

Standards and Assessment in the 2010 English Curriculum for High School: A Philippine Case Study

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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to analyze the alignment of standards in the 2010 English curriculum with the overall goal of the reform and to analyze the authenticity of the assessment tasks. In addition, this research also asked English teachers to choose what proficiency standards to include in a new English curriculum for Filipino high school students. Policy documents were analyzed and focus-group discussion was used to collect data from selected English teachers. The results showed that most of the standards targeted literature rather than language use. In addition, only few performance tasks were related to authentic use of language. Finally, the teachers chose standards that integrate language for academic, for social, and for literary response.

Key words: curriculum and standards, curriculum reform, curriculum and assessment

Introduction

There seems to be an increasing interest in revising educational standards because the demands have changed with the explosion of information and because of the shift from industrial to knowledge economy. At present, nations want their citizens to be knowledge workers not just knowledge consumers. Knowledge workers design new products, solve existing problems, and evaluate current practices. They have to be effective in writing their findings, in describing their solutions, and in defining their products. They also need effective oral communication skills to inform and persuade

anyone around the globe for their solutions, research, and products to be acceptable.

Educational standards “articulate binding requirements for school-based teaching and learning...Educational standards express the essential goals of pedagogical work in precise, comprehensible, and focused terms as desired learning outcomes for students” (Klieme, Avenarius, Blum, Dobrich et al., 2004, p. 5). Further, the functions of these standards include providing guidance for implementation in schools, for assessing educational outcomes, and for individual diagnosis and monitoring. Stites (1999) defines the three types of standards: content standards (desirable knowledge and skills within a subject area) performance standards (how much the students should know and be able to do benchmarks), and opportunity-to-learn (specifies number of hours and quality of instruction).

In the field of English language arts, there seems to be a complication with regard to the standards. For example, English Language Arts is a subject that combines language and literature. The complication happens in setting standards for both language and literature. Singapore is able to combine both in their genre-based syllabus which states the following goals: language for information, language for interaction, and language for literary response and appreciation. However, for other countries, standards for language and literature are still being debated on. In addition, standards in other fields like math aim for balance of standards by categorizing the list into three components (Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, 2000). These three components for math, for example, include proficiency in basic computational and procedural skills, develop conceptual understanding, and become adept in problem-solving. These components serve as guide to check the balance of any math program.

Curriculum reform is also complicated because assessment has to align with standards and instruction. In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), communicative competence standards are assessed using tasks that reflect real-life situations where English will be used (Richards, 2006).

Task-based language assessment (TBLA) grows from the observation that mastering the grammar and lexicon of a

language is not sufficient for using a language to achieve ends in social situations. Language use is observed in settings that are more realistic and complex than in discrete skills assessments, and typically require the integration of topical, social, and/or pragmatic knowledge along with knowledge of the formal elements of language (Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2001, p. 1)

The features above exemplify authenticity of tasks. According to Richards (2001) natural use of language activities have the following characteristics: “reflect natural use of language, focus on achieving communication, require meaningful use of language, require the use of communication strategies, produce language that may not be predictable, and seek to link language in context” (p.14).

As English continues to play a significant role in academic achievement (Gottlieb, 2006) and job security, countries where English is a second language or a foreign language would like to ensure that their citizens are able to competently communicate in English. One such country is the Philippines. The Philippines boasts of its position as the only English-speaking country in Southeast Asia. The English proficiency of its citizens is one of the reasons why the Philippines is now a destination for business process outsourcing. It is also one of the reasons why Filipinos are hired as nurses, teachers, mariners, and laborers in different parts of the world. However, the dismal performance of Filipino students in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) as well as the dismal performance in business process outsourcing (BPO) examinations of applicants, and the results of the National Secondary Assessment Tests (NSAT) are signals that there is a problem with the Philippine educational system. Cruz (2008) points out that:

The competitiveness of the Philippines has slid down from 47 in 2001 to 77 in 2007 out of 117 countries that were evaluated. This can be attributed to problems in the country's basic education sector, which critics have described as being in an alarming state... ENGLISH AND SCIENCE: In her excellent presentation at a recent COMSTE conference, Merle C. Tan of UP's National Institute for Science and Mathematics Education Development (UP

NISMED) showed a slide about the National Secondary Assessment Tests (NSAT). The scores in NSAT in 1999 were: math 47.47, science 44.53, English 47.22. In 2000, math 50.17, science 44.50, English 48.75. In 2004, math 46.20, science 36.80, English 50.08. In 2005, math 50.70, science 39.49, English 51.33 (p. 2).

As nations strive to develop their workforce as knowledge workers, education stakeholders revise their curricula to meet the new demands. To prepare young people as future workforce and future leaders, there is an increasing attention given to secondary education. In fact, The World Bank Report (Cuadra & Moreno, 2005) states that:

Secondary education is the highway between primary schooling, tertiary education, and the labor market. Its ability to connect the different destinations and to take young people where they want to go in life...can act as a bottleneck, constricting the expansion of educational attainment and opportunity—or it can open up pathways for students' advancement (p. 17).

There is also an increasing attention to secondary education because young people need to acquire the skills and thinking ability to make correct decisions.

Corollary to this is the increasing attention to adolescent literacy. Meltzer and Hamann (2002) claim that “adolescents who are literate can use reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking to learn what they want/need to learn AND can communicate/demonstrate that learning to others who need/want to know” (p.2). Adolescent literacy ensures that the future workforce will make informed decisions about themselves, their community, and their country. Adolescent literacy in English is also related to academic achievement particularly in countries where English is the medium of instruction (Gottlieb, 2006). Bautista, Bernardo, and Ocampo (2008) also claim that Filipinos need to possess the literacy skills needed to become productive and transformative citizens of the country.

The Philippines, an Asian country where English is the medium of instruction in mathematics and science, has revised its high school English curriculum to ensure that high school students achieve functional literacy. Another reason is the dismal performance in international exams in science and math. There were also studies that showed that the 2002 Revised Basic Education Curriculum did not meet most of its standards. For example, "The Monitoring and Evaluation of the Implementation of the 2002 Secondary Education Curriculum: Findings and Recommendations" (2009) found that:

There are gross inconsistencies between means and ends....There are gross inconsistencies between the kind of learner/graduate that the schools desire to produce and the strategies they employ. For example, instruction is still predominantly authoritative and textbook-based, learning is recipient and reproductive, supervision is commonly prescriptive and directive, and assessment is basically focused more on judging rather than improving performance... Students are having difficulties using English as learning medium.

BEC advocates the development of creative, critical thinkers, and problem solvers. Teachers find this difficult to achieve in English medium classes where students have poor oral-aural reading and writing skills. In these classes, teachers are prone to resort to simple recall, recognition and leading questions and to minimize questions that demand complex reasoning, explanations, elaborations, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation which students find frustrating and exasperating (p.3).

Plata (2007) also found that in the 2002 Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC), some standards were too low compared to those standards in other countries where English is also the medium of instruction. She also found that despite the policy to shift to performance assessment, the Department of Education still adheres to traditional forms of testing and does not provide for mechanism for student self-assessment and self-monitoring. In addition, Bautista, Bernardo, and Ocampo (2008) pointed out that:

The key competency that should be targeted by all school systems is subsumed under the expanded definition of functional literacy. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD defines functional literacy as *“the capacity to access, integrate, evaluate and manage information and knowledge. It provides learners a window to the world and the linguistic, textual and symbolic tools to engage with the world as acting and autonomous individuals interacting with various groups...on paper, the various DepED and CHED curricular statements make reference to such goals and aspirations. But what we find in these national curricula are still isolated bits of knowledge and skills which are clearly inadequate compared to the expanded concepts of functional literacy and transformational citizenship (p.69).*

Hence, the implementation of the 2010 English curriculum in school year 2010-2011 and the findings of previous research necessitate a study that will answer the following questions: (1) How do the standards in the 2010 English Curriculum support functional literacy and communicative competence? (2) How authentic are the performance tasks? and (3) What categories for content standards do selected English teachers choose for secondary English curriculum?

Background of the 2010 Secondary Education Curriculum

Reasons for the reform of the curriculum. According to the Curriculum Document in English (CDE) (2009), the revision of the RBEC was fueled by the need to achieve the goals of Education for all 2015, to streamline the content, and to assure functional literacy. In addition, it also reports that the results of national and international assessments were used in revising the standards and in conceptualizing the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning process. Finally, the proponents of the 2010 curriculum also considered the results of the case studies of the 2002 curriculum implementation in order to solve the problems reported in the implementation.

Understanding by Design Framework. The curriculum is anchored on Understanding by Design or UbD. Understanding by design is a framework that ensures deepening of student understanding by aligning standards, assessment, and instruction. However, the Department of Education modified this framework. Table 1 compares the original stages and the stages adopted by the Department of Education

Table 1
Comparison of UbD and Department of Education's Framework

Stages	Understanding by Design (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005)	DepEd Facets of Understanding
Stage 1	<i>Identify desired results:</i> Established goals Essential questions Enduring understandings Knowledge and skills	<i>Results and Outcome:</i> Content/Performance Standards Essential Understandings Objectives (KSA) Essential Questions
Stage 2	<i>Determine acceptable evidence:</i> Performance tasks Other evidence: tests, quizzes, prompts, work samples, observations, tudent self- assessment and reflection	<i>Assessment:</i> Products/Performances Assessment criteria and tools
Stage 3	<i>Plan learning experience:</i> Learning activities	<i>Learning plan:</i> Instructional activities Resources Materials

Description of the English Program

The overall goal of the 2010 Secondary Education program is to develop a functionally literate Filipino who can function in various communicative situations. A functionally literate individual demonstrates the following critical competencies: to express clearly one's ideas and feelings orally, in writing, and non-verbally; the ability to learn on his own; the ability to read, comprehend and respond in turn to ideas presented; the ability to write clearly one's ideas an feelings, and the ability to access,

process, and utilize available basic and multimedia information (CDE, 2009, p. 2).

The 2010 English Curriculum points out that the goal of communicative competence includes development of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence with emphasis on cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

Learning program focuses on content-based instruction (integration of math and science content), CALLA or cognitive academic language learning approach, problem-based, task-based, competency-based learning approach (PTCBL) and text analysis, text-based, and content-based, genre-based approaches to reading literature and literary appreciation (CDE, 2009, p. 2)

Method

This study is a policy research that attempts to understand standards and assessment policies in order to provide input in the ongoing discourse about curriculum reform. Relevant policy documents such as curriculum guides and actual 2010 curriculum were analyzed to find out if the content standards met the overall goal of developing communicative competence and functional literacy. The standards were classified according to the components of functional literacy in the 2010 Curriculum. These are “to express clearly one’s ideas and feelings orally, in writing, and non-verbally; the ability to learn on his own; the ability to read, comprehend and respond in turn to ideas presented; the ability to write clearly ones ideas an feelings, and the ability to access, process, and utilize available basic and multimedia information” (p.2). In addition, the standards in the 2010 English curriculum were also classified into the components of communicative competence which include the “development of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence with emphasis on cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)” (p.2).

Moreover, the tasks in the curriculum were also evaluated to find out whether they were authentic using Richards’ (2006) criteria such as they “reflect natural use of language, focus on achieving

communication, require meaningful use of language, require the use of communication strategies, produce language that may not be predictable, and seek to link language in context” (p.14).

Selected English teachers were asked to choose standards after a conference on proficiency standards. Fifty teachers from various private and public high schools and universities participated in the study. These teachers attended the First English Proficiency Assessment Summit held on December 4-5, 2009. This summit was organized by the Network of English Language Teachers/Testers, Inc. to bring together representatives from business, from professional organizations of English teachers, and English teachers from private and public schools in order to discuss the communicative needs of Filipino workforce and students. The teachers in this summit worked in groups of eight members as they compared the TESOL ESL Standards, Singapore English Standards, and the Philippine standards or list of competencies in English. The first two documents were chosen because they were able to categorize standards. The teachers were asked to select which categories they wanted to use to classify content standards for high school English curriculum.

Findings and Discussion

1. How do the standards in the 2010 English Curriculum support functional literacy and communicative competence?

Table 2 summarizes the content standards and performance standards of fourth year high school based on the 2010 Performance Matrix document from the Department of Education.

Table 2
Sample Content Standards from the 2010 English Curriculum

	Standard	Performance Standard
1 st year	The learner understands key concepts and demonstrates communicative competence for effective interaction, as well as literary competence for better appreciation of his/her culture and those of others through the study of Philippine Literature.	
Quarter 1 Narrative	<p>a. The learner understands that the interplay of the basic features and elements and objectives of a narrative leads to a better understanding and deeper appreciation of a narrative.</p> <p>b. The learner understands that the correct form of past tense time markers, subject-verb-agreement, direct and indirect discourse leads to effective and meaningful communication of ideas.</p>	The learner actively tells a story based on the following: focus, accuracy, organization, dialog, style, delivery, voice, pacing, and audience contact.
Quarter 2 Drama	The learner understands the features of drama which distinguish it from narrative, its elements, the conventions and varied types through the intensity of techniques employed by the teacher to produce a drama presentation of an excerpt.	The learner presents a dramatization of an excerpt based on: acting, voice, facial expressions, stage presence, and costume.
Quarter 3 Poetry	<p>The learner demonstrates understanding of the distinct features of narrative, lyric, and dramatic poetry, their elements and the poetic devices using the appropriate language forms and functions.</p> <p><i>Language focus:</i> basal adjectives, phrase modifiers, s-v agreement</p>	<p>The learner interprets a poem through choral reading based on the following criteria:</p> <p><i>Rubric:</i> facial expression, phrasing/blending/pausing/timing, rate, enunciation, accuracy, voice quality</p>
Quarter 4 Essay	The learner demonstrates understanding of the basic features, parts, structure, and pattern of development that make tone and style of Philippine essays effective.	The learner writes a vivid personal/reflective essay that expresses meaningful views and insights based on content, rhetoric, and form using the following criteria: unity, coherence, clarity, plausibility, mature usage and style.
4 th year	The learner understands key concepts and demonstrates communicative competence for effective interaction, as well as literary competence for better appreciation of his/her culture and those of others through the study of World Literature.	

Cont. Table 2

Quarter 1 Narrative	<p>a. The learner demonstrates understanding and appreciation of how narratives affect humanity through a ten-minute movie trailer.</p> <p>b. The learner understands the importance of using appropriate language structures in demonstrating his/her understanding and appreciation of narratives (adjective phrases and clauses, single word intensifiers, if clause and adverb clauses).</p>	10-minute movie trailer
Quarter 2 Drama	<p>a. The learner demonstrates understanding and appreciation of how drama affects humanity through creative presentation of a modern adaptation of a classic play.</p> <p>b. The learner uses the language to address a variety of meaningful contexts to enrich drama presentation.</p>	Modern adaptation of a classic play
Quarter 3 Poetry	<p>a. The learner understands that poetry provides a magical experience conveying a meaningful message about life that inspires him/her to create fresh ways of viewing the world through writing lyrics which highlight and compress emotions, sound, ideas, rhythm, and language in a carefully chosen word.</p> <p>b. The learner uses the correct modifiers, moods of verbs, and conditional clauses to help in the effective communication of feelings, thoughts, and ideas in writing lyric poetry.</p>	The learner writes lyrics given a melody
Quarter 4 Essay	<p>a. The learner understands that the knowledge of the features, content, structures, and other specific and standards for evaluating a literary work addresses a well-developed and meaningful critical essay.</p> <p>b. The learner uses parallel and balanced structure in sentences to effectively express ideas in writing a critical response.</p>	The learner writes a critical analysis of a film.

Table 2 shows that content standards primarily focus on literature whereas language standards refer to grammar. If the overall goal of the 2010 English Curriculum for Filipino high school students

is communicative competence and functional literacy, then it seems that the standards for language need to be reviewed. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the definition of functional literacy in CDE (2009) includes the ability of the learners to learn on their own, and yet the standards do not include learning how to learn. Secondly, communicative competence includes communicating orally to achieve communicative goals in appropriate contexts. However, it seems that some of the content standards in Table 2 do not reflect this. For example, for first year, telling a story and presenting a drama seem to focus on platform techniques rather than on authentic communication needs. This has implications to preparing Filipino students for the workplace. Despite the increasing work opportunities in call centers in the Philippines, only five out of 100 pass the examinations that require listening and speaking. If the new curriculum focuses on platform techniques rather than on authentic listening and speaking performance, then the number of applicants failing the call center exams will continue to increase.

Finally, the content standards do not include those that are important to reading, writing, listening, and speaking in academic context. Despite the document's description that the learning program focuses on content-based instruction (CBI) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), it seems that there are no standards that support them.

2. How authentic are the performance tasks?

Table 3 shows the performance matrix for year 1-4 and quarter 1-4. As can be seen in the table, most of them do not "reflect natural use of language, focus on achieving communication, require meaningful use of language, require the use of communication strategies, produce language that may not be predictable, and seek to link language in context" (Richards, 2006, p.14). For example, first year and second year quarter 1 and quarter 2 performance tasks do not focus on achieving communicative purpose because they are intended to display their ability to use platform techniques such as voice projection, audience contact, and delivery. Moreover, these tasks do not link language in context as they are not authentic tasks that people have to do in real life. In addition, year 1-4 quarter 4 tasks

of choral reading, writing a haiku or tanka, poetry slam/performance poetry, and writing lyric to a given melody do not seem to be authentic tasks because they are creative tasks that do not require communication strategies. It appears that these tasks do not develop the “capacity to access, integrate, evaluate, and manage information and knowledge” (Bautista, Bernardo, & Ocampo, 2009, p.8). It could be the reason why “Andrew King, country director of IDP Education Philippines, a group accredited by the Australian government to administer the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam to Filipinos who seek to enter Australia as workers, migrants or students in its universities, had earlier reported a decline in the English proficiency of Filipinos based on the results of IELTS examinations taken by Filipinos in 2008” (Sy, 2009, ¶ 9). This examination requires test-takers to communicate with an interviewer to test their ability to communicate their opinion and to analyze issues. It seems that the performance tasks in the 2010 English Curriculum for Filipino students will not prepare students for actual communication.

The fact that the 2010 Curriculum was created because of poor performance in international science and math examination and because of the below average performance in mastery test in English suggests that the performance tasks should assess and hone those skills that matter in the real world of work and in academic achievement. However, Table 3 shows that these tasks will not help Filipino students to improve their performance in tests that require critical reading, critical thinking, and effective communication skills.

Table 3
Performance Matrix from the Department of Education

Quarter	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year
1	Storytelling	Interactive storytelling/reading	Short story writing	One-minute film/movie poster presentation
2	Drama presentation	Playlet presentation from an original script	Theatrical presentation of an existing drama	Presentation of a modern adaptation of a classic play
3	Choral reading	Writing a haiku/tanka	Poetry slam/performance poetry	Writing lyric to a given melody
4	Writing a personal/reflective essay	Descriptive essay writing	Writing a persuasive essay	Writing a critical analysis of a film

3. What content standards do selected English teachers choose for secondary English curriculum?

The results of the focus group discussion showed that the teachers wanted to use both the TESOL standards and the Singapore English Curriculum goals. The following shows that in the TESOL standards there are three goals, and there are three standards under each goal. The participants in the focus group discussion wanted to use the standards as guide because the TESOL standards reflect the social, academic, and functional aspects of language use.

TESOL ESL Standards (n.d.)**Goal 1: To use English to communicate in social settings**

Standards for Goal 1

Students will:

1. use English to participate in social interaction;
2. interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment;
3. use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence

Goal 2: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas

Standards for Goal 2

Students will:

1. use English to interact in the classroom;
2. use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form;
3. use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge

Goal 3: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways

Standards for Goal 3

Students will:

1. use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting;
2. use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting;
3. use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence

Source: TESOL ESL Standards (1997)

Two of the seven groups chose the Singaporean framework. They reported that the three categories namely language for information, language for literary response and expression, and

language for social interaction seemed appropriate in the Philippine setting where language and literature are combined in English classes. Below are the Singapore standards.

Language for Information

As speaker, writer, reader, listener and viewer, the learner will access, retrieve, evaluate, apply and present information derived from print, non-print and electronic sources.

Language for Literary Response and Expression

As speaker, writer, reader, listener and viewer, the learner will respond creatively and critically to literary texts, relate them to personal experience, culture and society, and use language creatively to express self and identity.

Language for Social Interaction

As speaker, writer, reader, listener and viewer, the learner will use English effectively, both in its spoken and written form, to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, taking into account purpose, audience, context, and culture (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This case study was conducted in order to analyze the content standards and the authenticity of the assessment tasks because the 2010 English Curriculum intends to develop high school students' functional literacy. The results showed that the content standards did not include important aspects of functional literacy such as learning strategies, reading/writing strategies, and other aspects of communicative competence. The teachers also felt that there should be standards that specify the use of language for academic and social purposes. This case study opens a discussion on what Filipino high school students should know and be able to do given the available opportunity for those who are proficient in English. It also opens discussions about proficiency standards that will help teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to make decisions about teaching and assessment.

Case studies of schools that piloted the new curriculum can include teacher beliefs about the curriculum, the standards that they followed, and the assessment tasks that helped them measure student

progress. Further research that consults teachers and professional organizations regarding proficiency standards would help policymakers make decisions about what Filipino high school students should know and be able to do to become better students and better leaders, and better citizens.

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