curriculum is consequently a natural and necessary process in educational settings. Theoretically, curriculum reform is viewed as a sociopolitical effort to construct and redefine disciplinary knowledge which helps shape what is to be constructed in schools (May, 1989). Hence, curriculum reform usually reflects social needs, contributing to the advancement of teaching and the outcome of learning.

In Taiwan, curriculum reform is usually initiated by the educational authority and adopts a top-down pattern of implementation (Hwang, 1985). The planning of curriculum reform does not have large involvement of related implementers, but its implementation usually influences large amount of people. Whenever there is an innovation or reform in educational system or school curriculum, not only teachers are subjected to its influence but also parents and scholars respond to the policy enthusiastically. Because of the traditional Confucian culture, there has been a lot of concern about educational policymaking and themes. Therefore, curriculum reform often raises a wide-spread discussion in the country but does not influence teachers and students only.

In the September of 2001, the Ministry of Education (MOE) initiated a national curriculum reform movement in Taiwan, which affected all students and teachers in Grade 1-9. Since then, the new curriculum has influenced many people, including students, teachers, parents, and administrators. This so-called “Grade 1-9 Curriculum”, whose goal is to meet the need of raising national competitiveness and the overall quality of lives, reconstructs the knowledge structure by adopting a learning-area framework

instead of the traditional concept of subject matters. This new curriculum renews its original curricular structure and aims to cultivate students with “portable ability” which contains skills to deal with events in life, meeting the needs of the society in the future through integrated and collaborative instruction. In addition, in this new curriculum, associated with the enthusiastic English learning atmosphere in this country, English instruction is officially incorporated into elementary school education, starting from Grade 5 and Grade 6. English teaching, as part of the “language arts” area, adopts communicative teaching materials and aims at “communicative proficiency”, which refers to the ability to communicate effectively in an authentic context. Communication rather than grammar is the organizing principle. The skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in real world situations are emphasized. EFL teachers are now expected to teach toward a more communicative orientation.

As many creative ideas and educational concepts are proposed in this curriculum change, this change therefore calls people’s attention and arouses lots of discussions in our society. However, to keep reform movement stay on the way to succeed, we must go beyond the regulation and focus on teacher cognition (Boyer, 1988). It is often believed that if teacher implementation behaviors do not change, the positive learning outcome of students will probably not occur (Fullan & Promfret, 1977). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to stop and think about their respective roles at the moment of implementing a new curriculum.

Freeman (1992) propounded that “ Teaching is the integration of thought and action” (p. 1). For EFL teachers, the change of this English curriculum requires individuals to learn and to do something new. They need to simultaneously manage alterations in materials, teaching strategies, and classroom organizations. Their practice must reflect new language theories, instructional roles, and relationships with students. They have to expand their knowledge of the subject matter (Fullen, 1991 ; Fullen & Pomfret, 1977 ; Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). If EFL teachers cannot manage these

tasks well, they will feel frustrated by unsuccessful attempts on teaching and may cause this new English curriculum to fail. It is, therefore, very important to understand how teachers cope with the change and develop their opinions and attitudes.

In this study, two EFL teachers' experience of Grade 1-9 Curriculum are investigated. The purpose is to understand EFL teachers' attitudes and their teaching behaviors toward Grade 1-9 (English) Curriculum so that it may be possible to reduce teachers' pressure and offer support for their work. To build on what teachers know and what questions teachers have contributes to perceive teachers' constraints and difficulties at the school level. As a consequence, this investigation aims at deriving key issues related to the implementation of Grade 1-9 (English) Curriculum.

1.1 Motivation

As a member of junior high school English teachers, I had observed some problems while Grade 1-9 Curriculum became implemented in the school. These puzzling phenomena reflect teachers' behaviors and their attitudes toward curriculum reform. As behaviors and attitudes reveal teachers' receptivity to a new curriculum, I hope to understand and analyze teachers' attitudes and coping behaviors in facing the implementation of the new curriculum. Likewise, it is also necessary to find constraints and difficulties that influence teachers' attitudes and teaching behaviors in implementing the new curriculum. Thus, this study, adopting qualitative method, selected two participant teachers to create a holistic view of the curriculum implementation at the grassroot level. It is expected to have a thorough understanding of how this new curriculum is implemented in schools and how teachers view this new curriculum.

1.2 Purpose

In the initial implementing stages of this new curriculum, teachers usually have their anxiety and fear about the curriculum. Most of the time, teachers struggle with their

problems and anxiety privately. In order to reveal these teachers' responses in detail and to present the voices from school/ classroom level, the researcher adopted qualitative methods for this study. In addition to reporting the situation at school, the researcher analyzed the reasons behind the impediments and hindrance. The results of this research are expected to reveal more understanding about the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum, pointing out possible solutions to problems.

1.3 Definition of Terms

1. Grade 1-9 Curriculum

To foster national competitiveness and the overall quality of the citizens' lives, the MOE of Taiwan initiated a curriculum reform in elementary and junior high school education. This new curriculum has already implemented since September 2001 and is named "Grade 1-9 Curriculum".

2. Learning Area

Learning area is a new concept of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. It aims to integrate knowledge into several learning fields rather than dividing knowledge into isolated subjects. So "learning area" refers to the content of learning, not the titles of subjects. In Grade 1-9 Curriculum, seven learning areas are structured, including language arts, health and physical education, social studies, arts and humanities, mathematics, technology and science, and integrative activities (the MOE, 2001a).

3. Core Competence

As Grade 1-9 Curriculum focuses on the needs and experiences of students and aims at developing competences which a modern citizen should possess, the concept of core competence is proposed. Such core competences are categorized into ten dimensions (the MOE, 2001a).

4. Academic Attainment Testing

The Academic Attainment Testing is held by the MOE for the purpose of examining junior high school students' academic performance. This test is in conformity with the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines. Students' scores on the test are used as a reference for admission to senior high school.

1.4 Research Questions

This study adopted qualitative case study approach and collected data from participant interviews, classroom observations, student questionnaires, and teachers' personal documents to understand both teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum and its English part. The study explored two junior high school EFL teachers' attitudes and teaching behaviors. The researcher attempted to find answers to the following questions:

- (1) In a public junior high school, how do the two junior high school EFL teachers view Grade 1-9 (English) Curriculum?
- (2) How do the two junior high school EFL teachers put Grade 1-9 English Curriculum into practice in the classroom?
- (3) What are some of the important constraints and difficulties the two EFL teachers face when they implement the new English curriculum, and what are their coping behaviors?
- (4) What are the advantages and disadvantages associated with the implementation of Grade 1-9 English Curriculum in the eyes of these two EFL teachers?

Through these questions, the researcher aims to obtain a holistic understanding of the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum at school level and to further offer implications for those educational implementers.