

Investigating teachers' implementation of a new communicative English language curriculum in Myanmar primary schools

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation of a new communicative English language curriculum in Myanmar primary schools. The case study method was used in collecting and analyzing the required data. Three teachers were selected purposively with the predetermined criteria. For the purposes of identifying the characteristics of their work in the classrooms, they were observed teaching a unit from grade two English curriculum for six weeks. To countercheck the observational data and to listen to their views, each teacher was interviewed using semi-structured questions. The findings showed that although there were certain elements of the curriculum implemented, most of the teachers' practices did not follow the recommended principles of the curriculum. In further investigation of the reasons behind the limited implementation of the curriculum, it was found that a range of factors: teachers' beliefs, teachers' past experience, teachers' workload, and teacher training, influenced their implementation of the curriculum. This study highlighted the importance of recognizing the disparity between the idealized vision of curriculum developers and the practical reality faced by teachers as well as the effectiveness of the teacher training programs in the process of implementing a reform.

1. Introduction

Several studies on curriculum reform have highlighted that teachers' implementation of the curriculum often deviates from the intentions of curriculum developers (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Ross, 2017; Shah, 2015). In Myanmar, since 2016, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has been implementing a new basic education curriculum in accordance with the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021). While this new curriculum demands innovative teaching methods and assumptions about language teaching, teachers may find difficulty in implementing it in their classrooms. Besides, due to the lack of evaluation conducted on this new curriculum, little empirical evidence is available regarding the effectiveness of this reform in the classroom. As a response to these gaps, this study was developed to explore the alignment between the curriculum objectives and teachers' actual practices in the classrooms regarding the grade two English curriculum. Consequently, the factors which account for their practices were also examined.

2. Context of the study

This study is situated in Myanmar's state education context with a focus on the reform in the basic education sector. As part of the reform, a new basic education structure of KG+12

(kindergarten plus 12 years) was introduced in the 2016-17 Academic Year (AY) (Ministry of Education, 2019). To conform to the structure of other Southeast Asian countries, the previous education structure (5-4-2) (grades 1 to 5 for the primary level, grades 6 to 9 for the lower secondary level, and grades 10 to 11 for the upper secondary level) was transformed into the KG+12 (5-4-3) structure. The new structure, KG+12, consists of kindergarten, five-year schooling for the primary level, four-year schooling for the lower secondary level and three-year schooling for the upper secondary level. Along with this reform, all the basic education curricula were updated. Primary education reform is one of the fundamental education reforms which the MoE in Myanmar has been implementing since 2016. The previous English curriculum was criticized for its focus on outdated teacher-centered pedagogy, rote learning, and memorization, lacking the communicative functions of the language (Hardman et al., 2019; Ministry of Education, 2015).

With the aim of addressing these issues, the new grade two English curriculum was introduced in 2018. The textbook (and accompanying teacher's guide (TG)) is a major part of the curriculum. The English textbook is organized by topics, and it involves eight units which is divided into six lessons. There are six types of lessons: language-focused lessons, skill-focused lessons, reading and writing lessons, letter review lessons, language review lessons, and project-based lessons (see Appendix A for a sample lesson) (Ministry of Education, 2018b). After every two units, there is a review section which allows students not only to consolidate their knowledge of the words and letters they have practiced writing, and the language they learnt in the previous two units but also to evaluate themselves the extent to which they could read and write the words and could use language in the textbook activities. After the review, there comes the project that teachers assign students to complete (Ministry of Education, 2018a, 2018c).

TG presents that the curriculum is child-centered and uses a communicative teaching methodology. It also suggests teachers use pair and group activities in each lesson so that students learn English in an experiential manner (Ministry of Education, 2018a). Besides, it describes the teacher as a facilitator or a guide who creates as many opportunities as possible for students to communicate in the target language. In terms of the learner's role, although TG does not directly outline their responsibilities in the learning process, the activities presented in them suggest that students are expected to take an active role in learning. This includes relating classroom activities to their own experiences, engaging in problem-solving tasks, participating in classroom and group work, and collaborating with their peers to find solutions. The new curriculum represents a considerable change in the principles of language learning and teaching compared to the previous curriculum (see Appendix B) (Ministry of Education, 2019). Both teachers and students are required to take on new roles. Overall, it aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, promoting a more interactive and communicative approach to teaching English compared to the previous curriculum.

The new curriculum was developed by the 40 Japanese consultants and 34 local experts from the MoE. Nation-wide in-service teacher training was delivered through a cascade model. As Figure 1 depicts, members from this team conducted briefing sessions for teacher educators from Education Colleges. During these training sessions, the whole grade two curriculum (totally 10 subjects including assessment procedures and general characteristics of the new curriculum) was introduced within a limited time (5 days). The same briefing training sessions were conducted for different levels: state/region, district, and township

using a cascade model.

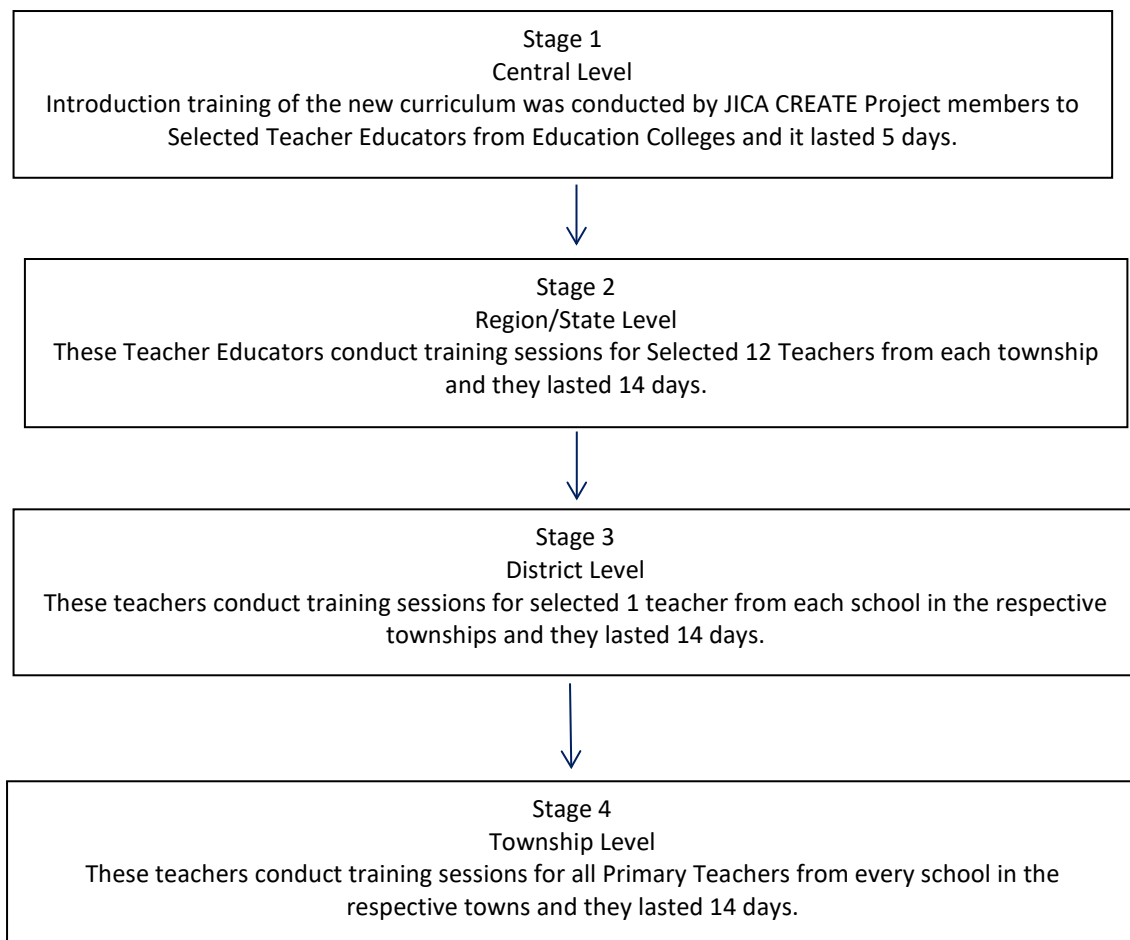


Figure 1. Process of how the new curriculum training was conducted.

3. Literature review

3.1 Curriculum implementation

Curriculum innovation is a process that is multifaceted and intricate in nature (Carl, 2005; Fullan, 2007), and it requires additional investigation (Stoller, 1994). Despite being a key area, enough attention has not been given on how teachers implement changes (Carless, 2003). Moreover, according to a World Bank report (2018), most curriculum reforms necessitate teachers to provide students with new skills and use better pedagogies, but they do not give teachers sufficient training and supportive teaching materials. Consequently, those education systems that perform poorly are not meeting the curriculum standards set by themselves (World Bank, 2018). Bishop (1986) highlights that curriculum developers frequently presume that their meticulously designed curriculum will be implemented exactly as intended, without considering the significant impact of other stakeholders involved in the implementation process. The disparity in challenges encountered by curriculum developers and implementers leads to the potential development of a gap between the intended curriculum and its actual implementation (Remillard & Heck, 2014; Sethole, 2004). This incongruence has been described by Rogan (2004) as a “mismatch between expectation and reality” (p. 176).

Several studies in various countries also indicate that attempts to introduce new

curriculums have often encountered problems, in South Korea (Li, 1998); in China (Yan & He, 2012); in Libya (Orafi & Borg, 2009); in Pakistan (Shah, 2015) and in Australia (Ross, 2017). In the case of Myanmar, when taking Child-Centered Approach (CCA) implementation in 2013, the results from the annual report of the monitoring of training and implementation indicated that while teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of knowledge and concepts, they struggled to effectively implement CCA in their practical teaching (UNICEF, 2013). For the current new curriculum, there is not enough information on its implementation, such as the extent teachers implement the curriculum intended by the curriculum developers, how they adopt the curriculum into their own context, and how students respond to their teaching. These facts indicate the urgent need to study the new curriculum implementation.

3.2 Factors influencing curriculum implementation

The literature on change management highlights several factors that can impact the implementation or non-implementation of curriculum innovations. The first one is the nature of teacher training offered. As educational innovations require teachers to change their classroom practices and adopt new ways of teaching, teachers' training and development are regarded as an influential factor in the implementation process (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014). Malderez and Wedell (2007) stress that effective teacher training is key to successful policy and curriculum reform implementation. Carless (1999) also emphasizes the importance of providing teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the change, especially "if it is slightly different to their existing methods" (p. 23). However, briefing teachers with short sessions about the innovation will be insufficient in equipping teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for successful implementation of the innovation (Orafi & Borg, 2009). As Adey (2004) put it "real change in practice will not arise from short programs of instruction, especially when those programs take place in a center removed from the teacher's own classroom" (p. 156). Several studies in different contexts have also highlighted the importance of training programs in China (Yan & He, 2012), in Turkey (KirKgöz, 2008), and in Myanmar (Thawdar Lwin, 2019). Furthermore, teacher training and development programs which depend on knowledge transmission models may not be effective in bringing about the desired change (Kennedy, 2005). In these models, teachers often act as receivers of specific knowledge imparted to them by an expert without considering the context where teachers work (Kuchah, 2018). Nation and Macalister (2010) also echoed that curriculum change involves teachers, and teachers need to be informed and involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of change. Overall, the literature indicates that teacher training is a cornerstone of successful education innovation. To achieve this, training programs should prioritize comprehensive and context-aware preparation, moving beyond brief sessions. Moreover, these programs must adopt a collaborative, teacher-centric approach to truly empower educators and drive meaningful change in education.

The second one is teachers' beliefs. Freeman (2002) notes that teachers' beliefs form the hidden curriculum in classrooms, shaping teaching practices. Breen et al. (2001) argue that any innovation must fit within teachers' existing framework of teaching principles. Nation and Macalister (2010) also highlight the impact of teachers' beliefs on their classroom practices. Therefore, it is important to consider teachers' beliefs as an influencing factor on the curriculum implementation.

The socio-cultural context is also considered as an influential factor in the implementation process (Fullan, 2007). For instance, school pressures may hinder teachers

from fully enacting their beliefs about quality teaching practices (Wilcox-Herzog et al., 2015). In Myanmar, the examination-oriented culture, preference for traditional teacher-centered approaches and heavy workload affected the implementation of CCA in 2012 at the primary education (UNICEF, 2013).

The literature reviewed in this context reveals that new curricula often face challenges in their implementation due to unaddressed disparities between their principles, ineffective brief teacher training programs, teachers' beliefs, and contextual factors. These findings served as a foundation for the objectives and methodology of this study.

4. Research methodology

The research questions investigated in this study were:

- (1) What are the classroom practices of the grade two English language teachers?
- (2) How closely do teachers' actual practices align with the prescribed principles in the curriculum?
- (3) What factors lead to the differences between curriculum principles and teachers' practices in cases where they are not congruent?

To study three teachers' implementation of the new curriculum, a qualitative case study approach was used due to its suitability for addressing exploratory research questions, and its capacity to observe real-life instances of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2007; Yin, 2009). This approach enabled the author to get detailed cases of the teachers, showing how the new curriculum was being implemented in their classrooms and the reasons for their implementation.

4.1 Participants

Participants were selected purposively using several criteria. Most teachers in Myanmar are not used to being observed by researchers or being asked to discuss their teaching (Borg et al., 2018). This new experience may be challenging, especially for teachers with less experience (Louws et al., 2017). That is why the key criterion is that participants with at least 6-year teaching experience who have experiences of teaching the previous curriculum and the new curriculum. For this study, the participants should be teachers who show real interest in the new curriculum. In addition, they must have access to the required materials and resources for the implementation of the curriculum. The background information of the teachers is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' background information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Teaching experience	Qualification
Teacher A	Female	7 years	BA (Geog.), PATC
Teacher B	Female	6 years	BA (Hist.), PATC
Teacher C	Female	14 years	BA (Myan.), DTEd,

Note. BA (Geog.) = Bachelor of Arts in Geography, BA (Hist.) = Bachelor of Arts in History, BA (Myan.) = Bachelor of Arts in Myanmar, PATC = Primary Assistant Teacher Certificate, DTEd = Diploma in Teacher Education

4.2 Data collection and data analysis

In this study, multiple data collection methods were used as they are complementary and form a complete and coherent picture of events that would be provided by any single method (Yin, 2009). Data were collected through introductory interviews, open classroom observations and follow-up semi-structured interviews.

After getting consent from the participants, they were interviewed for about 35 minutes and asked about their educational qualifications, teaching experience, and general opinions about the new curriculum. They were audio-recorded. Then, there was a six-week period of observing the teachers in their classrooms while they taught one unit (Unit 6) of the grade 2 English coursebook. To ensure that the data collected were comprehensive and precise, and to increase descriptive validity, all lessons were recorded in addition to the field notes written by the researcher (Maxwell, 2008). In analyzing the observations, the initial focus of this study was on the descriptions of what teachers did at different stages of the unit. Then, they were compared to the recommended principles and approaches outlined in the curriculum, which were sourced from the course book and the TG (Appendix B). The analysis of these data produced several themes, issues, and questions, which were used as the foundation for the semi-structured interviews that followed.

The follow-up interviews were needed as Breen et al. (2001, p. 498) explain, “we cannot infer the intentions of teacher action or the reasons why teachers work in the ways they do in particular lessons with particular students only from observed practices”. In the interviews, the teachers were presented with extracts of their lessons and requested to explain their actions and the reasoning behind their practices. To let them express their thoughts and ideas more freely, the interviews were carried out in Burmese, their native language. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed and translated into English. The interview data were then analyzed in relation to the research questions. The analysis focused on identifying comments pertaining to the teachers’ beliefs and contextual factors that influenced their interpretation and implementation of the curriculum. Firstly, the data were coded manually, and subsequently, these codes were consolidated into broader categories. To enhance the interpretation of the interview data, the emerging categories from the interviews were compared with the observation data. The teachers’ explanations of their practices were compared with different episodes from the observation data to identify evidence of consistency or inconsistency between practices and beliefs. This allowed the author to get a comprehensive record of each teacher’s practices and the underlying factors that influenced these practices.

5. Findings

The key findings that emerged from the analysis of the data are presented in two sections: intended principles and teachers’ practices; and factors influencing the teachers’ practices.

5.1 Intended principles and teachers’ practices

A key principle in teaching *reading and writing lessons* is that the teacher first does an oral introduction of each word, lets students guess the meaning and teaches words in an interactive way. Then, students do the reading and writing activity which allows them to further practice reading and writing the words and to recognize the meaning, spelling, and pronunciation of the words. The following episode illustrates the implementation of this

principle in one of the teachers' works. (T=teacher, Ss=students)

Episode 1 (Teacher A)

(T wrote the words: wall, water, world, and window on the blackboard together with their meaning in Burmese)

T: [In Burmese] *OK, Class, look at the blackboard and repeat after me.*

T: (*W-a-l-l = its equivalent in Burmese*) x3 (pointing to the word, 'wall')

Ss: (*W-a-l-l = its equivalent in Burmese*) x3

T: [In Burmese] *How many walls are there in the class?*

Ss: [In Burmese] *Three walls.*

T: [In Burmese] *Yes, there are three walls.*

T: [In Burmese] *You know what does 'wall' mean in Burmese?*

(Ss gave its equivalent meaning in Burmese).

Episode 1 illustrates that the teacher taught the words by giving its meaning into Burmese directly and using a repetition drill. In doing so, the type of interaction was teacher-to-student interaction. This type of classroom interaction was mostly used throughout all the lessons that were observed. Moreover, she skipped warm-up activities and went directly to teaching the lessons. It was also found that she just focused on meaning, spelling and translation of the words. The above episode clearly illustrates that there was a mismatch between the teacher's practices and the curriculum principles regarding the teaching of reading and writing lessons. While the curriculum emphasizes communicative teaching, the teacher focused on word meaning, grammar and translation.

In teaching *language-focused lessons*, it is advised to teach phrases, vocabulary or sentences for communication and have students use the language in communicative situations. However, Episode 2 depicts that the teacher taught them by translating into Burmese followed by a repetition drill. Then, she continued to teach phrases and sentences in the following ways.

Episode 2 (Teacher B)

Teacher B put the enlarged picture of a boy on the board.

T: [In Burmese] *OK, Class, look at the picture. What is he wearing?*

T: [In Burmese] *He's wearing a yellow T-shirt and red boots. OK, tell this in English.*

T&Ss: *He's wearing a yellow T-shirt and red boots.*

T: [In Burmese] *OK, repeat after me. "He's wearing a yellow T-shirt and red boots."*

Ss: *He's wearing a yellow T-shirt and red boots.*

T: *Boys, read this in English and Girls, read this in Myanmar.*

Boys: *He's wearing a yellow T-shirt and red boots.*

Girls: [In Burmese] *He's wearing a yellow T-shirt and red boots.*

The above episode indicates that the teachers laid stress on meaning and translation while the curriculum recommends focusing on listening, speaking, pair work and group work for students to learn communicatively. Moreover, despite the advice in TG to give feedback on students' language and pronunciation, she skipped these activities.

In teaching *skill-focused lessons*, the teachers started by reading the lines in the story and giving their equivalent meanings in Burmese. After that, she read the lines and made students repeat after her. Then, students read the lines on their own together with the equivalent

translation. The following episode depicts how the teacher was implementing the *skill-focused lessons* in her classroom.

Episode 3 (Teacher C)

T: *OK, I will read the lines in the first picture as model. Listen carefully to me.*

T: *Hello! I'm San San. I have three friends. They are Ni Ni, Toe Toe and Moe Moe.* (T gave its equivalent meaning in Burmese.)

T: *This time, you all have to repeat after me.*

T: *Hello! I'm San San.* (T gave its equivalent in Burmese)

Ss: *Hello! I'm San San.* (Ss gave its equivalent in Burmese)

T: *I have three friends.* (T gave its equivalent in Burmese)

Ss: *I have three friends.* (Ss gave its equivalent in Burmese)

T: *They are Ni Ni, Toe Toe and Moe Moe.* (T gave its equivalent in Burmese)

Ss: *They are Ni Ni, Toe Toe and Moe Moe.* (Ss gave its equivalent in Burmese)

After that, the teacher asked students to read them chorally and individually.

As highlighted in the TG, teaching *storytelling* activities involves activities which focus on interaction among students, communication in English and group work. However, the above episode depicts that the teacher skipped these activities and went on her own way of conventional teaching. Teaching *letter review lessons* and *language review lessons* should encompass self-assessment to train students to assess themselves and to help them understand the extent to which they have accomplished the objectives. However, the teacher skipped those parts of the lesson. Moreover, the teacher skipped *project-based lessons* which allow students to complete a project on their own by cooperating with one another and to present it to others.

In summary, it was found all three teachers' work was mainly teacher-whole class work. There were limited opportunities for the students to work together not only in pairs but also in groups. While they focused just on the content and meaning, students had little opportunity to speak in English. Furthermore, it is highly stressed in the TG to use English as a classroom language and give students as many opportunities as possible to communicate in English. As previously mentioned, the underlying principle of the new English curriculum is CLT. However, the teachers used English as a classroom language too limitedly and they skipped most activities which promote students' communication in English (see Appendix C for summary).

5.2 Factors influencing teachers' practices

The previous section reveals that the teachers' practices mostly do not align with the curriculum principles. Consequently, the teachers' rationales for their practices were interviewed, and several underlying factors were found.

5.2.1 Teachers' beliefs

Classroom observations show that teachers frequently omitted activities that involved students working in group and speaking in English. When the teachers were asked the

rationale for these practices, one of the teachers stated:

My students are not good at doing activities and they cannot work well with groups. They don't get used to doing so. As you know, they are too young to give discussion. Even when I allow them to do so, they just talk noisily. It goes out of the topic. (Teacher A).

Moreover, the teachers also modified the teaching of reading lessons into their own way. Once again, the teachers' belief about the students' abilities seemed to be a contributing factor for not teaching the lessons as recommended in the curriculum:

That's right, Sir. When I taught phrases and sentences as recommended in the curriculum, my students couldn't catch them. That's why I broke down and taught words by words by giving explicit meaning in Myanmar. And let my students repeat after me. I find that my students got well with this method. (Teacher B).

The observations depicted that the teachers dominated the classroom interaction. Students had little chances to collaborate or engage in activities despite the curriculum requiring such practices. Upon asking why they did not use pair work or group work, one of the teachers replied:

That's right, Sir, as you know, my students are not used to working in pair or group. Whenever I asked them to complete a task in group, the one who is brilliant just leads it and the others do not participate actively. They just do what they want to do. (Teacher C).

Overall, looking at the phrases "too young to do" "my students couldn't do/catch ...", it is clear that the teachers believe that their students are not ready to do most activities recommended in the curriculum. This has led them to changing them or skipping in most cases. Therefore, most of the teachers' practices, especially in use of English as a classroom, and pair and group work activities were influenced by their belief about students' abilities.

Classroom observation illustrated that the teachers skipped most of the activities like "story telling." They also modified some lessons into their own way of teaching. When they were asked why some of their practices are not congruent with the recommended principles, one teacher replied:

To tell you the truth, I still have difficulty in understanding some lessons and how to teach them. In some cases, I teach them on my own way as I understand. The point is my students get it. As you know, when I do activities, I can't control my class. My students are very playful and they make noises. I can't get their attention. (Teacher B).

Moreover, when Teacher C was interviewed for the reasons of not using English as a classroom language, she commended:

As you know, I'm not good at English speaking. I tried to speak in English, but I can't. I'm just used to explaining in Burmese. (Teacher C)

The phrases like “still have difficulty in ...” and “not good at English” clearly indicates the teachers’ concern about their language skills and knowledge of language teaching methods and content. This had a significant impact on their practices in the implementation of the curriculum like in the use of English as a classroom language and doing some interactive activities.

5.2.2 Contextual factors

In addition to teachers’ beliefs, several contextual factors influenced the teachers’ implementation of the curriculum. Observation of the teachers showed that the teachers’ past experiences of language learning and teaching is also an influential factor. As stated in the previous section, the teachers’ practices concerning reading and writing lessons were different from the ones recommended. The following answer depicted their rationale for their own practices:

You know, how can my students remember these words only by learning their spelling and pronunciation? Only when I taught the meanings of the words in Burmese and let them repeat after me, they can remember and retain them longer. That’s the way we have been teaching long before and it is more effective. (Teacher B).

The teacher’s statement of “that’s the way we have been teaching long before” clearly indicates the influence of her past experience in her practice.

The teachers added their heavy workloads as an influential factor on their implementation:

I have to study and teach all ten subjects. Sometimes, I can’t focus on a subject. I have too little time for my lesson preparation. That’s why I couldn’t teach some lessons as recommended in the teacher guide. (Teacher C).

On an interview of their difficulties, the teachers also stated their workload as one of their difficulties:

One of the difficulties that I encounter is lesson preparation. I have to learn and study not only the lessons but also how to teach them so that I can teach well the next day. And I have to prepare ... I’m not good at English. As you know, I have to teach all ten subjects. This means I have to study and prepare all these subjects every day. (Teacher A).

The fact that they must teach all the subjects clearly shows the workload and consequently, they do not have time for planning lessons for all the subjects. This explains why they do not teach some lessons as recommended in the curriculum principles.

5.2.3 Teacher training and professional development

Throughout the interviews, the teachers also mentioned teacher training as a factor which affected the implementation of the curriculum. All three teachers criticized that the introduction training was not enough:

It took two weeks for all the subjects and how can I say the way they gave training?... They just read about changes of the new curriculum in the training module. They just told us a little bit about this book. They did not teach the lessons from the textbook. They didn't tell us about the techniques. They just played an example video lesson, told us about the poems and how to play games. These are just what they taught. And then, they asked to teach in accordance with the teacher guide. That's all. (Teacher B).

The teacher emphasized that the training spanned a brief two weeks, raising concerns about its adequacy. She also critiqued the training content, indicating that it primarily consisted of reading about the curriculum changes rather than practical guidance on teaching methodologies. Lack of in-depth instruction might have left the teachers ill-prepared to implement the curriculum effectively.

Overall, it is evident that the training lacked depth and practical guidance, focusing more on surface-level information about the curriculum changes rather than equipping teachers with necessary tools, techniques, and detailed understanding to effectively implement the new curriculum in their classrooms. This inadequacy in training has contributed significantly to the observed misalignment between recommended curriculum practices and actual classroom implementation.

6. Discussion

Despite a few aspects of the curriculum being implemented, in general, the teachers' practices did not align with the intended curriculum principles. While one of the curriculum principles is to give as many chances as possible for students to communicate in English, most of the interaction was teacher-centered and Burmese was the dominant language during classroom interaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that three teachers' implementation of the new curriculum reform is not in line with the intended principles. The findings of this study corroborate the notion that curriculum reforms may not be implemented as originally intended. (Fullan, 2007; Shah, 2015; Ross, 2017). It is important to consider the implementation gap as a critical issue in curriculum innovations. Follow-up interviews asking the reasons behind their actions in their classrooms provided the opportunity to listen to the teachers' voices. In interviews, teachers reflected on their own practices and expressed the factors which had an impact on their classroom practices. These factors are discussed under three broad themes: teachers' beliefs, the context, and teacher training.

6.1 Curriculum reform and teachers' beliefs

The implementation of educational innovations by teachers is influenced by their beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2016; Freeman, 2002; Kagan, 1992). In the interviews, all three teachers expressed several beliefs regarding their students' abilities, and their own abilities, which influenced their implementation of the new curriculum. For instance, as the teachers viewed the requirements of the new curriculum to exceed their students' abilities, they skipped some activities and rarely used English during classroom interaction. This reflects findings from

previous studies of teachers' beliefs on their students' abilities and their influence on their implementation of the CLT curriculum (Li, 1998; Orafi & Borg, 2009). Beside worrying about their students' English proficiency, the teachers also expressed concerns about their own capability to fulfil the requirements of the new curriculum. They viewed some aspects of the curriculum as beyond their abilities and this leads to skipping some lesson contents which are considered as important in the curriculum principles.

6.2 Curriculum reform and the context

Several contextual factors such as their past learning and teaching experiences, and the workload, influenced the implementation of the curriculum. As the findings reveal, all three teachers preferred the ways they were taught, and they have been using in the teaching of the previous curriculum. It is noteworthy here that the teachers were educated in the context where the predominant focus of ELT was on explicit grammar instruction, rote learning, error correction, translation and reading aloud (Hardman et al., 2019). When the teachers did not receive enough training, they seem to rely on their pre-existing experiences when interpreting a new curriculum, resulting in a discrepancy between the intended curriculum and what is implemented in the classroom (Nevenglosky et al., 2019).

The teachers' workload also had an impact on their implementation of the curriculum. In most schools in Myanmar, primary teachers have to teach all the subjects. In the cases of this study, all three teachers had to teach all other eight subjects in addition to English. This indicates that they have heavy workload, and the findings also express that they could not focus on English subject and had too little time for lesson preparation. Consequently, they admitted that they could not teach some lessons as recommended in the TG. Therefore, it is important to lessen teachers' workload so that they can focus on a subject of their interest and teach with full potential.

6.3 Curriculum reform and teacher training

Another important factor that influenced the teachers' classroom practices is lack of adequate teacher training. When the new curriculum was introduced, briefing sessions were given to teachers through a cascade model introducing some changes of this curriculum, and teachers were advised to teach in accordance with the TG. However, these kinds of briefing training are inadequate to equip teachers for the requirements of the proposed change (Carless, 1999; Orafi & Borg, 2009). For teachers to be able to implement a new curriculum, they need to have a comprehensive understanding of the principles and practices of the curriculum (Carless, 1999). However, teachers in this study commented on the training they received as unqualified. They had not received adequate training and support to enable them to develop new ways of teaching that are required by the new curriculum.

As stated previously, teachers' existing beliefs and their past experience influenced how teachers implemented the curriculum. This implies that teachers cannot be expected to completely abandon their accustomed ways of teaching and accept new and unfamiliar approaches to the new curriculum. This in turn indicates that teachers should be given effective teachers training programs which link the new practices with their beliefs and past experience. Moreover, literature also reveals that teachers are usually not aware of the influence of their beliefs and past experience over their classroom practices (Fang, 2012). Therefore, it is the responsibility of teachers training and development programs to provide teachers with opportunities to become aware of their beliefs and past experience so that they

could fully adopt the new practices. One way to do would be exploring teachers' actual classroom practices and their beliefs and listening to their voices.

Overall, while three factors are discussed separately as the influential factors in the process of curriculum implementation, we can see the complex relationship among these factors, teacher training being the underlying factor. While the teacher training was offered top-down in using a cascade model with little chances for teachers to participate, it failed to listen to their voices and beliefs. Teacher trainers and the curriculum developers should consider strategies for teachers to recognize links (and differences) between different curricula to enable teachers to relate the new materials to their cultural context and give them a sense of ownership. New curricula should acknowledge teachers' past experiences to gain their commitment for a new reform agenda (Fang, 2012). Since the teachers did not receive enough training, their implementation of the new curriculum was based largely on their prior experience of teaching English and on their experience of learning English. The fact that the teachers have not had the opportunity to learn about the latest EFL teaching trends and methods, and their lack of exposure to CLT in the Myanmar context may contribute to the discrepancy between the curriculum's recommendations and their actual practices (Nevenglosky et al., 2019).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that the limited implementation of the new English curriculum in Myanmar state schools was due to the misalignment between the curriculum's intentions and teachers' real classroom practices. To address this, it is recommended to consider teachers' beliefs and voices in the curriculum reform process, while also taking into account their existing teaching principles and past experiences and integrating these aspects into teacher training programs. Additionally, it is recommended to increase the workforce at the primary level while ensuring the quality of teacher training.

While this study was conducted with a small purposive sample of three teachers as part of a qualitative research approach aimed at obtaining detailed stories from the participants, I acknowledge that the results may not be as readily generalizable as those from quantitative research with larger sample sizes. However, based on the author's experience of working for several years in this context, it is assumed that the teachers in this study were somewhat representative of primary schools in Myanmar in terms of their qualifications, received curriculum training, available resources, and workload. On this basis, the author would suggest that the findings of this research are relevant to an understanding of what happens in state primary schools in Myanmar, particularly regarding the implementation of the new CLT curriculum. However, the author acknowledges that future research will be necessary to delve deeper into these aspects.

This research can serve as a valuable reference for policymakers, educators, and researchers in different countries grappling with curriculum reforms, especially developing countries with similar contexts in state education sector where a nation-wide curriculum is used. It also underscores the importance the pivotal role of teacher training in facilitating the successful implementation of educational innovations, recommending to offer comprehensive teacher training programs instead of a short-term cascade model training, and most importantly to consider teachers' beliefs, past experiences, voices as well as the contexts in the process of curriculum development and teacher training.

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About the author

Phyo Wai Tun is an English language teacher from Myanmar with over seven years of experience in the public education sector. He has successfully led several teacher professional development programs for English language teachers in developing countries. His interests lie in teacher education and development, and in exploring teaching practices of local expert teachers, especially in difficult circumstances, with the goal of embracing and empowering them.

Appendix A: Lesson extract from grade 2 English textbook

Unit 6 What we wear



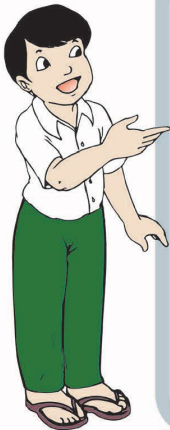
Listen and tick.

			<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">I'm wearing a yellow blouse.</div>



Draw and say.

I'm wearing ...



Appendix B: Objectives and principles of the grade 2 English curriculum

Table 2. Specific objectives of the grade 2 English curriculum by Strand.

Reading & Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language	Culture
1. read and write words and expressions in the textbook	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> listen to and understand stories, short talks, and songs produce intelligible English and prosody in short talks and conversations perform short talks in English such as describing pictures, presenting project work, or introducing classmates or oneself make simple suggestions demonstrate interests in communicative activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> use structures learnt in class to communicate feelings, thoughts and information understand and use vocabulary related to the textbook topics in communicative situations 	1. develop an interest in learning about other cultures through participating in language learning activities and understanding and discussing lesson contents

Note. Summarized from “Teacher’s Guide for Grade 2 English,” by Ministry of Education, 2018a, & “New Primary Curriculum Introduction Training Workshop (Grade 2 Training Handbook),” by Ministry of Education, 2018c. Copyright 2018 by the Basic Education Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbook Committee.

Table 3. Curriculum principles as highlighted in teacher’s guide.

Focus	Intended Principles
Language-focused lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To learn English phrases or vocabulary for communication To listen to the language through the teacher’s demonstration and try to guess the meaning To participate in various kinds of challenging and enjoyable language drills To use the language in communicative situations, enjoy language learning games, engage in more challenging practice, or practice writing the language To progress from listening and understanding the language to practicing the language and lastly to expanding on the practice
Skill-focused lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To practice either listening or speaking skills To learn a song, listen to a story, or prepare for a presentation Stage 1: to learn words or background information that will help them understand a story/song or do a presentation Stage 2: to practice singing a song/doing a presentation or listen to a story Stage 3: to perform in front of the class, demonstrate their understanding of the story, or do a slightly more difficult task

Reading and writing lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To learn how to write and say words beginning with each letter of the alphabet ▪ To listen, say and trace: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teacher first does an oral introduction of each word - students guess the meaning - students practice reading and tracing the words ▪ To do reading and writing activity
Letter review lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To consolidate their knowledge of the words and letters they practiced writing in the previous lessons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feature a series of word reading and writing activities - students evaluate the extent to which they could read and write the words
Language review lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To consolidate the language they learned in the previous lessons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consist a series of activities in which students recall the previously learnt language in practice or communication activities - students evaluate the extent to which they could use the language in the textbook activities
Project-based lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To use all the language they have learnt in the previous two units to complete a project
Pair work/Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider pair work as a good opportunity for the students to speak the target language ▪ Advise teachers to give many opportunities for the students to work together during each unit
Assessment Classroom language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use informal and formative assessment. ▪ Use classroom language in English

Note. Summarized from “Teacher’s Guide for Grade 2 English,” by Ministry of Education, 2018a, & “New Primary Curriculum Introduction Training Workshop (Grade 2 Training Handbook),” by Ministry of Education, 2018c. Copyright 2018 by the Basic Education Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbook Committee.

Appendix C: Intended principles and teachers' practices

Table 4. *Intended principles and teachers' practices.*

Focus	Intended Principles	Teachers' Practices
Reading and writing lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To do oral introduction of each word ▪ Students guess the meaning ▪ To learn meaning of the words through interaction ▪ To practice reading and tracing the words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gave its direct meaning in L1 ▪ Focused on repetition drill ▪ Omitted reading and writing activities
Language-focused lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To learn English phrases or vocabulary for communication ▪ To listen to the language through the teacher's demonstration and try to guess the meaning ▪ To use the language in communicative situations, enjoy language learning games, engage in more challenging practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broke down the sentence into parts and taught them by translating into L1. ▪ Focused on explicit sentence analysis, and use of L1 to explain every word. ▪ Focused on repetition drill
Skill-focused lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To practice either listening or speaking skills ▪ To learn a song, listen to a story, or prepare for a presentation ▪ To learn words or background information to sing a song, do a presentation or listen to a story ▪ To perform in front of the class, demonstrate their understanding of the story, or do a slightly more difficult task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Omitted listening activities ▪ Read lines and translated them into students' native language ▪ Did not give opportunity for students to do presentation ▪ Focused on content and meaning
Review lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To consolidate the language they learned in the previous lessons ▪ To feature a series of activities in which students recall the previously learnt language in practice or communication activities ▪ Students evaluate the extent to which they could use the language in the textbook activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Omitted interactive activities (pair work) ▪ Omitted 'self-assessment' ▪ Focused on meaning ▪ Focused on reading aloud ▪ Reviewed just words and meaning focusing on repetition drill
Project-based lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To use all the language they have learnt in the previous two units to complete a project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focused on revision ▪ Omitted projects
Pair work/Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To consider pair work as a good opportunity for the students to speak the target language ▪ To give many opportunities for the students to work together during each unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The teacher led most activities. ▪ Classroom interaction was teacher to the class
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To use informal and formative assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Omitted self-assessment
Classroom language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To use English as a classroom language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did not use English

Note. Intended principles are summarized from "Teacher's Guide for Grade 2 English," by Ministry of Education (2018a) & "Grade 2 Training Handbook," by Ministry of Education (2018c).