

## 'Rowing between two reefs': EFL curricular innovation issues in secondary education in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This study presents a new look at English curriculum innovations in Indonesian secondary education. Despite the good intention of the designs, many researchers argue that innovations still have not improved school English teaching outcomes. However, little research has examined this issue from the teachers' perspective using a fidelity perspective (Fullan, 2007). This study investigated the 2004 and 2006 English curricula for secondary schools in Indonesia from the English teachers' views using the fidelity framework. It found that the teachers' degree of fidelity was low. They failed to properly implement the critical component: developing students' communicative competencies with the Genre-Based Approach as they substantially adapted the curricula's contents. As suggested in some studies, the failure was not due to their incompetence, although this cannot be entirely discounted. It was more so to external factors beyond their control, especially a mismatch between the amount of material to cover and the time available, inadequate training, and the overwhelming demand to prepare students for the national examination. As the authorities also expected them to implement real innovation, they had to fake their reports. Some implications for future designs and training are suggested.

**Keywords:** Curriculum innovation; EFL curriculum; English language teaching; the fidelity of implementation; teachers' perspectives

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### INTRODUCTION

As in many countries worldwide, Indonesia has introduced curricular innovations to improve its high school graduates' competence in English. The innovations were incorporated in the 2004 and the 2006 English curricular documents for senior high school students developed by the Board of National Standard of Education (BNSE) and Centre of Curriculum Development (CCD). The 2004 Curriculum adopted the competence-based education framework, which contained communicative language teaching (CLT). At the same time, the then little-known (in Indonesia) genre-based approach (henceforth: GBA) in the 2004 curriculum (see Pusat Kurikulum Balitbang Depdiknas, 2003) was also included and considered

an appropriate approach for achieving these competencies (Agustien, 2004). It was considered a relatively complicated approach where the teachers had to teach different types of texts with their respective generic patterns (Sukyadi, 2015). Two years later, the authority added another major component, namely an autonomy for the schools to develop their syllabi, by adopting the school-based 2006 curriculum with no change to the 2004 Curriculum teaching approach and methods. Despite the significant nature and idealistic intention, these changes have not significantly improved the outcomes of school-level English learning in Indonesia (Lie, 2007; Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011; Renandya & Widodo, 2016; Sukyadi, 2015; Widodo, 2013, 2016).

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Many studies have examined aspects of this failure. However, none have looked thoroughly at the issues teachers had to deal with when trying to understand and implement these new curricula (Martel, 2018; Widodo, 2016; Yuwono & Harbon, 2010). Most analysts tend to blame teachers or a lack of proper resources for the poor learning outcomes (Bismoko, 2003; Lengkanawati, 2005; Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011; Triastuti, 2011). However, based on our literature review and our interviews with some teachers prior to our field research in East Java in March 2016, it seemed that the changes in the curriculum had generated two significant issues for the teachers, including lack of time due to excessive demands and lack of training. These issues were not considered in great detail from their perspective as implementers. Therefore, more research was needed to obtain a balanced picture of the issue.

This study attempted to fill the gap by revisiting the issue using a fresh approach, examining it using the teachers' perspectives, focusing on their struggles in implementing the curricula. This is important because teachers will continue to hold the key role in determining future innovations' success or failure. The researchers translated the central purpose of this study into the following questions: How did the teachers understand and interpret the curricula? How did they adapt their classes to suit their interpretation and circumstances? What were their reasons for the adaptation?

The literature shows several models of communicative competence (henceforth: CC) available. The first is Canale and Swain's (1980) model, which has three sub-competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Another model has four sub-competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale, 1983). The model adopted by the 2004 and 2006 curricula has five sub-competencies (adopted from Celce-Murcia et al., 1995) – linguistic, sociocultural, actional, strategic, and discourse competencies – and is thus the most complex of the three. These three models' existence indicates that experts have had different opinions about formulating communicative competence. These differences of opinion require investigation in terms of classroom realities, particularly in the Indonesian teaching environments, for example, whether they focus on enabling the students to communicate in English and whether they give them exercises that enhance their ability, such as doing a roleplay, giving a speech, and doing a pair activity.

Further, the GBA's inclusion in implementing the above model of CC, where the curriculum developers believed it would increase the students' overall English proficiency, brought additional

theoretical problems. The curriculum developers believed that the genre approach might provide a way of looking at what students have to do linguistically, for example, what kinds of text types should be used to achieve discourse competence (Agustien, 2004). They also believed that the approach could clarify the primary goal of communicative competence they must learn and produce in speech and writing (Pusat Kurikulum Balitbang Depdiknas, 2003). However, research shows that this approach remains controversial (Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Sukyadi, 2015). Two questions arise, first, whether the approach could be appropriately implemented by teachers and, second, whether it could achieve the desired communicative competencies expected by the curriculum developers.

The researchers used a fidelity perspective to analyze the implementation of the 2004 and 2006 curricula in this study. In implementing a curriculum, fidelity is defined as to what extent the teachers implement the policy faithfully as intended by the policymakers (Fullan, 2007). Fidelity of implementation, mutual adaptation, and curriculum enactment are the three approaches that emerged in the late sixties and early seventies in curriculum implementation studies (Snyder et al., 1992). Snyder et al. (1992) describe the fidelity perspective in curriculum implementation as a focus on (1) measuring the degree to which a particular innovation is implemented as planned and (2) identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder implementation as planned. Mutual adaptation refers to the process where both the developers and those who implement them in the classroom context make adjustments in a curriculum. This implies a certain amount of negotiation and flexibility for both developers and practitioners (Snyder et al., 1992). Implementation is considered successful when teachers enact the curriculum plan as stipulated (Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Snyder et al., 1992).

There are two perspectives on the teachers' adaptations. The first perspective focuses on how teachers view and interpret the curriculum documents and how these perceptions shape their decisions about how to adapt materials to their local contexts (Penuel et al., 2014). The second is the integrity of implementation (Penuel et al., 2014), which refers to the degree to which the teachers' adaptations of materials are congruent with the actual curriculum. The answers explain the degree of fidelity of implementation.

## **METHOD**

To address the research questions, we employed the methodology described below. The methodology includes aspects such as the location where the data

was collected, the participants, methods of data collection, and analysis.

### **Study location**

The study was conducted in East Java Province, Indonesia, from 2015 to 2017. East Java was selected because it allows one to compare curriculum implementation in rural and urban areas as it still has vast economic and geographical disparities between urban and rural areas. For example, in 2015, there were 15.84% of poor people in rural areas and 8.41% in urban areas in East Java (Statistics Indonesia, 2018). This information was supported by Nuraini's (2017) study, which reported disparities in people's economic growth between urban and rural areas in the province. These disparities are believed to influence the implementation of the curricula.

### **Participants**

The participants comprised government-certified senior high school teachers who were already teaching before the Government enacted the 2004 Curriculum. Six teachers from urban areas and six teachers from rural areas of East Java Province were selected as participants. The metropolitan areas consisted of three big cities: Surabaya, Malang, and Jember, whereas the rural areas consisted of some locations in the suburbs of small towns: Pare, Situbondo, South of Malang, and South of Jember. These teachers were coded as GP-1, GP-2, GP-3, GP-4, GP-5, GP-6, GS-1, GS-5, GT-1, GM-1, GM-2, and GMW-1.

Besides the teachers, the researchers also employed key informants in this study. The primary purpose of inviting them to participate was to triangulate the information on the same issues gathered from the participant teachers and collect any information the teachers may not provide. The key informants were three 'senior' (highly experienced) EFL teachers previously appointed as provincial curriculum trainers for senior high school English teachers. These key informants were coded as KI-1, KI-2, and KI-3.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The researchers employed three methods of data collection and analysis to conduct this qualitative case study: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (Liamputtong, 2009), and classroom observation (Kawulich, 2005) gathered from the research participants. In-depth interviews were carried out face-to-face with the participant teachers and key informants. The purpose was to gain deep information on the teachers' perspectives in relation to the research questions: their understandings,

beliefs, opinions, attitudes, experiences, and all related matters on the implementation of the Genre-Based Approach, and the curriculum itself. Most of these interviews were recorded for later analysis, but as there were some instances where participants did not want to be recorded, or were not allowed to be recorded, data were collected in the forms of memos and personal notes (Flick, 2014). Focus-group discussions were employed with the participant teachers. Data gathered from these discussions were in the form of memos and recorded (then transcribed) information, and were intended to gain various perspectives on the participants regarding their curriculum implementation of the GBA concept. Another purpose of the focus-group discussions was to gauge the consistency of information gathered from the individual interviews, so that the trustworthiness of the collected data was increased (Flick, 2014). The researchers chose to use non-participant observations (recordings of classroom lessons made by the teachers themselves) rather than participant observations (Kawulich, 2005). In non-participant observation, the researchers remain detached from the event being directly observed. Therefore, the researchers asked all the participant teachers to record their own classroom activities. Data gathered from these observations were also used to triangulate data from other findings.

The overall duration to collect all data was nine months, from December 2014 to August 2015, which were divided into four phases: direct observations, written data collections, interviews with participants, and interviews with key informants. In addition, follow-up interviews with both participants and key informants were conducted via telephone calls and text messages from May 2015 to October 2017. These follow-up interviews were necessary to get deeper contextual understandings all of the data collected previously from them.

The researchers employed a thematic method of analysis to examine the data focusing on the research participants' perspectives about the determinants of implementation (Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977): characteristics of the innovation (theme 1), strategies (theme 2), characteristics of the adopting units (theme 3), and characteristics of the macro socio-political units (theme 4).

### **FINDINGS**

The following findings are presented based on the themes mentioned earlier.

**Finding 1: Teachers' perception of the curriculum documents (Theme 1 characteristics of the innovation)**

The teachers found the curriculum documents to be complex and too theoretical for them, particularly the key innovative elements, namely the CC and the GBA. The evidence is presented in detail below.

**Teachers' understanding of the CC and the GBA**

The complexity of the theories adopted in the curriculum documents seemed to have led to difficulties in understanding them and, thus, inaccurate implementation. Both rural and urban participants admitted that the notion of CC and the GBA in the curricula was challenging to comprehend and, consequently, implement as planned by the curriculum developers. In a group discussion, one of the participants (GP-4) answered, *"It is not easy for us to fully comprehend communicative competence since we rarely had good examples from our training and workshops. Therefore, it is also not easy to teach that."* Other members of the discussion group agreed with their friend's answer. Most of them referred to the curriculum document to support their friend's answer. One of them (GP-1) added, *"In the main curriculum document, communicative competence is not comprehensively described, and nor are its sub-competences."*

With regard to the GBA, participants in one group discussion seemed not to recall the term, but when the researcher mentioned the terms 'generic structure' and 'recount', they immediately recognized them. They answered, *"...oh, that term (nodding their heads). GP\_4 added, "We know those generic structures, but we do not quite understand the overall approach."* The above statements given by both rural and urban participants, as well as by a senior teacher trainer, were also confirmed by a key informant who stated:

So many teachers still do not understand the GBA, even though they have been trained in some workshops (in their in-service education). The important thing is that teachers should comprehend the notion of communicative competence first before they learn about the GBA and try to implement it. Otherwise, this approach is difficult for them. (KI-2)

In short, the teachers found the documents difficult to understand thoroughly. The problem seemed to be due to a degree of inadequacy of the information and explanation of the key innovative concepts.

**Finding 2: Strategies of adaptation (Theme 2 strategies)**

The research participants argued that they had retained their integrity as defined by Penuel et al. (2014), that is, to follow as much as possible the curriculum materials and syllabi model given to them to be implemented. This integrity is, in fact, in line with macro socio-political factors that influence the implementation of the curriculum. However, the implementation seemed to have been significantly limited. As the curriculum was impossible for them to implement in its entirety, they had to make a significant adaptation. Both rural and urban teachers conducted this adaptation. The adaptation ranged from modification of the components considered difficult to implement, reduction of objectives and achievement standards, and exclusion of some components.

**Modification of components and reduction of achievement standards**

The teachers modified the components of the curricula deemed challenging to teach. *"We modify the [components] which are difficult to be implemented"* (GP-3). This is confirmed by another teacher citing local conditions such as her school condition and the condition of the teachers: *"We still use all the main curriculum documents as a guide, including all the competencies criteria stated in them. However, we should adapt them according to the conditions here: the conditions of our schools and ourselves"* (GP-1). What this teacher means by 'our own condition' seems to be the degree of their understanding of the curricula and the guide provided by their superiors and their colleagues in the Regional Forum of English Teachers (the *MGMP* or the *Musyawah Guru Mata Pelajaran*), which provides discussions and workshops for teachers to improve their professional practices). *"We mean by adaptation to our conditions according to our understanding of the curriculum and our guidance from our superiors and the MGMP"* (GP-3). The modification of the component could also mean lowering and even reducing the standards to achieve in teaching. *"This can be by lowering the criteria, reducing them, and omitting them"* (GP-3).

Another form of adaptation could also mean mixing some of the given materials with various locally available materials: *"We rarely develop or make our teaching materials. We usually combine all the available materials, then modify and adapt them according to the time available and our students' proficiency"* (GP-4). Mixing the materials may have two meanings, either enriching the given material or lowering the level of difficulties. The

latter seems to be the case as the reason is to suit the limited time available and the low level of students' proficiency. Two teachers confirmed the mixing of the materials. One of them combined the material provided by the Ministry of Education and the one they obtained from the MGMP: *Teaching materials we usually use are from the Diknas (The National Education Ministry) website, especially from the Electronic School Book sites, and we combine them with other materials we get from CC (Regional forum of English Teachers)* (GP-2). The other teacher combined the Ministry's material with a locally published book: *"Other than the e-books, the teaching materials we use are from books published locally that have been recommended by the MGMP or by the district education office"* (GP-3).

Further evidence of the adaptation could be found in the exclusion of some of the curriculum components. Some teachers admitted that they had to exclude some curricula components by not using the material provided. A rural teacher chose not to use the syllabi model at all, or sometimes he used it in accordance with the low competence of his students. *"I made it all myself ... sometimes I do not use the book (the models) ... sometimes I add from it according to the students' needs"* (GS-1). It seemed this participant made adaptations contextually (depending on the students' proficiency level) and occasionally picked some material from the books provided. GS-1 further added:

I do not use all of the books, but I read them. Why? First, it is due to the low level of students' vocabulary. Second, there is a repetition of the junior high school material. Third, the classroom consists of 37 students, while the 'Introducing oneself' topic is allocated just two teaching hours, and the assessment should be based on writing and roleplaying for speaking (GS-1).

Another participant confirmed the practice:

Yes, I do not always use the book. There is repeated material taken from junior high school, even though the students still do not completely comprehend this. There is not enough time if I follow all the requirements from the book (GM-1).

The adaptation was justified by the 2006 Curriculum, as confirmed by one key informant (KI):

In fact, that is in line with the spirit or idea of the school-based curriculum (or KTSP: *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*) of the 2006 curriculum, where teachers and schools have the right to make adaptations to the main curriculum document. (KI-2)

Another rural teacher supported the point. *"Yes, that is true. It should be adapted according to*

*the local context."* (GS-5). This strategy was used not only for the 2004 Curriculum but also for the 2006 Curriculum. *"We do the same thing with the 2006 Curriculum"* (GP-6). Hence, even though the adaptation is allowed, it reduces the quality.

Concerning the adaptation of CC, the participants stated that they made adaptations during the implementation of CC by "combining" or "integrating" its sub-competencies into a single discourse competence, except linguistic (grammar) competence. A rural participant stated, *"We combine and integrate these sub-competencies into one discourse competence"* (GP-2, in a group discussion). This point was confirmed by another rural participant saying, *"Yes, just like the examples from the model, Sir. All (sub-competencies) are integrated into one discourse competence"* (GP-1, in a group discussion). It was further supported by a senior rural participant, who added that the curriculum recommends it.

It is already stated in the main curriculum document that those sub-competencies are not to be taught separately, but they should combine or integrate into one competence. It (the guide) stated that, so with the models of the syllabi, we have got. Therefore, if (we were) asked to specify which sub-competence we teach, we are not used to it (GS-2).

However, they did not follow this consistently as they did teach the linguistic competence separately, as a teacher from Malang said, *"It depends on the topic, and the five competences do not always apply ... and we usually mix them, except for the linguistic competence"* (GM-2). This teacher tended to employ an old approach to teaching a language where the grammar points are first taught separately. He said, *"Yes, I think we should introduce the grammatical points separately and comprehensively so that the students can apply them correctly in communicative contexts"* (GM-2). This approach seemed to be subscribed to by all the teachers. *"Yes, we used to introduce the grammatical points first, then we implemented it into other sub-competencies in an integrated manner"* (GP-2). This is easy for the teachers to do as they were used to doing it, and they also do it when preparing students for the NE.

In short, the teachers were in the practice of teaching linguistic competence separately. They claimed that they taught the other four sub-competencies in an integrated manner. However, they could not define each of these sub-competencies. Hence, it is difficult to expect how they would develop each of them. Indeed, classroom observation shows some teachers did practice some form of activities, which promote oral communication; however, when asked, the teacher

admitted that she did not understand the sub-competencies:

It is complicated for me if I always follow the models, Sir. Besides, I do not entirely understand it (on the steps and procedures); what I know is how to make communicative activities as much as possible in class as long as it does not depart from the main goal (of learning the English language) (GS-1).

If the teachers did not understand the sub-competencies, it was difficult to expect them to achieve them.

The difficulty also concerned the sub-competencies to achieve and the GB approach. Both the rural and urban participants had difficulty understanding the approach. A rural participant commented, "I do not understand it, Sir... So how can I employ it (the approach) properly in my teaching?" (GP-3). An urban participant shared a similar response, saying, "Even I myself have difficulty (in understanding the approach) ... How can I teach it properly?" (GMW-1). These responses were confirmed by a senior key informant, "So, many teachers still do not understand about the GBA, even though they have been trained in some workshops (in their in-service education)" (KI-2). This finding is in line with the finding in previous studies, saying that the approach was too difficult to be implemented (Sukyadi, 2015; Triastuti, 2011).

Indeed, all the participants, rural and urban, stated that they had received training during the in-service period, including an introduction to the notions of CC and the GBA. However, since they did not get thorough and comprehensive training, they tended to blindly follow the models that had been given out to them, saying, "The models and examples of the generic structures are helpful for the students (in their writing exercises), Sir" (GP-2). Based on the participants' lack of understanding, the GBA was implemented in a limited way, only in students' writing activities, "It is for writing lessons, Sir" (GP-3, in a group discussion). This situation was confirmed by a key informant, "Yes, to make it easy, they, the teachers, follow and copy the model syllabi they got from the workshop" (KI-1). Further, a senior key informant illustrated teachers' difficulties if they had to teach using the entire model and its associated activities. Hence, they only partially employed the model.

It will become a heavy burden if teachers have to teach using the GBA and applying all of its types according to the models or guides from the workshops. Imagine if there are at least 36 students in a class and the teacher has to teach five parallel classes, so there are almost 200 students for one teacher (KI-2).

Another key informant explained the situation further: "The best teachers can do with the Genre-Based Approach in the classroom is to apply the four stages and the teaching cycles. Only if they had ever got the training and known how to apply them" (KI-3).

It can be summarised that the teachers, in accordance with their limited understanding, tended to implement the CC and the GBA minimally, and it was limited to students' writing activities. In short, although they combined materials from a variety of different sources, the adaptation shows a clear reduction of the significant elements of the curricula, the lowering and even reduction of the expected standards in their daily teaching, meaning lowering the quality of the innovation.

### **Finding 3: Characteristics of the adopting units (Theme 3 characteristics of the adopting unit)**

Characteristics of adopting units refer to the adoption process, organizational climate, and demographic and environmental support factors. The adoption process concerns whether the innovation objectives attempt to solve actual teaching problems or to follow a new trend in language teaching. The organizational climate refers to the capacity and cooperation among members of the organizational unit to implement the innovation. The demographic and environmental support factors relate to the geographical areas where the innovation is to be implemented. Here, urban and rural areas are to be compared or contrasted (Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). The following discussions do not distinguish between CC and the GBA but focus more on the similarities and differences between the rural and urban participants' perspectives on their schools' ability to implement the innovation.

#### **Adaptation by the rural participants**

Rural participants thought the demand for the innovation was too high to implement in their areas; therefore, they made adaptations to suit their school contexts and their students' levels of proficiency, with due regard to the resource limitations as well. However, they only confined the adaptations to the classroom level, which differed from what they reported to the authorities. "In preparing the lesson plan and the syllabi, we should follow the required model, but what we practice in the classroom is not the same" (GP-3), a rural participant stated. This point was confirmed by another rural participant, a senior teacher, citing lack of resources as the reason for the infidelity: "Schools in rural areas tend to follow the model set for them, but what happens

*inside every class is a different story. Usually, this is due to limited resources” (GS-1).*

It is true that, rhetorically, the teachers said that they followed the model provided by the authorities, but what they practiced in their teaching is not necessarily the same as what they said. The same teacher (GS-1) described what reduction she made and cited lack of time and students' low proficiency level as other reasons:

We still use the syllabi and the models as guides, but in practice, we skip or discount some materials since there is not enough time to cover them. One of the reasons is the relatively low proficiency of students (GS-1).

Thus, the rural schools where the teachers taught seemed to try to retain some degree of fidelity in implementing the curriculum as required. However, as they could not achieve all the objectives of the innovative components of the curricula, they lowered their expectations of the curriculum objectives. Hence, they implemented only some of them. This strategy is what they called implementing innovation 'in their own ways' as illustrated by a key informant: *“Yes, what happens in the class is different from what we usually report. The important thing is how we can achieve the expected goal in our own ways” (KI-3).*

#### ***Adaptation by the urban participants***

A similar situation happened in urban areas; however, lowering the teachers' expectations about meeting the curriculum objectives was not used extensively as in the rural areas. Urban areas were not as constrained by limited resources as the rural areas. They were generally higher in the fidelity of implementation than rural schools. The adaptations made by urban schools were mostly due to the limited time available to cover all the teaching-learning materials from the syllabi. "There is not enough time to deliver all the materials required in the syllabi," said an urban participant (GM-1). Hence, both rural and urban schools adapted the curriculum for the same reason: the limited time available. As stated previously, the adaptation practice was confirmed by a senior key informant, and she argued that it was justified.

#### **Finding 4: Reasons for the adaptation (Theme 4 characteristics of the macro socio-political units)**

Several reasons for the adaptation were expressed. The first reason was that both groups of participants admitted that they needed regular and comprehensive training and workshops to implement the curriculum appropriately. However, they pointed out that the authority did not provide adequate workshops and training opportunities to

meet their needs. In contrast, some did not learn the key innovative concepts during their university education. They were considered inadequate for a range of issues such as a lack of frequency of training:

I was taught that concept when I was a student. As a teacher, I got the training once, and it took one week. It was so long ago, and as I remember it (each sub-competence) was not taught separately. (GP-6)

I did the training twice, and it was a long time ago. As I remember, each training took one week. I did not have that when I was at the university. (GLS-1)

Although the MGMP is available, it is not regularly organized, as one of the participants said, *“There were MGMP meetings, but they were not routinely organized. Besides, we rarely come since we do not have substitutes to teach our students” (GP-1).* Most rural participants seemed to have difficulty if they were asked to specify and elaborate on the implementation of these sub-competences other than linguistic competence. They said (in a group discussion) that they had not been trained to specify and elaborate on each of these sub-competences: *“we are not trained to do that [specifying and elaborating sub-competences)” (GP-2-5).*

In other words, the introductory strategy of the authority, especially the dissemination of the necessary information to enlighten the implementers, was not enough to make the innovation successful. It seemed that the authority took it for granted that the new innovation would be easy for teachers to implement. They did not anticipate that the ideas in the new curriculum would be too complex for the teachers to understand and implement.

Concerning training in the GBA, only two participants, one from the urban area and one from the rural area, had been trained in implementing the approach. However, even these two participants were not satisfied with the training they had received: it was just six days of training, and all they received was the printed resources from the trainer. The rest of the participants did not understand the approach and had only learned about it from their peers in the MGMP meetings. No participants knew about the GBA book published by the Ministry of Education that the researcher mentioned (*Introduction to the Genre-Based Approach* by Nugroho and Hafrizon (2009), published by the Centre for Development & Empowerment for Language Teachers & Education Personnel, Ministry of National Education). In a group discussion, one of the participants remarked: *“...and we just knew it from the models (of syllabi or lesson plans) we got from our friends who had had the training” (GP-5).* One key informant, KI-2, a retired

provincial teacher trainer, also did not know the book: "Sir, I do not know that book, either" (KI-2).

These conditions were worsened by introducing the 2006 Curriculum, known as 'the school-based curriculum', requiring teachers to develop their syllabi. However, the teachers were so overwhelmed that they tended just to adapt the syllabi and lesson plan models given to them in the inadequate workshops available. Consequently, the expectation of the innovation that the teachers would be actual agents in implementing the school-based curriculum did not materialize. The second reason was inadequate time to cover the material, which all the participants unanimously cited. For the rural teachers, specifically, lack of resources and students' lack of competence were also seen as issues. The interviews also showed the lack of teachers' competence to implement the two key innovative concepts, the five sub-competences, and the GBA.

Finally, the most dominant factor appears to be the National Examination (NE) preparation. All the participants, regardless of the characteristics of the adopting units (locations), cited this factor. It is the most important factor based on two pieces of evidence. The first is that it was their number one priority before anything else. This was because the first thing they did was examine the NE's grids. They prepared their teaching plans and materials based on the grids of the examination. In a group discussion among urban participants, one senior participant said, and supported by the others, "Yes, we always look at the NE grid first, to develop our teaching materials. Then, we adapt them according to all competencies stated in the curriculum" (GM-1). Like their rural counterparts, the urban participants also cited the NE as the main reason: "We also have to prepare our students for the NE. We usually omit some materials that are not so relevant to the NE" (GMW-1). The importance of the NE as the reason for the adaptation is further emphasized by an urban participant, "Anyhow we have to follow that (the directions and orders from our superiors)" (GM-2).

The second piece of evidence for prioritizing the NE preparation was that they sacrificed one entire semester of teaching to tutor the students. They had to significantly adapt the syllabi and teaching-learning materials for the final-year students and focused more on the exam preparation materials, as confirmed by a rural participant: "Yes, we also have to prepare our third-year students for the national examination (NE). Usually, we compress the third-year learning materials into the first semester while we focus on the exam preparation in the second semester" (GS-1).

Thus, there was no proper teaching of the curricula in developing the five sub-competences, let alone implementing the GBA, for the final year, or at least in the second semester, as the priority was preparing the students for the NE. Instead, it mainly focused on training receptive skills in the areas covered in the NE grids and strategies to attack examination questions. Hence, their mind was fully obsessed with this priority. A key informant summed up the practice, "After all, their teaching goals are to prepare their students to pass the NE" (KI-2).

In summary, the adaptations made by both rural and urban participants in implementing the curriculum involved using various strategies: first, due to the limited time available, they reduced the standard objectives expected by the curricula to achieve, and the coverage of the learning materials, and second, they sometime simplified and mixed materials from different sources to suit their students' lower proficiency. Third, they made adaptations according to their limited understanding of the curriculum and their integrity in following the instructions given by the authorities. The fourth reason for the adaptations was preparing their students to do the NE required by the Government, which significantly reduced the time for achieving the curricula objectives. Their Head of School and the local educational authorities demanded a high level of pass rate in the NE, and they would be reprimanded if the pass rate was low. All the adaptation is justified by the 2006 Curriculum, but not by the 2004 curriculum. However, they still had to adapt to the 2004 curriculum, including the CC and the GBA, for the reasons mentioned earlier.

## **DISCUSSION**

All the findings suggested that the adaptations negatively affected the curriculum implementation; that is, the achievement of the objectives was significantly less than those intended by the curriculum developers and, by implication, the quality of the outcomes, which means the low fidelity of implementation. On the other hand, however, they were also expected to implement the curricula faithfully. Therefore, in their teaching report, they had to say a different thing that they had implemented the curricula as expected.

The findings contradict the conclusion of other studies, which tend to blame the teachers' incompetence for the failure of the innovations in improving the quality of EFL teaching outcomes in Indonesia (Bismoko, 2003; Lengkanawati, 2005; Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011). These findings do not suggest that they existed simply because the



teachers wanted to self-defend for failing to implement the innovations, but are genuinely evidence-supported as well. The content of the curricula was too much for the limited time available. The issue was worsened by the pressures on the teachers, which were so strong from the authorities to ensure a high pass rate in the NE that the teachers had to consider the examination grids, not the innovations in the curricula, before preparing their teaching plans. This priority dominated their mind. Hence, although the 2006 Curriculum permitted the adaptation, the permission only justified the already common practice, namely the watering down of the innovations, which sacrificed quality, not improved it.

Their report may have appeased their superiors, but it did not solve the central problem: failure to improve the quality of the EFL teaching to produce competent graduates. The main issue originating from the teachers was their failure to fully understand and acquire the skills to teach the sub-communicative competences within the Communicative Approach. Consequently, the inability to implement the GBA properly was due to lack of training and competence since the GBA was included in the Communicative Approach. However, this issue was not experienced by Indonesian teachers alone (see Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998). The practical implication of the findings is that every innovation needs well-thought preparation in advance, including preparing teachers and resources, conducting a pilot study to experiment with the innovations, a full consideration of key public inputs, evaluation, and revisions before widespread implementation. It appears that some of these were observed but not fully considered and followed up. Consequently, the initial critical comments from the public that the curricula were too challenging to implement in the country (See Sukyadi, 2015) came true, as found in this study.

One may argue that it is common for teachers to not implement innovation entirely in its original form as found in other studies of implementation of innovation, for example, the study of EFL teaching innovation by Lee et al. (2015) and the study on school curriculum change in Norway by Mellegård and Pettersen (2016). However, the difference is that the degree of adaptation (reduction) might have been much higher than in those studies because of the intense dilemmatic pressures the Indonesian teachers had to endure. They had to include incorrect information in their report to protect themselves. The two key factors contributing to the low fidelity have now been removed by the Indonesian Government, replacing the two curricula with the 2013 Curriculum and canceling the NE

(Kinapti, 2019). However, the hasty introduction of this curriculum was feared to repeat similar issues (see Widodo, 2016). Indeed, they did, that this curriculum had to be amended in 2016, and it has been reported that this curriculum will be amended again and implemented in 2021. This move has attracted criticism from the Indonesian Federation of Teachers Organisations for a similar reason, hasty introduction (CNN Indonesia, 2020a). It seems that the history of curriculum innovation could repeat itself. However, there will be a trial period in some innovative schools (CNN Indonesia, 2020b), and the Education Minister seems to have listened to the public voice. Nevertheless, only time will tell outcomes. This issue should be a focus of future research.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to discover the degree of fidelity in implementing the curriculum innovations as represented by the 2004 and 2006 English curricula for high schools in Indonesia. With the high degree of adaption by the teachers, it can be concluded that the fidelity of implementation in classroom practice was low. It has also balanced the claim in other studies, which blame the teachers for the failure of the innovative curricula to improve EFL teaching in Indonesia. The findings show it is not justified to entirely blame the teachers' incompetence for the failure of the innovations. The issue is more complicated because the load imposed on them was too much to work in their conditions, including the limited time they had, the complex concepts to implement, and the requirement to prepare students for the national examination (NE). The teachers were like 'sailing between two harmful rocks'; they would be reprimanded if they did not implement the curricula properly, but they could also be treated likewise if they did not prepare the students well and have a high pass rate in the NE. These unbearable dilemmatic circumstances forced the teachers to adopt two contradictory positions: Watering down the innovations in classroom practice but reporting otherwise for fear of being accused of ignoring the innovation. Hence, this situation sacrifices the very purpose of the curricula, namely, a better quality of teaching of the subject.

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<sup>i</sup> This is an important expression made originally in Indonesian by the first Indonesian Vice President, Mohammad Hatta. The translation is by Weiss, S.A. (2010). Rowing between two reefs. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/31/opinion/31iht-edweiss.html>. This expression is used here to illustrate the dilemmatic situation faced by Indonesian EFL teachers when implementing two national curricula in Indonesia as pointed out in this (current) paper