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THE PERCEPTIONS OF INDONESIAN SECONDARY EFL TEACHERS CONCERNING THEIR ROLES IN SYLLABUS DESIGN

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Abstract
In dealing with syllabus design, teachers must recognize their roles in syllabus design since they are taking part in it. Consequently, this current study attempts to explore Indonesian secondary EFL teachers concerning their roles in syllabus design. It covers three points: their general perceptions, their boundaries, and their qualification as the EFL teacher in syllabus design. The main theory used in this study is by Nunan (2000) related to the roles in syllabus design. This study applied a qualitative approach using open-ended questionnaires and virtual interviews as the instrument of the study. A total of five respondents have participated in this current study. The results found that the teachers believe that they have a role as the implementer and designer of syllabus design. Related to their boundaries in teaching English, all teachers create and develop the syllabus based on the student's needs. Besides, it discovers that teachers are likely to have the freedom to design their activities and materials based on the student's needs even though they should follow the basic element of the syllabus provided by the authorities. Finally, the teachers still need guidance and training in syllabus design since they have a fewer understanding of syllabus design.

Keywords: boundaries, qualification, syllabus design, teacher's role

Introduction
Syllabus design is a necessary process for a language education program. Developing a language education program requires a well-organized and well-structured syllabus as the vehicle to run the program (Richards, 2001). However, the ideal syllabus should meet the criteria for the target users, principally teachers. If the teacher does not know the syllabus's design and planning rationale, then the syllabus is unusable. As a result, the questions emphasizing the role and position of the teacher in course planning and syllabus design should be considered. A study by Tabari (2013) reveals that the teacher's role in syllabus planning can vary since it depends on the context of the teaching course. Thus, it isn't very clear because teachers' role in syllabus planning is still not obvious.

Currently, teachers have a more important role in teaching and in taking part in designing and developing curricula. They become a fundamental portion of the decision-making process of planning and implementing the curriculum in the

classroom. They can complement and enhance the curriculum by preparing and engaging with students, dealing with professional development, and sharing their experiences in teaching and learning in the classroom with other teachers (Doll, 1996). They can also be a strong positive force for change if given the resources and support that will enable them to implement the syllabus effectively (1996). As Klein (1999) argues, teachers possess the actual power to create or break the decisions promoted at any level. Their choices will ultimately determine the curriculum, irrespective of all decision-making.

Several studies have revealed the teachers' notions in designing and planning syllabi. Baldauf (2005) asserts that the role of the teacher is restricted to the implementation of the syllabus. It corresponds to Kaplan & Baldauf (2003) that government agencies and applied linguists ought to plan and develop the syllabus. Their claims have been evaluated since the idea seems to denote only the national scale syllabus or the macro. Thus, as Nunan (1989) stated, nowadays, teachers have freedom in designing their syllabus due to teaching and learning depending on the conditions and contexts of the students. Moreover, Richards (2001) and Johnson (2009) state that the concept of syllabus planning can be different between macro and micro so that the teacher's role can be broader in it.

A study by Aprianti (2017) revealed that EFL teachers' opinions and understandings related to their roles, especially in micro-course planning and syllabus design. Also, it explored the aspects that were recognized in the situation of teaching. Similarly, Pongsapan (2016) found that EFL teachers are not involved in curriculum design and that their assignation is only in their classroom. Li conducts another study (2010) that showed a cavity between the syllabus content determined by curriculum policy with the practice of teaching. It indicates that there are misunderstandings between the governments' recognizing the role of teachers in planning the syllabus, which is as an implementer. In contrast, teachers recognize the teacher's role as the planner. Consequently, the study discovers that teachers change the content of the syllabus to meet the criteria for their students. Thus, he recommends that teachers should have participated in syllabus planning so that the syllabus is appropriate.

The studies mentioned above have demonstrated a significant number of teachers recognize roles and positions in syllabus planning. However, it seems that these studies still have left one major gap. That gap is inadequate information on how secondary EFL teachers perceive their role in syllabus design since teachers play important roles in implementing the policy. Yet, they do not have enough knowledge to design a syllabus that meets the criteria for their students. As a result, the questions are formulated as follows: (1) What is secondary EFL teachers' perception towards the involvement and their roles in syllabus design? (2) What are the boundaries of teaching English? (3) What are the qualifications of Secondary EFL teachers in developing syllabus design?

Literature Review

In curricular decision-making, teacher participation has concentrated severely on three dimensions; teacher involvement, whether real or perceived, the education system's tendency towards teacher participation, and competencies related to curriculum leaders. It has been proved by several works focusing on this subject that teachers are not involved in making the curricular change (Bowers, 1991 as

cited in Pongsapan, 2016). It concentrates on the teachers' involvement in determining the curriculum in the classroom. Kennedy (1996) discovered that the general perception of the curriculum is established by the policymakers so that they only require to simply apply based on the guidance provided by curriculum developers or so-called handed down from them from above. Teachers consider that policymakers are the principle in syllabus determination while teachers rely on their engagement in their classroom practice. Handler (2010) stated that teachers require to be active in curriculum development. They can participate in working collaboratively with curriculum development teams. The involvement of teachers in curriculum development is crucial to meet the content of the curriculum with the needs of students in the classroom.

Curriculum development is the basic idea in curriculum planning, design, dissemination, implementation, and assessment (Carl, 2002). The role of the teacher becomes very crucial in developing the syllabus and creating lesson plans. The involvement of teachers in practice is, in reality, a significant aspect of curriculum development. As a result, teachers must be able to actively engage in the curriculum-building process (Oliva, 2008; Young, 1988). Course planning denotes structural approaches or ways of managing the syllabus. Meanwhile, the syllabus refers to the specification and organization of the course content (Nunan et al., 2000; Richards, 2001). Both syllabus design and course planning become part of the curriculum design entirely (Graves, 2000). For instance, as Richards (2001) suggested, six factors should be considered when developing the syllabus design. The process comprises: enhancing the course rationale, relating the entry and exit level of the target students, defining the course content's scope and sequence, and planning the course's structure. Planning the course requires sequencing and grading the course content based on the chosen syllabus design. Besides, the source structure becomes very problematic in planning the syllabus since there is a possibility that different teachers might have a different selection of syllabus design. Thus, teachers may determine the type of content to exclude or include and it takes from the various kinds of syllabi or focuses on a single type of syllabus (Nunan et al., 2000). Most importantly, within this process, the teachers should be actively involved, merely not in the classroom practice. As proposed by Carl (2002), two main possibilities for the involvement of teachers in curriculum development:

a. Teachers as the recipient
   The first role of the teacher in curriculum development is to consider the recipient of the curriculum developed by specialists. The teachers have no power to correct the syllabus design since the specialists have created it. It is a so-called top-down approach.
b. Teachers as the partners
   The second role is teachers as a partner in syllabus design developed by the specialist. They have the power to voice their idea toward curriculum development. Before implementing the curriculum, the teachers can take part in suggesting the process of curriculum development.

Meanwhile, in the syllabus design process, there are many possibilities for the roles of teachers in developing syllabus design. It starts from the teacher as the implementer until the teacher as the syllabus designer. The detailed explanation can be seen as follows:

a. Teachers as the implementer
   The first idea related to the role of teachers as implementers is suggested by Baldauf (2005). The teacher merely implements the syllabus, and the syllabus has been designed and developed by government agencies and applied linguists. Kaplan (2005) further asserts that planning the syllabus, ought to be done by experts so that it will apply to their students.
b. Teachers as the designer
   Nunan (2000, as cited in Aprianti, 2017) and Graves (2000) argue that teachers could implement the syllabus nowadays, which depends on the situation and context of the school and their students. Teachers have freedom in designing the syllabus. In this case, they are allowed to create their syllabus as long as they are well-prepared and have experience developing the syllabus. Otherwise, designing the syllabus requires the necessary skills and enough knowledge (Nunan et al., 2000).
c. Teachers as the negotiator
   Johnson (2009) is likely to select syllabus planning, an open and negotiable process. Graves (2000) states that teachers should negotiate the syllabus based on the student's needs and the context of their school. Further, it says that needs analysis is very crucial to recognize what the students need and want. Finally, teachers as a practitioner in the classroom ought to understand the students' condition well, and they must appropriately determine their syllabus.

As the education system in Indonesia is controlled and consolidated by the Ministry of Education, it is noticeable that English language teachers have a smaller involvement, and there are particular borders to be involved in syllabus design (Pongsapan, 2016). The government has provided an identical syllabus containing deadlines and guidelines that the teachers should follow (Pongsapan, 2016). It hinders the growth of teacher-made materials and does not give chances to be actively involved in curriculum development. Thus, it leads to teachers' perception that the task is beyond their abilities and their roles. Pongsapan (2016) stated that the Ministry of Education develops the guidelines, manages the standards, and plans instructional units. It is done by allocating the experts who work in the field. Ministry of Education also has shared EFL textbooks across the country to ensure that all students gain similar instruction.

In improving the curriculum, the government requires teachers' input, advisors' reports, and the participation of language researchers. Even though teachers are asked to give the information for the enhancements to the English curriculum, many of them do not have the opportunities due to the deficiency of professional requirements, such as knowledge of the English language curriculum, expansion, preparation, design, and assessment. Cohen & Hills (2001) states that teachers closely engage with the students to know their weaknesses and strengths. Besides, they also know the needs of their study and their emotional matters. Therefore, teachers as a practitioner should be actively involved in curriculum development. This current study employs the theory of Carl (2002) related to the position of teachers in the process of syllabus design. It explores in-depth the perceptions regarding the roles of teachers in determining syllabus design.

Method

This current study employs the responses from 5 (five) secondary EFL teachers in East Java. They all currently teach English in Junior High School and Senior High School. The five participants were females, while one of them was male. All the teachers have teaching experience of more than ten years. They were characterized as teacher 1, teacher 2, teacher 3, teacher 4, and teacher 5. All teachers were pseudonyms and selected for particular reasons. Data was obtained using open-ended questionnaires. It was made in Google form; the questionnaire had 4 (four) parts. The first part aimed to know the teachers' profiles related to name, institution, and teaching experience. Then, the second part aimed to capture teachers' perceptions of their roles in syllabus design. This part involved 3 (three) questions that lead to their perceptions. Next, the third section refers to the questions of their boundaries as EFL teachers. It consists of 3 (three) questions. The last part denotes the qualifications of the teachers, which contains 3 (three) questions. Finally, six secondary school teachers contributed to this study. As a follow-up, it also conducted a virtual interview to explore in-depth related teachers' responses seen from the open-ended questionnaire. Every participant was contacted through WhatsApp. This consideration is to prevent the spread of Covid-19—the data was gained in June 2021.

The data was gained from open-ended questionnaires so that it contains content analysis. Thus, this current study uses the qualitative approach in which the research was done based on descriptive data. Creswell & Creswell (2018) stated qualitative inquiry could be defined as inductive and exploratory. It explores and understands the meaning of individuals or groups in which the researcher interprets the purpose of the data as the final written report for the research. It also presents the extracts from the teachers' quotes without editing the sentences. As the data is in *Bahasa Indonesia*, thus it needs to provide the translation of the English language. All the information is not entirely presented, but it is selected with the theory used in the study.

Findings and Discussion

General Opinions of Secondary EFL Teachers

It has been collected from 5 (five) secondary EFL teachers related to their roles in syllabus design. Teachers feel that, to some extent, they carry out the part of implementing the syllabus. The teacher believes that the teacher cannot merely take decisions in syllabus design. Even though some teachers are allowed to give their input in developing the syllabus design, they still follow the basic elements of syllabus design. The idea is represented in the following comments:

> **T1 (25 years of teaching experience):** *Selama ini sudah berkontribusi tapi dipakai tidaknya kan otoritas atasan* (So far, I have contributed, still the decision is taken by the authority)
> **T2 (23 years of teaching experience)***: Tidak pernah terlibat* (I have never been involved)
> **T3 (16 years of teaching experience):** *Merasa msh kurang karena Silabus biasanya sudah ditentukan oleh MGMP Bahasa Inggris* (I feel that I am still lack of contribution in syllabus design since it has been determined by English MGMP)

From the extracts above, it could be seen that the decision-making of syllabus design depends on the authorities. Some of them have an opportunity to join the seminar related to syllabus design to give insight for them to fix the syllabus design. Meanwhile, a few of them have no experience in providing input to syllabus design. They have never been involved in participating in syllabus design. As T3 stated, they still lack contribution in syllabus design since English MGMP has determined it. Thus, a teacher who is not a member of MGMP does not have a chance in participating in syllabus design. These findings unambiguously confirm what has been indicated by Kennedy (1996) and Al-Seghayer (2011) regarding teachers' perceptions of syllabus design as a task that is developed elsewhere. This study is beyond their responsibility and capability. Having 23 years of teaching experience, the teacher has never been involved in syllabus design. In this case, the teacher is the implementer (Aprianti, 2017). This tendency is also responded to by Nunan (2000), who states that teacher involvement in designing subject syllabi can ultimately be extended and even limited by several interrelated factors. These factors include; the level of teacher expertise and the status quo of the syllabus. Respondents emphasized that the status quo syllabus is a negotiable instrument in their context.

Language course planning and syllabus design involve decisions that must be made from the highest level to the lower level, which means from the institution to the classroom teacher. This finding seems to be in harmony with Graves (2000) as he states that the complexity of course planning depends mainly on the fact that every stakeholder takes part in the decision making and it must be accompanied by the necessary skills until the final results of the syllabus to be successful. As stated by T1, it indicates that syllabus design is not entirely based on the teachers but still requires giving input in syllabus design. These reports clarify the statement of Nunan (2000), which states that no language syllabus can stand alone completely. In this context, some participants were stimulated to participate in modifying, applying, and estimate the syllabus (Carl, 1995). Respondents played their part in providing data from their actual teaching situation and, as a result, used it as input for syllabus revision. Teachers receive the role between the receiver and the partner of syllabus design (Aprianti, 2017; Carl, 2002). Finally, as the implementers of the curriculum in the classroom, teachers should be actively involved in the curriculum development process so that they can understand the psychology of their students and employ the most effective approaches and teaching practices (Jadhav & Patankar, 2013). The teachers are the persons who are most familiar with the student's wants and interests because they are the ones who are closest to them (Messick & Reynolds, 1992).

Boundaries of Teaching English

Since the Ministry of Education heavily controls creating an instructional syllabus, this data section attempts to identify the level of freedom and their boundaries, which teachers can enjoy in their classrooms. The extracts gained from the virtual interview in Whatsapp could be seen as follows:

> **T3 (32 years of teaching experience):** *Bukan membatasi kreativitas, namun keberadaan silabus dari sana terkadang perlu disesuaikan dengan kondisi riil sekolah yang kita ajar. Jadi ada penyesuaian dalam beberapa*

> *hal. Sebagai ilustrasi: Mengajarkan suatu materi di sekolah A (input siswa baik) akan berbeda dengan sekolah B (input siswa sedang/buruk). Baik di sini berarti kemampuan kecerdasan.* (Not limiting creativity, but the existence of a syllabus sometimes needs to be adjusted to the real conditions of the school we teach. So there are adjustments in some ways. As an illustration: Teaching a material at School A (good student input) will be different from School B (medium/bad student input). Good here means the ability of intelligence)
> **T4 (16 years of teaching experience):** *Ya karena kadang-kadang tidak sesuai dengan situasi di sekolah* (Yes, because it is rare that the syllabus does not fit the condition of the school)

From the response above, it could be seen that teacher needs to adjust what the students need in learning English. When they were asked whether the syllabus limits the creativity of the teachers to design the activity in the classroom or not, T4 responded that it limits creativity because sometimes the condition of each school is different. Another perspective could be seen from the response of T3, who stated that it does not limit the creativity of the teacher since the teacher can develop a syllabus based on the student's condition and needs. It is very crucial to know the student's situation and needs so that the teacher could achieve the goal of learning. Thus, the teacher must match what the students need in learning in the classroom. It indicates that the teacher tries to create materials and activities that encourage their students to learn English. Even though the teacher creates his or her materials and activity, he still follows the rules and does not change the basic standards of the syllabus. It could be seen from the response below:

> **T3 (16 years of teaching experience):** *Ya setidaknya teknik dan bobot materinya dipermudah namun tidak merubah standard pokok silabusnya.* (Yes, at least the technique and difficulty of the material are simplified but it doesn't change the basic standard of the syllabus).

From the reports above, it could be seen that teachers could create their materials and activity, but it must not change the basic standard of the syllabus. As the role determined by the Ministry of Education, the teachers have no power to break the rules. This finding corresponds to the study by Al-Sadan (2000) teachers have rarer autonomy and have precise boundaries when teaching English in the classroom. Overall, teachers agree that the syllabus does not allow them to create and design creative activity that suits the students' condition. Besides, teachers employ the criteria of assessment provided by the Ministry of Education. Among others, make the assessment based on the student's ability. The extracts are shown as follows:

> **T5 (14 years of teaching experience):** *Menyesuaikan dengan tujuan yang ingin dicapai* (Adjusting to the learning objectives)

The response above shows that teachers could also be the syllabus designer since they make an assessment by themselves and it does not follow the criteria provided by the authorities. Yet, most of the teachers still follow the requirements

of the evaluation provided by the policy-makers. The comments could be seen as follows:

> **T1 (25 years of teaching experience):** *Mengikuti karena aturan* (following the rules)
> **T2 (23 years of teaching experience):** *Mengikuti kriteria dari kementerian pendidikan* (following the criteria of the Ministry of Education)
> **T3 (32 years of teaching experience):** *Mengikuti kriteria kementrian prndidikan* (It follows the criteria of the Ministry of Education)

The extracts above indicate that there are still boundaries in teaching English. Some teachers do not creatively make assessment that matches learning objectives. They are isolated from the criteria provided by the Ministry of Education. The teachers have an opportunity to develop their syllabus, which suits the condition of their school and their students.

Qualification of Secondary EFL Teachers

Since teachers have no power in making the decision, most teachers still have no idea of syllabus design. Although they successfully mentioned the basic elements of syllabus design but were asked about the types of syllabi that would be applied to students, they still got a dilemma. The results of open-ended questionnaires could be seen as follows:

> **T1 (25 years of teaching experience):** *Mengembangkan ketrampilan berbahasa karena lebih dibutuhkan dalam dunia kerja* (develop language skills because it is more needed in the field of work)
> **T2 (23 years of teaching experience)***: Menyesuaikan kebutuhan siswa, karena akan menghasilkan pembelajaran yang bermakna* (Adjusting what students need since it will give meaningful outcome of learning)
> **T3 (32 years of teaching experience):** *Silabus yg disesuaikan dg kondisi riil sekolah, karena beda sekolah beda kondisi* (The syllabus which is suited to the condition of the school since different school has different condition)

The statements above indicate that the teachers do not successfully mention the type of syllabus. Almost all teachers respond that the syllabus is matched the condition and needs of the students. The comments show that there is some kind of complete lack of theoretical basis for curricular design. They also explain more about what is often assumed that teachers only want to cope with the practicality of their work without needing to be exposed to the broader theoretical aspects of the curriculum (Carl, 2002). Only one teacher mentioned the type of syllabus. The data is provided below:

> **T5 (14 years of teaching experience):** *Silabus pengembangan, karena disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan* (A developing content-based syllables since it suits the needs of the students)

Even though some teachers do not mention the type of syllabus, they utter that it is important to develop a syllabus that is appropriate to the condition and the

context of their students. Thus, it is expected to achieve the learning objectives in the process of teaching and learning English (Richards, 2001).

Conclusion

From the exploration in the results and discussion section, it could be drawn that teachers play a significant role in developing the syllabus. Besides, the role of teachers in syllabus design is as the implementer and designer. Related to their boundaries in teaching English, almost all teachers create the syllabus based on the student's needs. Otherwise, the teachers whose role as the implementer follows the syllabus that English MGMP *(Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran)* has provided. In this case, the teacher is still not actively involved in curriculum development, especially in syllabus design. Besides, for the freedom in determining the assessment, the teachers still follow the criteria provided by the Ministry of Education. It shows that teachers still have no creativity in syllabus design. Regarding the assessment used by teachers, they follow the criteria provided by the authorities. In other words, the teachers still do not merely knowledge to design the syllabus. As a result, teachers can't mention the type of syllabus used in the classroom. They implicitly state that the syllabus that is appropriate for their students. Therefore, the government should give more information and training in the process of curriculum design. They are significant to know the theories and the role of teachers effectively.

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