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EFL Curriculum Implementation: An Exploratory Study into Teachers and Students' Perceptions

Chantarath Hongboontri[1] and William Egerton Darling[2]

[1]*Mahidol University, 999 Phuttamonthon Road, Salaya Sai 4, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand*
[2]*Mahidol University/ Chellaston School, 58 Potter Street, Melbourne, Derbyshire, DE73 8 DW, UK*

ARTICLE INFO

*Corresponding Author
Chantarath Hongboontri
E-mail: chantarath.hon@mahidol.edu

Co-Author
Author 2: willdarling160986@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study attempts to document how university English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers implemented their curriculum and how students perceived such implementation. To do so, the researchers went into one Thailand university, interviewed four EFL teachers and thirteen students undertaking the English foundation course, observed EFL classrooms, and collected written documents and artifacts (e.g., curricula and teaching materials). Gathered data were then coded, categorized, and compared and contrasted. The analyses revealed the differences in the teacher participants' implementation of their curriculum and the student participants' mixed perceptions toward their teachers' implementation of the curriculum. To some extent, one lone teacher made some adaptation to the imposed curriculum on account of his students' needs and interests. In contrast, the other three teachers restrictively followed the prescribed official curriculum and closely adhered to the scope and sequence of their assigned textbook. The student participants were satisfied with the teacher whose decision concerning curriculum implementation was largely grounded upon interaction/contact between the teacher and his students. However, the students complained against the teachers whose instruction was doctrinally adhered to the imposed curriculum.

Introduction

In the late 1970s, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) made an urgent call for studies on teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation. This was because there was a need to bridge an existing gap between the transitional process of policies from the invented curricula and teachers' implementation of such curricula in actual classrooms. Indeed, little was known about how the invented curricula were implemented in the reality of the classrooms, how teachers decided to approach the invented curricula, what teachers decided to do or not to do with the invented curricula, and what classroom factors affected teachers' decision regarding curriculum implementation.

Fullan and Pomfret's quotation, though lengthy, is worth mentioning.

> There is a singular lack of curiosity about what happened to an innovation between the time it was designed, and various people agreed to carry it out, and the time that the consequences became evident. Once an innovation was planned and adopted, interest tended to shift toward the monitoring of outcomes. The assumption appears to have been that the move from the drawing board to the school or classroom was unproblematic, that the innovation would be implemented or used more or less as planned, and that the actual use would eventually correspond to planned use, and the actual use would eventually correspond to planned or intended use. The whole

area of implementation, what the innovation actually consists of in practice and why it develops as it does, was viewed as a "black box" where innovations entering one side somehow produce the consequences emanating from the other. (p. 337)

Therefore, knowledge and understanding of teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation in actual classrooms is essential as it could explain not only the differences (if any) between the intended curriculum and its actual implementation but also the failures of many establishments of educational changes (Chapman, Wright, & Pascoe, 2018; Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Janik, Janko, Pešková, Knect, & Spurnà, 2018; Kirkgöz, 2008; Park & Sung, 2013; Zhu & Shu, 2017).

Given this, curriculum implementation has, over the years, become an area of particular focus for researchers interested in unveiling the reciprocal relationships between teachers' curriculum implementation and other education-related activities. For example, several researchers and educators in the realm of general education have concluded, with evidence, that teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation determine students' learning and achievements (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Erickson & Shults, 1992; King, 2002, Wells, 1999; Wilson, Reichsman, Mutch-Jones, Gardner, Marchi, Kowalski, Lord, & Dorsey, 2018). Findings from studies of, for example, Bakah (2019), Banegas (2019), Craig (2006), Eisner (2002), and Parker (1997) have convincingly verified the relationships between teachers' implementation of their curriculum and their professional development. The observed effects of teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation noted in previous studies have urged the researchers of the current study to explore and document how university EFL teachers in one Thai university implement their prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook in actual classrooms, and how students think about these teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation.

Two research questions helped frame the study. (1) What are these university EFL teachers' approaches to implementing their officially prescribed curriculum and their assigned textbooks in their actual classrooms? (2) What effects do teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation and the assigned textbook have on students' learning?

Theoretical framework

The current study has drawn on multiple integrated perspectives of teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation.

In their review paper on curriculum and instruction implementation, Fullan and Pomfret (1997) examined 15 different studies with an aim of defining and measuring curriculum implementation. They identify two orientations explaining the degrees to which teachers implement their officially prescribed curriculum. One is the fidelity perspective and the other one is the mutual adaptation/process perspective. Further, Fullan and Pomfret are able to identify 14 determinants influencing teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation. These determinants are grouped into four categories: (1) characteristics of the innovation (explicitness, complexity), (2) strategies (in-service training, resource support, feedback mechanisms, and participation), (3) characteristics of the adopting unit (adoption process, organizational climate, environmental support, and demographic factors), and (4) characteristics of macro sociopolitical units (design questions, incentive system, evaluation, and political complexity) (pp. 367-368).

Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt (1992) extend the work of Fullan and Pomfret (1977) further and suggest three different ways of clarifying teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation. They are: (1) fidelity, (2) mutual-adaptation, and (3) enactment. Under each approach, teachers' roles are different. In the fidelity approach, teachers play the role of "a consumer who just delivers the curriculum message as intact as possible according to specific curriculum implementation instructions" (Shawer, 2017, p. 297). In other words, teachers dogmatically follow a curriculum developed by policy makers or authorities. In contrast, the mutual adaptation requires teachers to adjust and adapt curriculum instructions drawn by either policy-makers or authorities to suit their contexts. This, hence, suggests a change in both teachers' roles and curriculum. Here, teachers become more active as teachers and do not necessarily follow the officially prescribed curriculum linearly. Teachers possibly adjust the curriculum and make it more relevant to their students (Ben-Peretz, 1990; Shawer, 2017, Snyder et al., 1992). Compared to the mutual adaptation, the enactment provides teachers with autonomous independence in dealing with the prescribed curriculum. Under this notion, teachers have the utmost freedom; they may choose not to rely on their prescribed curriculum instructions. In fact, teachers constantly interact with students to construct and re-construct a curriculum until it meets students' needs and interests (Erickson & Shultz, 1992; Munby, 1990; Shawer, 2017; Snyder et al., 1992). Further, Snyder et al. explain, "While teachers may use externally designed curriculum and benefit from the simulation of an 'outside', it is they and their students who create the enacted curriculum and give meaning to it … [T]eachers

are creators rather than primarily receivers of curriculum knowledge" (p. 429).

In addition, Snyder et al. (1992) review previous works on curriculum implementation and listed 15 factors affecting teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation. These factors are categorized into four main categories: (1) characteristics of the change (need and relevance of the change, clarity, complexity, and quality and practicality of program), (2) characteristics at the school district level (the district's history of innovative attempts, the adoption process, district administrative support, staff development and participation, time-line and information system, and board and community), (3) school-level factors (the role of the principal, teacher-teacher relationships, and teacher characteristics and orientations), and (4) the external environment (government agencies and external assistance). (See Snyder et al., 1992, pp. 415-417 for more details.)

Mode of inquiry

Data Collection Tools

The current study was grounded upon the theoretical notions of a qualitative research paradigm. More importantly, the researchers developed and designed three different data collection tools in order to counteract the inefficacy of a single data collection source (Ballantine, Hammack, & Stuber, 2017; Eisner, 2017; Merriam & Greiner, 2019; Metz, 2000; Sarma, 2015). These tools were (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) classroom observations, and (3) a collection of written documents and artifacts.

Semi-structured interviews
A semi-structured interview was selected as one of the data collection tools for the current study. This is because this type of interview, as widely understood, would offer the potential participants (EFL teachers and students) with enough flexibility in articulating their perceptions of the issues under investigation (Adams, 2015; Berg, 1985; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Gray, 2009; Jamshed, 2014; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016; Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, & Son, 2004; Rabionet, 2011; Sampson & Johannessen, 2019).

To conduct a semi-structured interview, the researchers first created an interview guiding framework by adapting and combining the notions of an ethnographic interview (Spradley, 1979) and a semi-structured interview (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Brown & Danaher, 2019;

Madill, 2011; Robinson, 2014; Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). Before an actual interview, the researchers drafted two sets of open-ended questions and piloted these questions on two EFL teachers and four students whose characteristics were close to the potential research participants. The researchers then scrutinized the interview responses and comments from the piloted interviews and modified the interview questions (Sampson, 2004). In total, two set of 13 interview questions were developed and used to interview EFL teachers and students participating in the study (N = 17, 4 EFL teachers, 13 students). (These two sets of interview questions were almost identical. Except some questions in the one used to interview student participants focused more on students' perceptions of their teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation and classroom instruction. [See Appendix A and B for interview questions.]) All interviews, with permission from the research participants, were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for further analyses.

Classroom observations
To better depict the teacher participants' approaches to curriculum implementation, the researchers conducted a series of classroom observations. At their best, the classroom observations provided robust information about habits of mind and first-hand data concerning not only teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation in their actual classrooms but also students' reactions to such approaches (Bell, Dobbelear, Klette, & Visscher, 2019; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Nava, Park, Dockterman, Kawasaki, Schweig, Quartz, & Martinez, 2019; Park, Brownell, Bettini, & Benedict, 2019; Schoenfield, Floden, Chidiac, Gillingham, Fink, Hu, Sayavedra, Weltman, & Zarkh, 2018).

To conduct classroom observations, the researchers followed Merriam's (1988) guidance of observer as participant. In addition, they also borrowed and adapted Hongboontri and Jantayasakorn's (2016) and Hongboontri and Keawkhong's (2014) Foreign Language Classroom Observation Protocol (FLCOP) to record their observational data of a total of 12 EFL classes. These data were later transcribed and analyzed.

Written documents and artifacts
Throughout the process of data collection, the researchers also collected written documents and artifacts in relation to the EFL instruction at *Pilgrim University* (a pseudonym used to replace the actual name of the participating university). The written documents and artifacts collected included, for example, curriculum documents and course syllabi, teaching materials (assigned

textbooks), and teaching artifacts, among many others. Later, these documents and artifacts were extracted and included in the report of the findings where necessary.

Participants

After gaining permission to conduct research from *Pilgrim University*, the researchers contacted four EFL teachers who had been teaching an English Foundation course at *Pilgrim University* for at least one academic semester and the students in their classrooms. Each teacher and student received a letter explaining the study and describing all the means taken into practice to assure potential research participants' well-being as well as their confidentiality and privacy. Attached to the letter was a consent form. Teachers and students who volunteered to participate in the study signed the form and returned it to the researchers.

In total, 4 EFL teachers and 13 students consented to voluntary participation. The four teachers were *Helen*, *Natalie*, *Rodger*, and *Simon*. (All names are pseudonyms.) *Helen* was Thai and held a PhD in Applied Linguistics. She had been teaching at *Pilgrim University* for more than one decade. *Natalie* was also Thai; she held a master's degree in English literature. She taught both English Foundation and English literature courses and had been teaching at this *University* for almost a decade. *Rodger* was American. He held a master's degree in Applied Linguistics. He had been teaching at *Pilgrim University* for seven years. *Simon* was English and had just joined the *University* for four months before the study was conducted. (See Table 1 for further details.)

The 13 participating students were *Alice*, *Bonnie*, *Charlotte*, *Darlene*, *Ellie*, *Faye*, *Georgia*, *Harry*, *Irene*, *Jane*, *Katie*, *Laura*, and *Mary*. (All names are pseudonyms.) Their ages ranged between 18 to 22 years. These students came from different faculties and had varying amounts of English language learning experience. (See Table 2 for further details.)

Table 1: Teacher Participants

Name*	Nationality	Educational Background	Teaching Experience
Helen	Thai	PhD in Applied Linguistics	12 years
Natalie	Thai	MA in English Literature	9 years
Rodger	American	MA in Applied Linguistics	7 years
Simon	English	BA in Japanese and Music	4 months

(*All names are pseudonyms.)

Table 2: Student Participants

Name*	Age	Major	Years of Studying English	Teacher
Alice	20	Liberal Arts	12	*Helen*
Katie	19	Medicine	12	*Helen*
Harry	19	Dentistry	12	*Rodger*
Laura	19	Engineering	10	*Rodger*
Mary	19	Medicine	16	*Rodger*
Charlotte	18	Science	10	*Natalie*
Darlene	20	Medicine	16	*Natalie*
Irene	20	Medicine	13	*Natalie*
Jane	19	Medicine	12	*Natalie*
Bonnie	22	Medicine	16	*Simon*
Ellie	22	Medicine	19	*Simon*
Faye	19	Medicine	13	*Simon*
Georgia	19	Medicine	12	*Simon*

(*All names are pseudonyms.)

Data Analysis

The researchers used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) notions and perspectives of open and axial coding techniques to analyze their transcribed data. In the open coding, the researchers read the transcribed data line-by-line and named concepts and assigned categories for the read data. Then, the categorized data were read and re-read to group concepts and to develop properties for each re-assigned category. Later, the developed categories were compared and contrasted in terms of consistency, inconsistency, and contradictory to better depict how the participating EFL teachers approached their prescribed curriculum in their actual classrooms and what perceptions their students had toward such the approaches. (Kane et al., 2002; Kern, 2018; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Mathison, 1988).

Results

The English Language Curriculum

The curriculum chosen for this current study was developed for the *Foundation English Language Course for University Students*. It was a required course offered by *Pilgrim University* for its first-year undergraduate students. Its main aim was to help students develop their communicative ability for both general communicative and academic purposes.

The curriculum for *Foundation English Language Course for University Students* was drawn-up by its course coordinator (*Natalie*, who was also one of the four teachers participating in this study). The curriculum detailed

course description, course objectives, weekly taught topics, materials (course textbook and other supplementary materials), pedagogical instructions, and methods of assessment and grading criteria.

In developing the curriculum for the course, *Natalie* took the course description ad verbatim from the student handbook (prepared by the *University*). This course description briefly outlined the overall goal of the course as well as some explanation of the taught content. The course objectives aligned with the course description were later developed. The weekly taught content included in the curriculum was taken directly from the table of contents of the commercially-available textbook *Natalie* had selected for the course (*Empower B2 by Cambridge University Press*). This particular section listed the weekly taught topic but contained very few details. (See Table III for more details.)

Teachers' Approaches to Curriculum Implementation and Instruction

In the following sections, the researchers summarize the views of the four participating EFL teachers on their approaches to curriculum implementation and instruction and the rationale behind their practices. Of particular interest, the researchers' findings indicated the different degrees to which these EFL teachers implemented their officially imposed curriculum and what these teachers typically did in their classrooms and why. In brief, *Rodger*'s adherence to the prescribed curriculum was rather minimal. Instead, he tailored his instruction in accordance to his students' needs and in negotiation with his own needs and informed decisions. In contrast, the other three teachers (*Helen*, *Natalie*, and *Simon*) meticulously followed the prescribed curriculum and centralized their classroom instruction on the assigned textbooks.

Rodger

Prevalent in *Rodger*'s responses to the interview questions was his sheer dissatisfaction with the curriculum and syllabus developed by the *University* and *Natalie*. In particular, he strongly complained about the vagueness and lack of authenticity of the course goals. "[*Course goals*] are just so inauthentic. They're just some gobbledygook that's just been scrambled together to make it sound good. 'Students will learn how to use passive, progressive ….. things like that.'" *Rodger* appeared to be rather reluctant when trying to recall the course objectives. Later, he admitted that he deliberately ignored the curriculum as he disagreed with the philosophy behind the curriculum development. In his own words,

It's kind of my own fault that I haven't really subscribed to their [*the University and Natalie*] philosophy of curriculum development. I didn't pay much attention to these things. So I couldn't even tell you what all the objectives are without looking at the curriculum again. (Italics added)

Rodger also expressed dissatisfaction with the assigned textbook and avoided using it in his teaching where possible. The textbook, as *Rodger* criticized, was not organized well; nor did its content relate to his students' needs and interests.

Generally, my teaching isn't really centralized on the assigned textbook as I wasn't impressed with it in regard to its organization, content, and authenticity. The textbook separates tasks into four skills [*listening*, *reading*, *speaking*, and *writing*]. I was shocked because I didn't know there was such a rigid and defined allocation for each of those skills. When you use language, I think they are all just a part of fluency and need to be used together for effective and genuine communication. The students do not enjoy or have much connection [*with the content in the assigned textbook*]. Most of these [*sections of the assigned textbook*] don't really relate to what students are being tested on, so I overlook them. (Italics added).

This same teacher went on to explain how he typically conducted his teaching. In a language classroom, a teacher, as *Rodger* believed, needs to engage students with authentic content in order for lessons to be effective. As a result, *Rodger* brought a lot of activities into his classrooms. With these activities, *Rodger* engaged and fostered relationships with his students, assessed his students' language proficiencies, and discovered his students' needs and interests. He described,

Language learning should be student-centered, and the teacher needs to use tasks to engage students in authentic discourse. I bring a lot of activities into my classrooms. These activities fulfill many purposes. At the beginning, they are designed to build camaraderie and relationships between students. Most activities encourage oral communication and help me to evaluate student ability and needs.

In the classrooms, *Rodger* played various roles. Apart from being a teacher, *Rodger* sometimes took on the roles of a coach and a motivator. Through these two roles, *Rodger* thought he could help his students become more confident with their English language and could encourage as well as challenge the students to make more effort into learning the language. More

Table 3: The Curriculum for English Foundation Course for University Student

English Foundation Course for University Student (Level IV)

Course Description

Integrating four English skills by practicing reading news, research articles, commentary, and academic texts, for comprehension and critical thinking , from various sources focusing on the issues that enhance students' world knowledge; listening to news, lecture, and speech via multimedia and the internet; making conversations on various situations including speaking in public, giving oral presentations and making simulations; and writing essays in various types using citations and references, also practicing sub-skills such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary used in appropriate context.

Course Objectives

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1) understand the news, research articles, commentary, academic texts through listening and reading skills.
2) make conversations in various situations including speaking in public.
3) give oral presentations and making simulations.
4) write essays in various types using citations and references.
5) use sub-skills such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary used in appropriate context.

Course Outline

Week One	Course Introduction: Ice-breaking activity
Week Two	Travel & Tourism (Grammar – Gerund & Infinitives, the Passive, Introducing requests and Showing gratefulness)
Week Three	Life in Cities (Grammar – Too/Enough, So/Such, Causative Have/Get
Week Four	Crime (Grammar – Third Conditional; should have + past participle, verb patterns, Reporting Verbs)
Week Five	Revision
Week Six	Mid-term Exam
Week Seven	New Invention for Health (Grammar – Relative Clauses, Reported Speech, Reported Verbs, Past modals of deduction, Adjectives with prefixes)
Week Eight	Self-study
Week Nine	(No Class)
Week Ten	Life Achievements (Grammar – Verbs of efforts)
Week Eleven	Listening Test
Week Twelve	Revision
Week Thirteen	Writing Exam and Outside Reading Test
Week Fourteen	Final Exam
Teaching Methods	Lectures, Presentation, Discussion, Demonstration, Media
Teaching Media	Teacher-generated materials, Commercial Textbook, LCD/Visualizer,
DVD,	Computers

Measurement and Evaluation of Student Achievement

Student achievement will be graded according to the faculty and university standard using the symbols: A, B+, B, C+, C, D+, D, and F. Methods of assessment include mid-term exam, final exam, outside reading test, writing test, listening text, and attendance and participation.

Course Evaluation

Students will be evaluated as indicated above. Students' satisfaction towards teaching and learning of the course will be completed with a questionnaire survey.

Reference

Doff, A., Thaine, C., Puchta, H., Stranks, J., & Lewis-Jones, P. (2015). *Empower B2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

importantly, *Rodger* believed that his uses of language-related activities and his various roles in the classroom could not only instigate but also promote students' involvement and participation in language teaching and learning. *Rodger* added,

> In my teaching, I play different roles. I kind of see myself as a coach and a motivator – someone that can provide real experiences for the students. Students need to have such experiences because, when they leave my classroom, they'll have to use English with another foreigner. They need to lose that fear that they may have at the start. My coaching mentality is different from others. But, for me, I kind of take the approach slowly. Slowly, I build

up students' confidence and push them just beyond what they think they can do.

Evident from *Rodger*'s observed classrooms were his frequent uses of a series of language-related activities to promote teaching and learning. By adopting multiple roles such as those of a motivator, a facilitator, and a guide, among many others, *Rodger* successfully built strong working relationships with the students in his classroom. Moreover, he was able to encourage the students to actively participate in most of the activities that he had prepared for his teaching. These activities were, for example, discussions about television shows and

money, a debate about who to save during the apocalypse, and an interrogation game requiring the students to find holes in stories their classmates told. As observed in his teaching, these activities helped facilitate communication between *Rodger* and the students as well as among the students themselves. Better yet, they also encouraged the students to use the target language in the classrooms.

Interestingly, the researchers' observations of *Rodger*'s classrooms revealed that he did not totally ignore the officially prescribed curriculum as he had claimed. To some extent, he adapted some of the sections in the assigned textbook that he was dissatisfied with and replaced them with more authentic teaching materials. Occasionally, his teaching was centralized on some of the topics in his assigned textbook as he believed they were important for the students.

Helen

Demonstrated in her interview responses regarding her perceptions of the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook was *Helen*'s strong satisfaction of them both. Specifically, *Helen* complimented the curriculum for its clear objectives and praised the textbook for its content. Both the curriculum and the textbook assisted her in her preparation for her teaching. In her own words, *Helen* said, "[*T*]he curriculum tells me what the students need to be able to do and how I can help my students to attain these goals. And I can use the list of textbook exercises for each lesson as my plan for teaching." Further, *Helen* discussed the approaches she used in implementing the curriculum. In particular, she talked about her role in the classroom, her preparation for her teaching, and her reasons for excluding any language-related activities from her teaching.

In her classrooms, *Helen* saw herself as a facilitator. In her teaching, she tried to encourage her students to use the target language to improve their English as well as to develop positive attitudes toward the language. To achieve these, *Helen*, as she asserted further, played YouTube in her classrooms to model how English was used in real life. Also, she introduced her students to the cultures of the English-speaking people in order to help improve her students' communicative competence. *Helen* maintained,

> My role in the classroom is a facilitator. I encourage the students in my classroom to improve their English, to participate, and to use English in the classroom. I try to tell them that they can improve their English if they try and participate. So, in my classroom, we watch YouTube

channels to learn how people usually speak English in their real life. I also want my students to have positive attitudes toward the English language. So, I often include the cultures of the English-speaking people in my teaching. I believe that the understanding of these cultures would help enrich students' communicative competence.

Helen also proceeded to share her preparation of her teaching with the researchers. She strictly followed the officially prescribed curriculum. "We've got the outline and it is planned for us. I look at the outline and then plan my teaching around it. Because, if not, I can't actually finish what I have to do in one class as suggested. Typically, I use the list of textbook exercises for each lesson as my plan for teaching." Absent from her teaching were language activities to promote student involvement in teaching and learning. This was because of the teacher's lack of understanding of how activities could be used to promote language learning and address students' inattentiveness to class activities. *Helen* began,

> I want to do activities in my classes as I believe that activities could help my students learn better. I don't have any activities for my students, and I wish that I could do more activities with them. The problem is I don't know that many activities. I admit that choosing and developing activities are my weak points. Also, I want to play games, but I don't know which and how.

Helen continued,

> I've been through the system before, so I know what and how students feel. Thai students focus a lot on their marks for the exam. If they don't really have something concrete, they will actually think they won't have anything to help them improve their grades to get good marks. In the past, when we learned English with some native teachers who tried to bring in some games and activities that encouraged us to speak more English in the classroom, or to encourage us to more English in the class, we enjoyed the class. But, at the end of the class, we usually think, "Oh, we learned nothing. What about the exam?"

The researchers' observations of *Helen*'s teaching revealed that her typical instructional practices ran in parallel with her interview responses. *Helen*'s classrooms were heavily teacher-centric and reminiscent of traditional classrooms. That is, the teacher alone did the talking and the students listened and took notes. *Helen*'s teaching was largely centralized on the assigned textbook and there was little (almost no) room for authentic materials. Indeed, the assigned textbook was the only focal point about which all elements of *Helen*'s instructional practices were based. For example, in one single observation, *Helen* devoted three quarters of her class time to

cover discrete grammar points in the assigned textbook. The rest of the class involved students completing seat-work grammar exercises in the textbook. The authentic language teaching materials that this particular teacher had often championed in her interview as an important part of her instruction (e.g., YouTube programs) failed to materialize. (In fact, there was no evidence of YouTube being played in any of *Helen*'s classes.) There was little interaction between *Helen a*nd her students and among the students themselves. Indeed, the students appeared to be rather passive with limited opportunities to use the target language for actual communication.

Natalie

Natalie was a course coordinator of this English Foundation course. As a course coordinator, she took charge in designing and developing the curriculum/syllabus for the course and selected the textbook for the course. Unsurprisingly, *Natalie* was satisfied with the curriculum and syllabus that she had created as it was clear and informative. In her own words,

> The curriculum that I created was very helpful. It clearly talks about the goals for teaching and learning. It explains what we are trying to do on the course and also what we should do to achieve each week. It really helps me prepare the teaching that could be compatible with these goals.

Natalie's classroom instruction restrictively adhered to the assigned textbook as the textbook, she believed, standardized both teaching and learning. She opined,

> I rely heavily on the textbook. The textbook ensures that all the teachers teach the same things, not only in terms of language and grammar points, but also about different topics to be covered in the classrooms. Moreover, the textbook also is a platform for the students to think about topics they may not have thought about before.

The observations of *Natalie*'s actual classroom instruction correlated with her interview responses. Indeed, the majority of *Natalie*'s instruction was dedicated to her introduction of grammar points to her students, chorus reading, direct translation from English to Thai, and students' completion of exercises in the assigned textbook. Each observed class had large amounts of time devoted to explicit grammar instruction that was independent of any authentic language use. There was little (almost no) communication between *Natalie* and her students, nor was there any among the students themselves.

Simon

Simon's description of his implementation of the officially prescribed curriculum and his typical classroom instruction at first suggested his departure from the curriculum and the assigned textbook. During an interview, he shared with the researchers of his frequent attempts to relate the grammar points in the assigned textbook to what his students could probably encounter in their daily lives outside of the classroom. He also added that he often brought in cultures of the target language to interest his students as well as to build relationships with them.

> My teaching would be less focused on grammars being studied from the assigned textbook and in writing, and perhaps using grammar more in speaking. Classroom activities are definitely important and essential. Often that's students' favourite part of a lesson. In the classroom, I would try to fit the grammar into a more practical real-world context …. avoiding contexts that they are not likely to find themselves in their daily lives. I often bring the target language culture into the classrooms. This keeps students interested. My experiences in my own culture are a way of making the lessons interesting to the students. I think it is part of the rapport that you build.

The observations of S*imon*'s classroom instruction showed otherwise. *Simon*'s classes were predominately teacher-centric; his teaching was mandated by the officially prescribed curriculum and exclusively centralized on the assigned textbook. Student involvement was rather scarce, almost to the point of being non-existent. The vast majority of his teaching time was filled with the students either being lectured to by *Simon* at the front of the class or completing textbook exercises individually. Then, *Simon* went over the exercises with the students by providing them with answers. There was no evidence of students discussing the exercises as either pairs or groups. Nor was there any sign of interaction between *Simon* and the students taking place. Indeed, with the curriculum and the assigned textbook playing such a vital role in his classes, there was a dearth of other more authentic materials used in his classes (despite his claim of bringing different aspects of the target language culture into his classrooms). Overall, the observations revealed that traditional classroom practices were employed for long stretches of *Simon*'s classes.

Students' Perceptions of their Teachers' Approaches to Curriculum Implementation

All 13 student participants were vociferous in their opinions of the approaches that their EFL teachers employed to implement the officially prescribed curriculum. Overall, the majority were dissatisfied with what three of the four teacher participants (*Helen*, *Natalie*, and *Simon*) did in the classrooms. They lamented at how these three teachers

rigidly planned their teaching around the curriculum and the assigned textbook but ignored students' needs and interests. Not only did such an approach demotivate the students, but also it restricted the students from improving their communicative competence.

Katie's criticisms focused on *Helen*'s dominant role in the classroom. *Helen's* teaching was routinely centralized on the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook. Whilst teaching, *Helen* often stood in front of the classroom and gave lectures on various grammar points included in the textbook. The students in the class had little-to-no involvement in teaching and learning as they were instructed to comply with *Helen*'s direction. *Helen*'s approaches to curriculum implementation and teaching not only fostered passive learning in the students but also minimized their interests in learning. *Katie* voiced,

> *Helen* only uses the book and students just have to listen to her and do the exercises that she tells us to do. Or we need to join in any exercises that she does. That's pretty much what she normally does in the class. There is a lack of speaking. Many of the students do not pay much attention; some feel really sleepy. You can learn more when you are being active. We can learn more when we do things in the class and practice. My English skills will improve more.

Alice's interview responses loudly echoed *Katie*'s complaints about *Helen*'s classroom practices.

> In my classroom, the textbook is the main thing *Helen* uses, even though a lot of it isn't about the kind of English we need. *Helen* only follows the topics included in the textbook and the curriculum. It is not enough. We never go for any discussion about what we need. Students just sit and be quiet and just listen to *Helen*. She is a speaker, but not a good listener. Interaction between *Helen* and the students in the class are very … very rare. I notice that all of us, including me, do not really feel free to talk with *Helen*. I don't like that I just have to sit and listen to *Helen*. We never discuss what we need.

Further, this same student concluded that teaching and learning should not be mandated by either the curriculum or the textbook. Instead, it needed to focus on students.

> The curriculum and the assigned textbook should be used as a guideline and also used for homework. They should not be used in a classroom the whole time. Moreover, the teacher should necessarily put a focus on students. Because if the teacher is the focus, I feel like we are in a frame. The teacher puts a frame on us about what we can do, what we can say, and what we can think. It also makes us think that whatever the teacher does is always right.

Four students from *Natalie*'s class shared similar concerns about *Natalie*'s strict implementation of the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook. *Daria* condemned *Natalie*'s dominance of what happened in the classroom and her rigorous adherence to the curriculum and the assigned textbook.

> I am always in… a textbook-centered classroom. I never enjoy that. *Natalie* bases her teaching on the curriculum and the assigned textbook. As far as I can remember, we never discuss what students want to study with *Natalie*. She always does the speaking and we just sit and listen or we just take note. I don't like it. I think my English has gotten rustier since I now don't have a chance to talk, to write, or to listen, and to be exposed to real English.

Later, the same student contended that students should be the real focus of teaching and learning, instead of teachers. *Daria* argued, "Students should be the key role – the main role in the classroom. My friends and I have become very passive." Merely listening to teacher's lectures would not help students become proficient in English. *Daria* metaphorically compared learning a language to learning to play a musical instrument. Without practice, students would acquire neither language proficiencies nor musical skills. "Language is skill like playing a musical instrument. You cannot practice English with lecturing like you cannot play violin with only watching concerts."

Jane's criticisms of *Natalie* for not including students in her teaching matched with those of *Daria*. Her clear dissatisfaction with *Natalie*'s approaches to curriculum implementation in her actual classroom drove *Jane* to say, "We have no involvement. *Natalie* informed us about her teaching style but never once asked us about our needs. We have to be the ones who control the class. The teacher should be listening to us, not us listen to and follow the teacher." *Jane* also offered some suggestions of what *Natalie* could do to improve her teaching.

> Students should have the opportunity to choose what they want to read, and it should be more real – practical books, not a textbook. Jokes and stories are important in the classroom to gain the interest of the students. But *Natalie* goes directly into the curriculum and the textbook and sticks with them.

Charlotte's comments on *Natalie* were similar to those of *Daria* and *Jane* in that she criticized *Natalie* for her rigid reliance on the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook. Because of this, some of the students in *Natalie*'s class paid little (or almost no) attention to her teaching. *Charlotte* voiced, "A lot of time it's like *Natalie*

is giving a lecture and some students can't concentrate because it's so boring to listen and follow the curriculum and the textbook with teacher standing at the front of the classroom. In fact, some even fell to sleep. The textbook has lots of information, but some isn't that necessary or practical."

Irene agreed and posited:

> The teacher just orders us to do exercises in the textbook, and then she gives us like an hour to complete these exercises. The textbook is of little of use to us. It doesn't help much. The exercises don't teach us anything. I believe it would be much better to bring extra materials in so that we are not just repeating what we already knew.

The perceptions *Simon*'s students had of his approaches to curriculum implementation were distinctively divided. Two students (*Faye* and *Georgia*) commended *Simon*'s attempts to involve students in teaching and learning, to some extent, through his uses of activities. *Faye* used to study with both *Helen* and *Natalie*. She compared *Simon* with her two previous teachers and praised *Simon*. "In *Helen* and *Natalie*'s classes, the focus is very definitely on teachers. *Simon* somehow is a bit different. He uses some activities; he tries to get students involved through games; and he sometimes gives us some group discussions to do." Another student, *Georgia*, reverberated and added that *Simon* had helped the students in his class improve their English language skills. "*Simon* somehow focuses on the students. He tries to get students involved in teaching and learning. He brings in games; he encourages us to speak English. These are good. Overall, he has helped us a lot to improve our English skills."

Nevertheless, there was an ambivalence about *Simon*'s approaches in curriculum implementation. Two students were strongly dissatisfied with how *Simon* had chosen to approach the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned teaching material. In particular, they complained about *Simon*'s rigid adherence to the textbook and students' lack of opportunities to become involved in teaching and learning. As *Bonnie* criticized,

> Really there are not many opportunities to use English in *Simon*'s class. I thought there would have been more, but not many at all. Actually, we don't have many things to talk about in English with *Simon*. Mostly what we do in the class is just to follow the textbook. Its content, honestly speaking, is not new to us.

Simon's heavy reliance on the curriculum and the textbook, as *Bonnie* concluded, was not conducive to learning. She felt that her English made minimal progress since she had enrolled in *Simon*'s class. "My English has not improved that much because most of the things in the book were what we had already learned before. There are many methods for teaching and learning English, and textbooks should not be the only major one."

Ellie also raised concerns about *Simon* using the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook to scaffold his classroom instruction while ignoring students' needs and interests. *Ellie* put it like this:

> The focus is definitely on the teacher. I would say the class is overall a more of …. teacher-focused. This is very different from other classes that I had taken. Usually, at the beginning of the semester teachers would ask students to write down their needs and interests on a piece of paper and send it back to the teachers. These needs and interests might be incorporated later into the teaching and learning. But this doesn't happen in this class. *Simon* never asks us to share either our needs or interests. The curriculum and the textbook are the two major things that *Simon* uses in his teaching. He basically follows the curriculum and the textbook.

Three participating students from *Rodger*'s class were overwhelmingly satisfied with *Rodger*'s classroom instructional practices. Their comments on *Rodger*'s practices were nothing but positive. Different from the other three teacher participants, *Rodger*, as *Harry*, *Laura*, and *Mary* commonly agreed, consistently involved the students in his class in teaching and learning through a series of classroom activities. Student engagement was prevalent; interaction/contact between *Rodger* and the students and among the students themselves was abundant. Speaking for all the students in *Rodger*'s class, *Harry* complimented *Rodger* for what he had done to help his classmates and him improve their English language skills.

> I think a lot of the students in my class would agree with me that we've moved from a passive class to an active class. The students in my class are mostly active. *Rodger* does an excellent job in trying to make the students active and making us speak English more. The teacher encourages all of us to speak and I think everyone has a chance to practice his speaking skills. My English has improved a lot and *Rodger* has made the most contribution to my improvement. *Rodger* is the one who lets me practice my speaking as well as my listening skills. Additionally, he helps me with my writing by correcting and giving feedback on my essays. So, after all, yeah, I think the improvement mainly comes from my teacher – *Rodger*.

Compliments of *Rodger*'s instructional practices were also abundant in *Laura*'s interview responses. Commenting

on how *Rodger* helped the students in the class increase their confidence in English speaking, *Laura* said:

> In my class, we have plenty of interaction between our teacher and the students. The main thing that *Rodger* does in his class is to build our confidence for speaking English. He wants the students to have more confidence, so he gives is the microphone to speak in front of everyone. During activities and games that we play, there are lots of opportunities for us to speak English.

Airing similar commendation of *Rodger*'s approaches to curriculum implementation, *Mary* remarked that she was content with *Rodger*'s decision to deviate from the imposed curriculum and the assigned textbook and to focus on activities and games instead. *Rodger*'s implementation of language-related activities and games not only enlivened the class but also helped the students increase their confidence in communicating in English.

> I am happy that *Rodger* does not really use the textbook in our class. This is because the content in the textbook is pretty much a repetition of what had learned in my high school. *Rodger* often gives us activities in speaking in English. This is so much better than passive learning – sitting in our desk and listening to the teacher and doing exercises after exercises in the textbook.

Discussion and Conclusion

Following Wolcott's (1990, 2001) suggestions, the researchers revisited and rearranged their analyses to answer the research questions.

What are these university EFL teachers' approaches to implementing their prescribed curriculum and their assigned textbooks in their actual classrooms?

The findings of the current study found two approaches used among the four teacher participants in implementing their officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned teaching material. One was a mutual-adaptation approach; the other was a fidelity-oriented approach.

Rodger's obvious dissatisfaction with both the curriculum and the textbook drove him to follow the notions of the communicative language teaching approach (Breen & Candilin, 1980; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2018) and adjusted both the curriculum and the textbook, to varying degrees, to meet his students' needs and interests. His classroom instruction promoted learner-centered classes. Often, *Rodger* used activities to serve different teaching and learning purposes.

For example, activities were implemented to engage students, to help them determine their own learning objectives, to encourage them to become active as well as responsible for their own learning, and to assess students' learning outcomes. It is obvious that *Rodger*'s adaptation of the curriculum and the textbook was heavily influenced by his pre-service training and his language teaching experience (Shawer, 2017). In essence, this particular finding supported previous research whose results emphasized the relationships between pre-service training and teaching experience and teachers' adaption of officially prescribed curriculum (Clemente, Ramirez, & Dominguez, 2000; John, 2002. Kinach, 2002; Kirk & MacDonald, 2001).

Surprisingly, the current findings also challenge the interplay between teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation and teachers' pre-service training and teaching experience to some extent. Notwithstanding their pre-service training and teaching experience, both *Helen a*nd *Natalie* chose to restrictively follow the officially prescribed curriculum the assigned textbook, using them both as the only sources of their instructional content. Their teaching plans were customarily centralized on the curriculum; they typically went through the textbook page-by-page, a teaching approach/strategy referred to, as Shawer (2017) coined, "*fixed-lesson plans*" (p. 298, italics original). What this means is that teachers "deliver [*the instructional content*] without responding to classroom dynamics, and depend on the teacher's guide [*e.g. the imposed curriculum and the assigned textbook*] to transform received content" (Shawer, 2017, p. 298, italics added). (See also Grossman & Thompson, 2014; You, Lee, & Craig, 2019). Such practices, as the findings indicated, could be attributed to teachers' understandings and experiences (as a learner in a second language classroom) of teaching and learning (Johnson, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996).

Simon's approaches to implementing curriculum and classroom instruction also supported the influential role of teacher understanding and experience in instructional practice. *Simon* had neither training in EFL education nor experience in teaching at the tertiary level. Given his insufficient pedagogical knowledge, he necessarily adhered to the imposed curriculum and the assigned textbook (Lee, 1995).

Interestingly, this drawn data set, to some extent, could be used to support previous findings on the differences in how experienced teachers and novice teachers approach their imposed curriculum and the assigned textbook. Several researchers have suggested that

experienced teachers have more ability in either adapting or developing curriculum than novice teachers (Beck & Konsnik, 2001; Clement et al., 2000; Doyle & Carter, 2003; Zheng & Borg, 2014). In addition, the current data also offer another alternative explanation to teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation. It may be possible that teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation are determined by their understandings of teaching and learning and their experiences (as a learner in a classroom).

What effects do teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation and the assigned textbook have on students' learning?

The findings of the current data augment the interplay between teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation and students' learning (Aldhafri & Alrajhl, 2014; Alrajhl & Aldhafri, 2015; Beck, 2001; Dever & Karabenick, 2011; Green & Fugita, 2016; Liu & He, 2014; Paolini, 2015; Tasdemir & Yalcin Arslan, 2018; Tulbure, 2012; Wilson, 2012). The students in *Rodger*'s classroom, in which the teacher adapted the imposed curriculum and the taught content to meet the students' needs and interests, were strongly satisfied with the teacher's approaches to implementing curriculum and instruction. They were motivated and active, being able to participate in *Rodger*'s language-related activities.

In contrast, the students in the other three teacher participants' classrooms, whose practices were largely defined by the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook, demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the teachers' instructional practices and made vicious complaints. While the students felt that they needed to be involved in teaching and learning, the teachers ignored this and chose to deliver predetermined content in a linear-like fashion. Student classroom participation was not encouraged. Hence, their motivation to learn English was low as they felt that the approaches that their teachers used contributed almost nothing to their learning (Shawer, Gilmore, & Banks-Joseph, 2009).

Implications and Future Studies

Teacher training programs may use the findings of the current study to develop a training program that may help equip pre-service teachers with knowledge on approaches to curriculum implementation and classroom instruction. In essence, this training program should introduce pre-service teachers to possible approaches/strategies for dealing with requirements

from policy-makers and the workplace, differences in teaching approaches and strategies and learning styles, and learner diversity, among many others. At their best, these approaches and strategies may assist teachers in exercising "control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118).

To some extent, the findings not only raise awareness of the disadvantages of marginalization/division within a school context but also emphasize the necessity to lessen the marginalization/division. Necessarily schools should promote more collaboration among teachers; cultures of sharing and exchanging should be fostered. With teachers being more involved, not only would they be more certain with their teaching practices but those practices would also be less routine (Hargreaves, 2019; Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014; Kleinsasser, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991; Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015). More importantly, these cultures would contribute greatly to student learning (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grisson, 2015). In her own words, Rosenholtz (1991) maintained:

> [*Collaborative principals*] shook loose new elements of collegial interdependence, seeming to vastly expand teachers' sense of possibility and their instincts for improvisation …. Principals often orchestrated collaborative relations between more and less successful teachers, explicitly acknowledging that improvement was possible, necessary, and expected. Teachers saw that working together seemed to reduce their endemic uncertainty and increase their classroom success. Such was the power of teacher learning that, like good, it became its own propagator …. With greater teacher certainty about instructional practice and technical knowledge, teachers tended to search for reasons and ways to help, not for excuses for their failures. They often found what they were looking for in the sage counsel of principals and colleagues, and in the cooperation, trust, and support of parents. With more nonroutine and humanistic treatment came personal promises fulfilled: the sweet promise of helping children learn, the glittering promises of societal contribution, the warm promise of freedom from failure, from lack of faith in themselves and their teaching culture. (Italics added, pp. 208-209).

As the findings of the present study underpin the effectiveness of a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in language teaching and learning (Rahman, Pandian, & Kaur, 2018; Shawer, 2010a, b), they call for more training on CLT for both pre-and in-service language teachers. More importantly, the training should provide language teachers with opportunities to mix and balance both theory and practice. As a result, language teachers would not only acquire a better theoretical

understanding of CLT but also gain a better insight into how CLT could be practically used, especially in an actual language classroom.

These implications also call for more studies in various areas. For example, what factors affect the way teachers choose to implement the curriculum at a classroom level? What are the relationships between workplace culture and teachers' approaches to implementing the curriculum at a classroom level? To what extent does workplace pressure influence teachers' implementation of the officially prescribed curriculum? How do schools promote collaboration among their teachers? All these questions await further exploration.

Competing Interests

The author(s) reported no potential conflict of interest.

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Biographical Statements of Authors

Chantarath Hongboontri is a professor in Applied Linguistics at Mahidol University, Bangkok Thailand.

His areas of research interest include sociology of education, workplace culture, teacher culture, and teachers and students' voices.

Professor Dr. Chantarath Hongboontri
Mahidol University, Bangkok
Thailand

E-mail: chantarath.hon@mahidol.edu

William Egerton Darling graduated from Mahidol University in June, 2019 with a master's of Applied Linguistics.

He is currently a teacher of English literature at Chellaston School, England.

His areas of research interest include curriculum implementation, language pedagogies, and students' voices.

Mr. William Egerton Darling
Chellaston School, England
U.K.

E-mail: willdarling160986@gmail.com

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Participating Teachers

1. How long have you been teaching English?

2. How long have you been teaching at *Pilgrim University*?

3. What teacher training have you received?

4. How did your teacher training prepare you for teaching?

5. What do you typically do in your EFL classroom?

6. How do use your textbook and other teaching materials in your classroom?

7. What different roles do you play in your classroom?

8. What are your perceptions of the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook?

9. What language-related activities do you use in your classroom? And how do you use them?

10. What other teaching materials do you use in your classroom?

11. What problems have you experienced in carrying out your planned instruction?

12. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add to your comments?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Participating Students

1. How long have you studied English?

2. What is your English language learning experience like?

3. What do you like/dislike of your current EFL classroom?

4. What do you think about your current English subject? How do you think the course could be improved?

5. What are your perceptions of the officially prescribed curriculum and the assigned textbook?

6. What does your EFL teacher typically do in your classroom?

7. What do you think of your teacher's teaching styles?

8. How does your teacher implement the curriculum? How does your teacher use the textbook?

9. What strengths do you think your teacher has? What weaknesses does your teacher have?

10. How do you think other resources such as activities and games should be used in your classroom?

11. To what extent are you satisfied with your teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation and classroom instruction? And why?

12. In what way are you involved in the teaching and learning in your classroom?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add to your comments?