

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This study explored junior high school EFL teachers' attitudes and their classroom practice related to Grade 1-9 Curriculum. In this section, teachers' attitudes and curriculum reform will be introduced to offer theoretical support for the research first. Then, the current status of curriculum reform in Taiwan will also be discussed.

2.1 Curriculum Reform

2.1.1 Curriculum Reform

Curriculum is defined as a plan which deals with the issue of what should be taught in the classroom (Schubert, 1986; Unruh & Unruh, 1984). "This plan is concerned with purpose, with what to be learned, and with the results of instruction" (Unruh & Unruh, 1984, p.96). Because curriculum is the basis of school teaching and has a great impact on intended student achievements, many countries in the world often review or renew their school curricula either on a nation-wide scale or on a smaller local scale. Thus, curriculum implementation has been a well-discussed issue in education and many scholars are quite interested in researching phenomena or problems related to the implementation of a new curriculum.

In this section, the discussion will focus on curriculum reform which is close to the situation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. In fact, terms, such as "curriculum innovation", "curriculum reform", or "curriculum development", are all related to implementing a new curriculum. "Curriculum innovation" means to maintain the original structure of the curriculum but change something within the curriculum to make a condition better (Klein,

1994). “Curriculum reform” suggests a fundamental renewal of the curriculum. When a reform occurs, the basic nature of the original curriculum has changed or has been replaced (Klein, 1994). On the other hand, “curriculum development” is casual in decentralized countries in which the curriculum is developed naturally by teachers or school staff rather than the government authority (Unruh & Unruh, 1984). With regard to Grade 1-9 Curriculum, it adopts a very different curriculum structure and many new concepts which aim to cultivate students’ competence instead of the traditional concept of knowledge acquiring. Therefore, Grade 1-9 Curriculum, which has a fundamental renewal and is very different from the previous curriculum, can be considered a curriculum reform.

“Reform” means there are problems to be solved. Social pressures and the growing awareness of the necessity for a flexible and creative organizational character in the school and educational system contribute to ideas of curriculum change and innovation (Khalid, 1989). Both reform and innovation, therefore, express the need of change. “Curriculum reform is viewed as a sociopolitical effort to construct and redefine disciplinary knowledge which helps shape what is to be constructed in school” (May, 1989, p.142). Klein (1994) indicated that:

Curriculum reform is a confused concept with multiple meanings. To some, it means an updating of content, the selection of a new text, or a revised curriculum emphasizing new or additional skills and knowledge. To others, it’s an improved, systematic process of addressing the fundamental questions of curriculum development, which should result in a better curriculum for the student. For still others, it’s decentralized decision making so that students and teachers have the freedom, responsibility, and obligation to create their own curricula based upon their interests and needs (p.19).

From this multiple viewpoint, it is clear that curriculum reform will be not only a planned

process but also a complex process (Unruh & Unruh, 1984). Kallen (1996) concluded from his study about curriculum reform in Central and Eastern Europe that, “the curriculum must be freed from its earlier ideological determination and its content must be rapidly updated after decades of isolation from contemporary developments in knowledge, science, and technology” (p.51). Kallen reasons that curriculum reformers should sense and identify a problem of common concern, insert wants and values, think about alternative solutions, and consider the implications of these alternatives for teachers and students. Therefore, curriculum reformers determine partly the failure or success of a new curriculum. The reformers might be government administrative authorities, local school committees, or teachers themselves. It depends on the model of curriculum developed in each country.

2.1.2 The Model of Curriculum Implementation

When mentioning about models of curriculum developing, McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) identified four patterns of curriculum implementation:

1. top-down pattern
2. grass-roots planning pattern
3. no planning pattern
4. collaborative planning pattern (p.73)

In the case of “top-down pattern”, project plans are made almost entirely in the central office and announced to the shareholders. Teachers often have little or no participation in the policymaking (May, 1989). “Grass-roots planning” is similar to the case of bottom-up implementation in which teachers or school staff dominate the change project rather than

district administrators. “No planning pattern” means the plan and the funding of a project are imported into the district with little or no involvement from district staff at any levels. In the “collaborative planning” mode, teachers and district managers made equal input to project plans. Of the four patterns, “top-down model” receives the most criticism. Wyatt (1988) pointed out that “top-down curriculum reform” is not viewed favorably by those responsible for its implementation unless they are allowed to feel empowered or to be a part of the change. One teacher in McLaughlin and Marsh’s case study of staff development and school change also criticized the “top-down pattern” as the following.

Top-down planning generally fails.....both because it cannot generate the staff commitment necessary to project success and because this planning style does not incorporate the special knowledge and suggestions of the staff who will be responsible for project implementation (p.74).

However, there is a tendency that “many district organizations, especially in big cities, shift toward centralized, hierarchical control of school operations” (Cuban, 1995, p.6). In such districts, headquarters often make major decisions about curriculum, budget, and staff to implement school board policies and expect each school to comply (Cuban, 1995). This phenomenon of centralized tendency in big cities might be caused by the emphases of efficacy and compliance (McNeil, 1986). Another pattern, “grass-roots planning”, receives more support and is consistent with the model of curriculum development in modern countries nowadays. Several researchers (Combs, 1988; Lawson, 1987; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988) stressed the necessity of large-scale involvement in curriculum decision-making. Connelly and Claninin (1988) argued that curriculum is experience and that curricular matters should be decided by teachers. Teachers have the right to control curriculum rather than those outside developers or policy makers.

In view of the four patterns discussed above, Taiwan seems to take on the top-down model, because educational plans were made almost entirely by the MOE authority. Proposals for curriculum reform came from policy-makers. Curricula and textbooks are normally prescribed or at least compiled by the central government. Teachers are passively informed to implement the curriculum and to take responsibility for the consequences.

In terms of Grade 1-9 Curriculum, the MOE seemed to adopt a “modified top-down model” because the MOE no longer kept control of the curriculum. On the contrary, the local schools were given the rights to decide their curriculum. Diverse teaching materials and school-based courses were encouraged. Although this new curriculum was planned almost entirely in the central office and announced to the shareholders, the government authorized the local schools to develop their own curriculum. This situation seems very different from the previous discussed “top-down pattern.” More about Grade 1-9 Curriculum will be discussed in a later section.

2.1.3 Tasks and Changes of Curriculum Implementation

Kallen (1996) mentioned that modern curriculum reform focuses on three main tasks:

- (1) determining and implementing the essential core of knowledge, competence, and attitudes that is to be acquired by all.
- (2) adapting the curriculum to the rapid development of science and knowledge and to the evaluation of society towards a post-industrial phase.
- (3) providing an enriched curriculum choice that responds to local and regional

needs and interests and that meets the demand for free individual choice (p.51).

As curriculum reform is usually by the demand of the external pressures and needs, curriculum planner must select proper content to satisfy social requirements and learning outcomes. Thus, the new curriculum often addresses new social issues and adds more subjects. “The process of curriculum implementation is a process of mutual adaptation in which teachers modify their practices to conform to project requirements and project” (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978, p.77). To complete the above tasks, the staff who adapt them into practice in the classroom may become the focus of attention because “successful implementation is an individual development process within certain organizational conditions and strategies”(Fullan, 1989, p.24). For understanding the changes that the staff at school might experience in practice, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) provided the following alteration to :

1. change in subject matter or materials
2. change in structure
3. change in role/ behavior
4. change in knowledge and understanding
5. change in value and internalization (p.336)

“Subject matter” refers to the order in which the content is to be conveyed, or media to be used, whereas “structure” involves changes in formal arrangements and physical conditions such as allocation of time, allocation of space and assignment or grouping of students. “Role relationship change” is an essential dimension which often concerns new teaching styles, new tasks, new role relationships between teachers and students, teachers

and heads, and so on. “Knowledge and understanding” include the innovation’ philosophy, values, assumptions, objectives, subject matter, implementation strategies, and other organizational components, especially role relationships. “Value internalization” must be linked to the specific aspects of the other four.

Fullan and Pomfret’s analysis of curricular alteration in practice shows curriculum is multidimensional and is also a complex process. For this issue, Fullan (1989) further explained that “for a new curriculum project to be fully implemented , there are four core changes required of a teacher changes in class groupings and organization, materials, practices and behaviors, and in beliefs and understandings” (p.8). It seems reasonable to suppose that failure to deal with the changes in practice may result in the implementation unsuccessful. Although the meaning of curriculum and the selection of curriculum development model in any educational reform are largely influenced by philosophies and approaches held by curriculum planners, teachers’ behaviors and instructions in the classroom are extremely critical to the success of the implementation. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) suggested that we should listen to teachers more and give them opportunities to confront the assumptions and beliefs underlying their practices. The wisdom of teachers should not be undervalued.

2.1.4 Influencing Factors of Curriculum Reform

Many factors that might influence the success of a curriculum reform have been identified by previous research. Fullan (1982) discovered 15 factors and categorized them into 4 subcategories including characteristics of the change itself, characteristics of the school district, characteristics at the school level and external system. Another researcher,

Parsons (1987) further provided a wide- ranging list of factors in promoting successful implementation practice such as the need for time, a technology for change, sharing the burden in the workplace and so on. It is generally agreed that these factors intertwined and ultimately affected what happens in classrooms. Among these factors, one of the most important factors is teachers' attitude, which will be reviewed next.

2.1.5 Summary

We come to the conclusion that with any successful educational program, a number of levels of planning, development, and implementation must be involved. Goals and objectives for the program have to be developed as well as syllabuses and instructional materials. Instructional strategies have to be determined, teachers need to be selected and trained, and tests and assessment procedures must be chosen. Once the program is in operation, procedures are needed to enable the program to be monitored and its effects on learners and learning evaluated (Richards, 1999).

2.2 Teachers' Attitudes toward Curriculum Reform

Fullan (1991) has argued that the reasons for the failure of most educational reforms go far beyond the identification of specific technical problems. He pointed out that:

Innovators need to be open to the realities of others: sometimes because the ideas of others will lead to alterations for the better in the direction of change, and sometimes because the others' realities will expose the problem of implementation that must be addressed and at the very least will indicate where one should start (p.96).

From this point of view, “ the process of curriculum should be conceptualized not only in terms of teachers’ abilities to implement the reform but also with reference to their perception of the reform ” (Kyriakides, 1997, p.40). Kyriakides’s viewpoint involves neither bottom-up nor top-down implementing strategies but is related to if teachers adopt sophisticated proposals for change and improvement in their own classrooms and translate them into effective classroom practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Because educational change that is not supported by teachers usually ends up in the worse change or no change at all.

It is generally agreed that curriculum change and improvement will not take place unless teachers are closely involved. Giroux (1985) states that:

Teachers must take active responsibility for raising questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving (p.378).

This statement implies the support of teachers’ reflective thinking, and it corresponds to the view of Schubert (1986), as he argues, “teachers are the curriculum ” (p.157). The daily decision and action of teachers shape a kind of unwritten policy that greatly influences the lives of students whether it is formally recognized as policy or not. Other researchers (Cuban, 1995; Hawthorne, 1992; Oakes, 1985; Page, 1991) further indicate that teachers, working alone in their classrooms, choose what to teach and how to present the curriculum. Their choices derive from their knowledge of the subject they teach, their experiences in teaching the context, their affection or dislike for topics, and their attitudes toward the students they face daily. Thus, the official curriculum and what teachers teach may overlap in the title of the course, certain key topics, and the same text, but can differ substantially in classroom manifestations. The taught curriculum, then, is likely to differ

from the official curriculum. Thus, educational change ultimately depends on what the teacher thinks and does in the classroom. It is important to understand how teachers receive and react to changes. Accordingly, teachers' attitudes toward curriculum reform deserve much attention.

As teachers' attitudes are considered an important factor that is influential in curriculum change, many researchers have studied the relationship between teachers' attitudes and curriculum change. Mohlman (1984) defined teachers' attitudes as " their belief in the importance of the recommended practices and their confidence in their ability to deal effectively with classroom situations relate to their subsequent improvements in teaching behavior (p.10). " That is, to provide teachers with a supportive environment where they feel safe to try new techniques and gain greater sense of teaching self-efficacy may effectively enhance the growth in confidence and competence among teachers and contribute to their positive attitudes toward the new curriculum. This condition is different from the presumption that teachers are always unwilling to change. The process of educational reform might ask teachers to change a little bit of their teaching; many teachers indeed have the tendency to be conservative about the change (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). However, it doesn't mean teachers' attitudes can not be changed, but it needs time for attitudes to change. A study made by Margery and Alison (1995) reported the implementation of the New Zealand curriculum in primary schools, based on case studies of seven schools ranging widely in size and areas. After interviewing with the principals, classroom teachers, and members of the school boards of trustees, the researchers concluded in terms of five reasons contributing to varying progress that schools had made toward implementing the New Zealand

Curriculum. Teachers' attitudes toward change and the amount of time needed to bring about change were identified as the mainly influential factors. In their investigation, most of the staff agreed with the view that teacher resistance was the greatest obstacle to change. The point is that teachers' unwillingness to change or teachers' fear of change might hinder the implementation of the new curriculum seriously. Added to this, time is another factor that teachers felt strongly as a hindrance to implementing the New Zealand Curriculum. The researchers commented that, " if teachers had more time to attend courses, study the documents, and assemble resources, they would be less resistant to the requirement to implement the new curriculum " (p.34). Their words reveal that time for preparation can reduce teacher resistance effectively.

It is clear that teachers' attitudes are a decisive variable in the dynamic of curriculum innovation. Without influencing teachers' attitudes, any systemic innovation in the curriculum will not have an obvious effect on what goes on in classrooms (Young & Lee, 1987). Since teachers' attitudes play such an important role in implementing a new curriculum, it is necessary to understand the factors affecting teachers' attitudes in implementing a new curriculum.

Generally speaking, both internal and external factors which share some advantages are very likely to influence teachers' attitudes toward a new curriculum. Waugh and Godfrey (1995) investigated teachers' perceptions of the Unit Curriculum System in 1992 after it had been operated in the state schools at years 8, 9, and 10 for two full years (1990 and 1991) in Western Australia. The central certifying authority, reorganizing courses into short units, and allowing students to choose their units of study according to their needs, interests and abilities with only a minimum of restrictions

approved this curriculum. In this study, Waugh and Godfrey described teachers' attitudes to the Unit Curriculum in terms of six general advantages. They are cost benefit, perceived practicality, alleviation of concerns and fears, participation in school decisions about the curriculum, perceived support from senior staff, and perceived improvements of the curriculum.

(1) Cost benefit It concerns the advantages accompanied with the work at the school level when implementing the change. For example, increased student learning, increased satisfaction with teaching, and vice versa.

(2) Practicality It measures the extent to which the teachers perceived the course outlines or syllabus statements to be practical in the classroom. " It measured whether the courses reflected the teachers' educational philosophy; whether the content was tuned to the needs of the students; and whether the course outlines were sufficiently flexible to help teachers manage the day-to-day running of the classroom (p.46). " Hargreaves (1994) agreed that practicality is a powerful factor to influence teachers' receptivity because most teachers concern what works and what doesn't work in their classroom.

(3) Alleviation of concerns and fears It is related to knowledge, understanding, clarity of change proposals, lack of feedback, and lack of meetings. This variable is identified to be more influential in teachers' receptivity of the new curriculum implementation. Other researchers also take a similar view. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) claimed it is not true that when teachers display resistance or resentment, and have reasonable questions about what they are being asked to change, these reactions are always interpreted as fear of change itself, or lacking self-confidence to work with others. An explanation for teachers' negative attitudes toward change is that change is a threat to

the security of teachers because it has the potential to cause anxiety in staff if they feel they cannot cope (Margery & Alison, 1995). In fact, "anxiety is a natural syndrome which comes from fears of exposure and incompetence in the more public teaching environment and the giving up of reasons why learning cannot be improved " (Joyce et al., 1989, p.23). Thus, if administrators at the school can provide a means to lower teachers' fears and uncertainties, it will be more effective to aid the implementation of change.

(4) Participation in school decisions about the curriculum Participation plays an important role in teachers' attitudes toward change (Conley, 1991). Conley found that:

Teachers would evaluate actual outcomes versus expected outcomes and classroom decisions versus administrative decisions in relation to changes that had to be implemented in their schools and classrooms (p.47).

In Waugh and Godfrey's study, many teachers thought that they didn't have sufficient participation in the decision-making processes that were related to the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. This factor was identified as voice¹ by Mellencamp (1992, p.8). However, if the same situation occurs in Taiwan, it would likely be considered to be the fault of government administrators rather than local schools. Because the top-down pattern doesn't allow large-scale involvement in curriculum decision-making, consequently, the voice of teachers could not be heard easily.

(5) Perceived support from senior staff While teachers perceive benefits and profits of the change from communicating with senior staff, they are more likely to have positive and active attitudes to the new curriculum. Mellencamp also mentioned that support from principals, colleagues, and community members could increase teachers'

¹ Voice refers to the ability of teachers to initiate and decide change and to be heard as respected members of the school community

receptivity to change.

(6) Perceived improvement of the curriculum In a previous study of system-wide change by Waugh and Punch (1985), the result showed that “ teachers’ attitudes to the previous system were positively related to attitudes to the new system where the new system focused on demonstrated improvements (p.48). ” That is, if the new curriculum is not better than the old one on important aspects such as matching courses with student interests and needs or student learning outcome, it will be reasonable for teachers to develop unfavorable attitudes toward the curriculum change. A primary motivation for teachers to take on the extra work and other attempting change is the belief that they will become better teachers and their students will benefit from the reform (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). It is similar to the efficacy² factor identified by Mellcamp (p.8).

To sum up, teachers’ perception of the advantages from the reform influences teachers’ attitudes toward a new curriculum. Thus, to create advantages for teachers in implementing a new curriculum is a good direction for educational administrators to prompt teachers’ receptivity and positive attitudes to educational change.

2.3 Teachers’ Attitudes versus Teachers’ Behavior

The relation between attitudes and behaviors is a controversial issue, which is often discussed by social psychologists. Naturally, in the field of education, teachers’ attitude-behavior consistency related to successful curriculum implementation is also discussed frequently.

² Efficacy refers to the degree to which teachers feel they make a difference in the lives of students.

In the West, there is a view that if people had a more positive attitude toward the change, then it would be successfully implemented. This assumption offers an account of a positive relationship between teachers' educational attitudes and their actual teaching methods (Ashton, 1975; Bennett, 1976; Falvey, 1983). Freeman (1989) mentioned attitude is considered as "the principal constituent of language teaching that accounts for individual performance within the generic model" (p.32).

However, Morris (1988) is against Freeman's viewpoint. He writes about an investigation on teachers' attitudes toward a new curriculum project implemented in Hong Kong. This project based on a process-oriented interpretative approach was implemented widely in subject areas such as integrated science, social studies, and economics. The new approach was designed to get rid of the disadvantages of stressing the transmission of information and encouraging rote learning. After receiving questionnaires asking about the teachers' attitudes to this educational reform, the economics teachers sampled expressed attitudes that were broadly consistent with the demands of the new approach. The teachers generally appeared to evaluate the new curriculum positively. But classroom observations showed a different facet. The fact was that in the classroom teachers did not implement that approach as well as their favorable attitudes. It is interesting that teachers accept and support the innovation but make no attempt to translate their positive attitude into classroom practices. The discrepancy between teachers' attitudes and teachers' behaviors suggests us that teachers' behaviors in the classroom are not totally consistent with their attitudes. This phenomenon indicates there, among teachers, exists certain social constraints or situational norms to have more influence on teachers' behaviors than on their attitudes toward teaching approach.

People do not always do what they think and what they say, but their subsequent actions will reveal their true beliefs. That is the reason why many researchers (Kennedy & Kennedy; 1996; Morris, 1988) argue that drawing a cause-effect relationship between attitudes and behaviors is not sufficient for successful implementation of change. Other equally important factors need to be taken into account.

Two researchers, Kennedy and Kennedy (1996), discussed the mismatch between people's expressed attitudes and their actual behaviors by two illustrations. They suggested people not to take a risk of excluding other influential features of the context. They introduced Ajzen's (1991) theory to explain the complex inter-relationship of attitudes and actions because they thought Ajzen's theory might have some applications to the changing situations that teachers face in English language teaching. Ajzen (1991), proposing a model of "a theory of planned behavior", argues that attitudes cannot influence actions if individuals lack a sense of control over the behavior. Intentions, in fact, are the immediate determinants to push individuals to perform the desirable and willful behavior:

Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that have an impact on a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior (Ajzen, p.113).

At an appropriate time these behavioral intentions are translated into action. He suggests that behavior/action is decided by the combined impact of attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. These three elements are different facets of intentions and each of them greatly influences individuals' behaviors.

(1) attitudes toward the behavior

Ajzen (1991) defines an individual's attitude toward a behavior as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, institution, or event" (p.4). It concerns a person's positive or negative evaluation of performing a certain behavior. People intend to perform a behavior when they evaluate it positively. According to Ajzen's theory, attitude toward a behavior is decided by 'behavioral beliefs', which are related to both belief strength and outcome evaluation. People gain an evaluative judgment about an object, a person, or any other identifiable aspect of the environment based on their main beliefs about the behavior. That is, an individual will hold a favorable attitude toward a behavior if s/he believes performing the behavior will lead to the most positive outcomes. Conversely, a person will hold an unfavorable attitude if negative outcomes are perceived.

(2) subjective norms

Subjective norms, the second element in Ajzen's theory, reflect social influence and are dominated by the underlying normative beliefs. These beliefs are not only the individual's personal beliefs but also what the individual believes others think about the behavior concerned. Those "others" are known as "referents" (p.121). The referents have great impact and pressure on an individual's intention and behavior. The important referents might include colleagues, school principals, parents, depending on the behavior involved. When important referents support and approve a behavior, individuals are likely to carry out the behavior. Conversely, if such influential referents are disapproval of the behavior, the input to individuals' intentions will be negative. That is, the person's perception of social pressure determines whether to perform the behavior or not.

(3) perceived behavioral control

The third element is “perceived behavioral control” which “refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles” (Ajzen, p.132). The factors of perceived behavioral control may be internal and external. Internal factors may include lacking needed information, skills, or abilities. Duttweiler and Mutchler (1990) also identified lack of skills as one of the attributes that might result in resistance to change. But teaching techniques can be overcome and improved.

External factors determine “the extent to which circumstances facilitate or interfere the performance of the behavior” (Ajzen, p.129). Opportunity plays a part in external factors. Absence of proper opportunities may temporarily disrupt or prevents performance of the behavior, but one’s attitude or subjective norm with respect to the intention is not easily changed. Lacking opportunities may cause the person to try in another way or wait for a better opportunity. Besides, depending on others could lead to incomplete control over one’s behavioral goals. To cooperate with partners, on the other hand, can help an individual to deal with difficulties and perform the desired behavior.

Other higher-level constraints such as availability of teacher time, or examination within a teaching system, may be influential factors, too.

In short, internal factors and external factors make up an individual’s perceived behavioral control which has motivational implications for intentions. Without the resources and opportunities to perform a certain behavior, it is not possible for individuals to own strong behavioral intention to engage in it even if they show a favorable attitude toward the behavior. The more resources and opportunities individuals think they own,

the more control over the behavior they perceive.

In conclusion, the above discussion suggests the discrepancy between teachers' attitudes and their behaviors need to be taken into account when individuals try to explore how teachers implement a new curriculum in their classrooms. Some social constraints or subjective norms may hinder teachers from keeping their positive attitudes toward implementing a new curriculum. Thus, a qualitative method, collecting data from different sources, was adopted in this study to help understand these factors which have a great impact on teachers' attitudes and their behaviors.

2.4 The Implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum

A curriculum reform, in order to foster national competitiveness and the overall quality of our citizen lives, has already been implemented in Taiwan with students of elementary schools and junior high schools since September 2001. This educational reform program focuses on improving the previous curriculum in which most of the subjects were taught separately and were not linked with each other in functions. It breaks down the narrow subject divisions used by the old framework of teaching and consolidates different subjects into learning areas which refer to the contents of learning, not the titles of subjects (the MOE, 2001a). The curriculum is called "Grade 1-9 Curriculum".

2.4.1 Characteristics of Grade 1-9 Curriculum

Grade 1-9 Curriculum has been a major educational policy in this country and has concrete and direct effects on the public. One of its main features is integration and

articulation. It integrates six grades of elementary school and three grades of junior high school into continuous nine grades (1st- 9th grades) in order to facilitate the articulation of curriculum. Seven study fields, ten core competences, and six major topics have been developed as the goals and objectives of the curriculum. Besides, the new curriculum also emphasizes the skills that are useful to students rather than unrelated knowledge. The portable skills, which are widely applicable, including abilities to deal with events in life, are important learning outcomes.

Based on the concept of competence, the MOE adopted the following principles to design the curricula for elementary and junior high schools (2001a):

- (1) to involve all aspects of daily life that correspond to the students' mental and physical development
- (2) to encourage the development of individuality and the exploration of one's potentials
- (3) to foster democratic literacy and respect for different cultures
- (4) to develop scientific understanding and competences, in order to meet the demands of modern life.

In addition the above four principles, Grade 1-9 Curriculum has other special characteristics. Key features of Grade 1-9 Curriculum different from the old one are listed as follows (Dai, 1999 ; Shih, 2002; the MOE, 2001a):

- (1) All subjects are integrated into seven learning areas– language arts, health and physical education, social studies, arts and humanities, mathematics, technology and science, and integrative activities. Among all learning areas, language arts takes about 20% to 30% of the total number of classes. Each of the other six learning areas takes about 10% to 15%. This shows that English is no longer an individual subject but is

integrated into language arts with Chinese and the local dialect. However, since integration is the apparent spirit of this new curriculum, how English is integrated with the other two languages and other learning areas deserves much attention.

(2) The new curriculum is designed to cultivate ten core competences of students – ability to understand self and develop individual potential; ability to appreciate, perform and create; ability to plan career and learn in all life; ability to express, communicate, and share; ability to respect others, care for the community, and facilitate team work; ability to learn culture and understand international affairs; ability to plan, organize, and practice; ability to use technology and information; ability to explore something actively and conduct research.

(3) Apart from the seven learning areas and ten core competences, the integrated curriculum also identifies information technology, environment, gender, human rights, career development, home economics as six major topics related to human social development. They are set out in the curriculum syllabus with basic ability indicators for each study field. These provide the textbook publishers with a basis for preparing teaching materials.

(4) The administrative authorities give schools more power and autonomy to organize and conduct their activities for alternative learning periods. Schools no longer wait for instructions passively from the MOE. They need to develop the way on their own actively. All schools have to establish curriculum committees to design their own teaching materials and activities. This is a distinct change in Grade 1-9 Curriculum. However, many of the teachers in junior high schools are used to teaching based on a textbook and some traditional teaching methods. Many of them did not receive any curriculum-design

training in the university. Whether teachers can afford such a change might be an important issue.

(5) To meet the needs of social diversification and educational liberation, the monopoly for the compilation of textbooks is transferred from the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT) to publishers. Textbooks of all courses and areas have been opened to all versions but they must be reviewed and approved by the MOE authority. In addition to textbooks, diverse teaching materials and school-based courses are encouraged. The preparation and selection of teaching materials become more diversified and liberal. This is another change because the government authorities hope teachers can choose proper teaching materials according to students' needs and proficiency level. However, without experience and consultative criteria for adoption, it might be a challenge for teachers to decide a proper version for their students.

(6) English instructions are officially incorporated into elementary school education, starting from the fifth and six grades. This is due to the enthusiastic atmosphere of English learning in Taiwan and the need to advance the abilities of competing against other countries. This shows that more English teachers are needed to support English teaching of elementary schools. However, with hastening to largely increase the amount of English teachers in a very short time, the quality of English teachers would be a worrying problem.

(7) Computer-assisted instructions are emphasized in each field. Teachers are encouraged to develop their teaching resources and strengthen exchanges of information on the Internet. This feature reveals that using computer to assist in teaching is considered an important competence of teachers. In the 21st century, for teachers, one of the tasks to

prompt individual professional ability is learning to use computer.

(8) Multiple approaches to assessment based on the concept of multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1983) are applied in testing. Accordingly, teachers in Grade 1-9 Curriculum are encouraged to evaluate students' learning results in the method of formative evaluation rather than summative evaluation. This seems to be a great challenge to those teachers who are used to ordering a lot of test papers for students because they usually put much emphasis on grades rather than competence. In addition, how to design a test to effectively evaluate students' competence proclaimed by Grade 1-9 Curriculum is another challenge for teachers.

It is clear that Grade 1-9 Curriculum is different from the previous one. The aim of this revised curriculum is to teach students to obtain basic knowledge and to develop the capacity for lifelong learning in order to cultivate able citizens. Thus, the curriculum focuses on the needs and experiences of students and developing core competences which a modern citizen should possess. Accordingly, Grade 1-9 Curriculum adopts an innovative perspective to improve school education.

2.4.2 Grade 1-9 English Curriculum

In Grade 1-9 Curriculum, English is incorporated into the field of language arts with Chinese and the local dialect. This new English curriculum not only integrates the ten basic competences and the six major topics but also involves the redesign of the English syllabus for primary and secondary schools and productions of new communicative-based teaching materials. The new English syllabus reflects a more

communicative orientation to the teaching and learning of English in order to create an enjoyable learning environment without pressure. Basic communicative competence and learning interests are the goals.

The adjustment in English curriculum is consistent with the current trend in secondary foreign language study, which has been accompanied by a curricular emphasis on communicative proficiency. That is, the ability to communicate effectively in an authentic context. Communication rather than grammar is the dominant principle of English curriculum.

Nunan (1991a) offers five features to understand communicative approach:

- (1) An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- (2) The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- (3) The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- (4) An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- (5) An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom (p.279).

The above characteristics are the reasons why Grade 1-9 English Curriculum, in terms of communicative approach, emphasizes authenticity of the contexts and the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in terms of real world situations. The principles of selecting and editing English materials are authenticity, practicability and fun. The

dynamic, creative, and individualized approach is expected to bring into practice in classroom settings.

In Grade 1-9 English Curriculum, the goals of national junior high school English education involve three main aspects (the MOE, 2001b):

- (1) to develop students' basic communicative language skills in English
- (2) to cultivate students' interests in English and good learning methods
- (3) to introduce foreign culture as well as local culture

Furthermore, the curriculum contains indicators of abilities which are divided into three dimensions: interests and methods in learning English, culture and customs, and language competence. The main points of implementation are related to outlines of materials, principles of material compilation, teaching methods, teaching assessment, and teaching resources.

So far, we have seen the contents of Grade 1-9 English Curriculum. Based on the principle of communication, the English curriculum aims at developing four language skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading—the four basic abilities for efficient communication. Students are encouraged, through language learning, to cultivate basic communicative competences, to understand different cultures, and to be familiar with social customs. This new English curriculum aims to remove the disadvantages of overemphasizing reading and writing in the previous one and wishes to create a new environment for English teaching.

However, this curriculum change also makes a tremendous impact on EFL teachers. First of all, English teaching starts to be officially implemented at Grade 5 and Grade 6 in elementary schools rather than junior high school students. Junior high school EFL

teachers no longer face new students who do not have much English learning experience. Instead, they have to deal with students with different proficiency levels. Added to this problem is the various versions of textbooks adopted by elementary schools, which also challenge teachers to integrate and connect the English curriculum of elementary schools and that of junior high schools. Furthermore, Grade 1-9 Curriculum emphasizes teacher autonomy; teachers are encouraged to develop teaching materials, activities, and school-based curriculum. However, it is not sure if teachers own the ability to perform this task, especially those who used to teach based on a textbook and traditional teaching methods. In fact, many problems exist in the beginning of curriculum implementation. These problems need to be solved through the collaboration and consensus between government officials and teachers.

2.4.3 Research of Grade 1-9 Curriculum

As Grade 1-9 Curriculum is a controversial educational policy in Taiwan, many educational journal articles have been dedicated to the discussion of this theme. According to a rough calculation, as of February 2004, more than one thousand and two hundred journal articles are related to Grade 1-9 Curriculum. In terms of dissertations, Grade 1-9 Curriculum is discussed in more than two hundred theses, most of which adopted quantitative methods and concerned about multi- dimensions of this new curriculum, such as integrated curriculum, textbook assessment, teachers' belief, and in-service teacher training.

Although Grade 1-9 Curriculum aims to response to public expectation of

improving elementary and junior high school education, many criticisms are associated with its implementation. Lacking theoretical background and hastening to implement are two of the main concerns discussed. Recently, many citizens even asked the MOE to admit in public the failure of Grade 1-9 Curriculum. In fact, the effects of the new curriculum remain to be investigated, but it is sure that students and teachers in primary and junior high schools have been influenced tremendously.

Responding to the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum, many researchers were engaged in exploring different facets to this new curriculum. In terms of teachers' attitudes, Yeh (2001) investigated elementary and secondary school educators' perspectives of Grade 1-9 Curriculum program implementation. Ko (2001) analyzed factors affecting junior high school teachers' receptivity of educational reform. Wang (2002) focused on attitude formation of primary school teachers related to Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Another researcher, Chen (2003), did a research on junior high school teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum. The results of their studies are shown in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Teachers' Attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum

Researcher	Research method	Selected participants	Results
Yeh (2001)	Qualitative	Elementary and secondary school educators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School educators hold positive attitudes toward 1-9 curriculum program. They agree 1-9 curriculum program can offer students a more flexible learning environment. 2. The factors, such as teaching

			experience, educational background, and characteristics of school, will influence educators' attitudes toward 1-9 curriculum program.
Ko (2001)	Qualitative	Junior high school teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A majority of teachers present significant support toward the current educational reform action program. 2. The factors, such as gender, teaching experience, duty standing, and school size, will have impact on the receptivity of the educational reform action program.
Wang (2002)	Qualitative	Primary school teachers	The characteristics of the school field, such as authoritarian structure, limits teachers' receptivity toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Teachers cannot accept curriculum reform as well as the administrative promoters expect.
Chen (2003)	Quantitative	Junior high school teachers	1. Teachers remain neutral attitudes toward the curriculum reform, but they give their support to the

			<p>ideas of 1-9 curriculum reform.</p> <p>2. Teachers reflect their dissatisfaction of teaching effects and implementing measures.</p> <p>3. Age, experience, and administrative job have significant influence on teachers' attitudes toward curriculum reform.</p>
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From the results of these studies, two important points can be drawn. One is that participating teachers generally show positive attitudes toward the new curriculum or give their support to the Grade 1-9 Curriculum. This phenomenon reveals that this curriculum reform is really under demand and can meet the need of our society. The other is that teacher experience is a key factor which influences teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum.

However, most of these studies took a quantitative approach, in which attitudes were self-reported. As discussed earlier, reported attitudes are often different from the real situation in the classroom (Kennedy & Kennedy; 1996; Morris, 1988). Therefore, there is a need to use qualitative methods to understand how teachers actually cope with the new curriculum in their teaching settings.

2.4.4 Research of Grade 1-9 English Curriculum

Up to February 2004, there have been about 55 journal articles in Taiwan

concerning English teaching in Grade 1-9 Curriculum, whereas 23 of them are related to junior high school English teaching. In terms of theses and dissertations, only two theses are related to EFL teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 (English) curriculum in Taiwan. Chiu (2002) investigated the junior high school language teachers' cognition and attitude toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum in a quantitative method. Chen (2003) adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the attitudes of the junior high school EFL teachers toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum and further analyzed the factors affecting teachers' attitudes toward this new curriculum reform. The results of each research are shown as follows.

Table 2.2 Junior High School English Teachers' Attitudes toward Grade 1-9 (English)

Curriculum

Researcher	Research method	Selected participants	Results
Chiu (2002)	Quantitative	Junior high school language arts teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers hold positive attitudes and are willing to give support to Grade 1-9 Curriculum and language arts field. 2. Teachers recognize that the resources of schools are enough to carry out the new curriculum. 3. The different school and personal variables of teachers have influence on the attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum and

			language arts field.
Chen (2003)	Quantitative and qualitative	Junior high school EFL teachers in Taipei City	The junior high school teachers' teaching attitudes are deeply affected by the education reform policy, the administrative measures taken by school authorities, the demands from students and their parents, and the Academic Attainment Testing

The participating teachers in the above studies do not seem to achieve an agreement on affecting factors and their attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum. Teachers of language arts in Chiu's study show positive attitudes and give their support to the English curriculum, whereas the EFL teachers' attitude in Chen's research is not investigated. However, Chen's research seems to reveal that EFL teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum are largely influenced by other groups and external circumstances. But how and why teachers are influenced is not discussed.

To sum up, the existing research has increased our understanding of teachers' attitudes toward Grade 1-9 Curriculum and the factors behind their attitudes. However, the questions such as how and why teachers are influenced, teachers' self-reported attitude and their real attitude, and agreement in terms of factors still remain to be investigated. Therefore, it is necessary to more closely examine teachers' attitudes and coping behaviors in their workplace, without relying on the statements of attitude alone.

To have teachers' voice heard from their workplace helps enrich an understanding of teachers' behaviors and attitudes toward curriculum change.