

English Teachers' Understanding of Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed at exploring English teachers' understanding of the Basic Education Core Curriculum in Thailand and to investigate the contributing factors. The selected research with triangulation design was used to analyze the data, which was obtained from 66 English teachers. The drawings and questionnaire data showed that most teachers possessed 'impeding understanding', which may interfere with the development of a localized school curriculum. No clear trend was found in the present study on how teachers' professional experiences, teachers' qualifications, professional development activities, and involvement in curriculum development may contribute to teachers' comprehension, as suggested in previous studies. The findings on teachers' lack of understanding of the Core Curriculum after ten years of its implementation indicate the pressing needs to carefully design the implementation of the new national curriculum the Ministry of Education is developing. Effective communication processes and continual in-service professional development activities are recommended. Further investigation on how to effectively provide in-service professional development activities in Thai schools to promote teachers' understanding of a new educational policy will be needed.

Keywords: teacher understanding, standards-based curriculum, Thailand basic education, curriculum implementation

1. Introduction

1.1 Teachers' Understanding and Curriculum Implementation

"Educational change is technically simple and socially complex" since it involves thousands of stakeholders (Fullan, 2015, p. 67). Implementation of a new national curriculum, which can bring about important changes in the country's educational system, consists of both the technical, step-by-step processes that can be planned and the emerging processes that are complicated and unpredictable (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). The implementation approaches and processes may vary from country to country depending on what educational system is enacted: centralized or decentralized (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). Regardless of the system, careful planning for the implementation is key to success (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Ornstein and Hunkins explained that planning how to introduce the change to people is as important as planning how to modify the program and the organizational process.

In curriculum implementation, teachers are key actors (Datnow, 2020; Fullan, 2015; Loima, 2020; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Their beliefs, understanding, knowledge, desire to change, and commitment, to name a few, have been found to affect the adoption of a new curriculum (Beni et al., 2017; Crary, 2019; Datnow, 2020; Komba & Mwandangi, 2015; Loima, 2008, 2020; Ng, 2017; Nomnian, 2013; Vandeyar, 2017; Vitikka et al., 2012). Changes in teachers' use of instructional materials, instructional approaches, and beliefs, in line with the intention of the new curriculum, are evidence of successful implementation (Fullan, 2015; cf. Yang, 2015). To ensure a full adoption of a new curriculum, teachers first need to understand the goal of the new curriculum, and second, what they need to do to achieve the goal since the new curriculum usually introduces new ideas, activities, or structures for how to provide education (Fullan, 2015). Without a clear understanding or 'clarity' of the goals and means of the new curriculum, teachers cannot fulfill the expected learning outcomes (Govender,

2018; Pak et al., 2020; Porter et al., 2015). They may adopt the curriculum superficially (Datnow, 2020; Fullan, 2015) or resist the implementation of the new curriculum (Loima, 2008, 2020; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

In Thailand, the national curriculum framework, Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (hereafter Core Curriculum), has been implemented since the academic year 2009 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2008). This curriculum is the second version of the standards-based curriculum employed in the country. The Core Curriculum provides the framework including the guiding principles and minimum standards (i.e., time structure and indicators) for the development of a localized school curriculum that responds to the context of the community and schools (MoE, 2008). Considering the length of the implementation time, the Core Curriculum should have been ‘institutionalized’ or built into the system already (Fullan, 2015). However, studies that investigated the implementation of the Core Curriculum have shown mixed results—both successful and failed implementation (e.g., Jaitrong & Intarak, 2011; Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Nonthaisong & Mantero, 2017; Pramann & Pramann, 2016; Radchakom, 2014; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014; Yuakkul et al., 2019). One common challenge in the implementation was found to be teachers’ lack of understanding of how to design the school curriculum or courses to suit the local context (e.g., Jaitrong & Intarak, 2011; Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Pramann & Pramann, 2016; Radchakom, 2014; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012).

Since most of the recent studies about the Core Curriculum focused on the implementation in one educational service area or one province only, the present study aimed to gain a wider perspective of this phenomenon, a decade after the first launch, through cases of English teachers who were from different schools and different areas of the country. Considering the nature of English language learning, English courses should be localized, i.e., using content and communicative contexts that are relevant to the students (MoE, 2008; cf. Lightbown, 2014; Richards, 2015). How English teachers conceptualized the ‘localization’ principles in the Core Curriculum is thus critical for the quality of English education (Nomnian, 2013; Vibulphol, 2012). Factors that may explain their understanding were also examined as previous studies have shown that they can affect teachers’ understanding (Ahmad, 2014; Alsubaie, 2016; Apau, 2021; Choppin 2011; Crary, 2019; Datnow, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018; Vandeyar, 2017; Zhao et al., 2020). The present study may be small in scale, but the findings could reflect the situations in many public schools in Thailand. The insights gained from this investigation are worth noting when planning the implementation of the new national curriculum.

1.2 Research Questions

The present study aimed to investigate the following questions:

- 1) How did English teachers understand the key principles of the Core Curriculum?
- 2) What factors might have contributed to their understanding?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers as Agents in Curriculum Implementation

In the context of curriculum implementation, Fullan (2015) argued that teachers reside in the heart of the implementation. They are considered as “key agents” to bring a new curriculum to the classroom (Alsubaie, 2016; Obi & Ticha, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018; Richards, 2015; Vibulphol, 2012) and to create a meaningful educational change (Vandeyar, 2017). However, the roles of teachers are normally restricted. Instead of engaging in the process of the curriculum development, teachers appeared to be left out and performed a passive practitioner role—merely followed the policy (Alsubaie, 2016; Obi & Ticha, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018). Teachers’ voices are not always heard and considered when the curriculum is being developed (Obi & Ticha, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018). This lack of teachers’ involvement can result in different interpretations of the curriculum from the intention of the policymakers and thus fail to deliver the instruction towards the intended outcomes (Ahmad, 2014; Dubetz, 2014; Sim & Print, 2009).

The success of the curriculum implementation is often attributed to teachers’ understanding of the curriculum (Nolan & Meister, 2000; Rahman et al., 2018; Rusydi et al., 2020). Were teachers to have thorough knowledge of how to expertly execute the curriculum, the outcomes would be favorable. Several factors have been identified to mediate or inhibit teachers’ understanding such as teachers’ involvement in the curriculum implementation (Ahmad, 2014; Alsubaie, 2016; Choppin 2011; Rahman et al., 2018), teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards a new curriculum (Ahmad, 2014; Zhao et al., 2020), how the new curriculum is communicated to stakeholders (Crary, 2019; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Vandeyar, 2017), opportunities for collaboration and discussion among teachers (Apau, 2021; Datnow, 2020; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018), organizational support (Zhao et al., 2020), and witnessing positive changes in students (Zhao et al., 2020).

2.2 Basic Education Core Curriculum and Its Implementation

Since 2009, the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) has been implemented as the national curriculum framework for Grades 1 to 12 in Thailand (MoE, 2008). To achieve the national unity in exhibiting quality education while embracing the diversity of the local contexts, the Core Curriculum provides a flexible framework and guiding principles for school curriculum design (MoE, 2008). To ensure success in implementing this standards-based Core Curriculum, curriculum developers and teachers need to understand the purpose, goals, and the technical requirements of the Core Curriculum as well as their own local context (MoE, 2008; cf. Ahmad, 2014; Nolan & Meister, 2000). In addition, coordinated efforts among educational service area offices, schools, and community are needed (MoE, 2008; cf. Gujarati, 2011; Hodges & Jong, 2014; Ogawa et al., 2003).

Several key principles of the Core Curriculum are essential for designing a localized school curriculum (MoE, 2008). First, the goal for basic education in Thailand is to promote learner's holistic development—knowledge, physical strength, and morality. This goal is translated into five key competencies and eight desirable characteristics in the Core Curriculum. Second, every school is responsible for designing a school curriculum that meets the minimum requirements of the Core Curriculum and corresponds to its emphases, resources, and local contexts. These requirements are described as the learning standards, indicators, learning areas, learning time, and assessment criteria. Additional learning standards and indicators may be added. Third, the Core Curriculum prescribes a structure for school curricula to include three types of courses: basic courses, additional courses, and learner development activities, but the number of courses or how to design courses in each learning area is not specified. Lastly, the teaching and learning activities should be designed and conducted based on the learner-centered approach, recognizing the potential of all learners in the learning process and responding to their individual differences.

For English teachers, they need to understand the details in the foreign language learning area specifically since English is the required subject in this learning area (MoE, 2008). The indicators for each grade are prescribed under four learning strands and eight learning standards. Each indicator combines a few language skills and communicative functions with no prescribed content. For example, an indicator in the standard 1.2 for grade 9 is “Speak and write to describe their own feelings and opinions about various matters, activities, experiences and news/incidents, as well as provide justifications appropriately” (p.281). This indicator can be broken down to at least four learning outcomes, two speaking and two writing lessons. With this kind of indicator description, the design of English basic courses in each school could vary greatly, in terms of course structure, content and activities (Richards, 2015; Saengboon, 2013; Vibulphol, 2012). To design a ‘signature’ English curriculum that reflects the unique contexts of the school, teachers’ understanding surely plays an important role (cf. Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Thailand Development Research Institute [TDRI], 2020).

The Core Curriculum was first implemented in 555 model schools in the academic year 2009, then in the rest of the schools in the country in 2010 (MoE, 2008). Since teachers serve as implementers of the learning standards in standards-based curriculum (Alsubaie, 2016; Obi & Ticha, 2020), they need to be well informed of how to translate the standards into practice. Before the official launch of the Core Curriculum, representative teachers from the model schools and the educational supervisors in the area were required to attend workshops on how to design a school curriculum (Jaitrong & Intarak, 2011). Follow up or continual professional development activities about the implementation of the Core Curriculum are questionable (Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Radchakom, 2014; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014).

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research with triangulation design was employed to guide the data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Data from two sources were triangulated to explore teacher's understanding of the Core Curriculum and the contributing factors.

3.2 Participants

The participants comprised 66 in-service English teachers who attended a workshop, entitled “From Core Curriculum to a Signature English Curriculum”. The workshop participants were asked to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. They were informed of the purpose of the study and the confidentiality protection and asked to return the workshop materials after the workshop if they were willing to participate in the study.

In total, 69 workshop participants returned a complete set of materials, but three were excluded from the study since their drawings were not clear. Their age ranged between 25 and 59 years old ($\bar{x} = 40.55$, S.D. = 10.41). About half of them had backgrounds in education—received a bachelor's degree in education with an English

major (55.38%). A similar number continued their studies in the graduate level, having a master's degree (49.23%) or a Ph.D. (1.54%). They all taught English at the secondary education level. Most of them taught Grades 10-12 (85.07%), but a small number also had classes with elementary school students (5.97%). The number of teaching years ranged from one and a half years to thirty-eight years with an average number of 15.12 years (S.D. = 10.40).

Regarding the involvement with curriculum development activities, the participants had different experiences (see Appendix A). Only one-fifth of the participants, 14 out of 66, were involved in the school curriculum development. About half of the participants reported having designed the curriculum for the foreign language learning area (54.55%) and course syllabuses (50%). The activity that most participants were involved with was planning lessons for their own subjects (78.79%).

When asked about how they learned about the Core Curriculum, approximately 60 percent reported studying the Core Curriculum by themselves, half had taken a training organized by OBEC, educational service area offices, or schools, and about 20 percent studied about it from classes when studying at a university (see Appendix A).

3.3 Research Instruments

Two research instruments were used to collect the data, a drawing worksheet and a questionnaire. The two materials were originally designed as workshop materials by the first author. They were used at the beginning of the workshop to assess the participants' background knowledge.

The drawing worksheet was used to examine the participants' understanding of the underlying principles for implementing the Core Curriculum. Drawings were used as the main source of data because a teacher's understanding is often described as complicated and multidimensional, and visuals can enrich layers of data and provide knowledge beyond what texts can do (Glaw et al., 2017; van Manen, 2006). On the worksheet, the participants were asked to draw a picture or a visual representation of the relationship between the Core Curriculum and the school curriculum. They were also asked to write a brief description of their picture or visual representation. The instructions on the worksheet were in English, but the participants' responses could be in both English and Thai.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 items and was divided into two parts. The first part was used to collect demographic information including age, educational background, and the number of teaching years. The second part consisted of ten multiple-choice items. The first two items were used to examine the participants' experiences with curriculum development and prior trainings and the other eight items were used to check their understanding of the key principles of the Core Curriculum, especially for developing a school curriculum. The questionnaire was in Thai to prevent any misunderstanding caused by English proficiency.

3.4 Data Collection, Limitations of the Study and Research Ethics

The data were collected between July and August 2018 in the workshop "From Core Curriculum to a Signature English Curriculum," which was facilitated by the first two authors. The workshop was offered to Thai teachers in public schools, as one of the choices in the "Teacher Coupon Project 2018," organized by the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC), Ministry of Education. The data were collected in three locations, one in the central region (Nontaburi), one in the eastern region (Rayong), and the other in the northeastern region (Khon Kaen). The data collection process did not affect the time of the workshop nor alter any workshop activities since the research instruments were the workshop materials, designed and used as a part of the workshop.

In each location, sixty English teachers from various provinces in the region and elsewhere attended the workshop. Being informed of the study and other confidentiality measures, the participants who were willing to take part in the study were asked to return the drawing worksheet and the questionnaire to the staff at the end of the workshop. Only the participants who returned a complete set of materials and whose drawings were clear were included in the study. After checking the returned materials, the data from 66 participants were employed in this study.

Two limitations were considered when interpreting the findings. First, given the nature of the workshop activities, the originality of the responses the participants completed in the drawing worksheet and the questionnaire was not controllable. Second, clarification with the participants about the responses they provided was not possible since no contact information was collected at the time of the workshops.

Regarding research ethics, the identity of the participants was kept completely confidential. Numbers were assigned on the materials when collecting and filing. The information about the school affiliation was not collected. The data were kept in a safe place and only the researchers had access to them and they will be deleted after the completion of the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Two sets of data were analyzed and used for triangulation purposes to respond to the two research questions. First, the teachers' understanding of the Core Curriculum principles were examined by the drawings and triangulated with the questionnaire data. Second, the factors that may contribute to the teachers' understanding were examined by observing the patterns in the data from the teachers with facilitative understanding.

To analyze the data from the drawing worksheets, open coding (Creswell, 2003) was employed. The drawings were first reviewed and classified by the first two researchers separately without any prior categories. The description provided in the worksheet was not considered in the analysis (Glaw et al., 2017). The drawings were reviewed and coded multiple times to observe the patterns in the data. The drawings were not classified based on the actual drawing, but the intended meaning about the relationship between the Core Curriculum and the school curriculum. After arriving at the decision for categorization individually, meetings were convened to examine the codes and the initial themes. Similarities and differences in the coding and categorization were discussed to gain understanding of the data (McDonald et al., 2019; Turner, 2020). Finally, six categories emerged from the data, which were employed to describe different understandings about the relationship between the Core Curriculum and the school curriculum, and were grouped under three themes, considering the potential effects on the school curriculum development.

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages, average scores, and standard deviation. The data from the last eight items in the questionnaire were used to triangulate with the data from the drawing sheets to describe the teachers' understanding (Creswell et al., 2003). The data about the educational background, professional experiences (years of teaching), involvement in curriculum development activities, and prior trainings were analyzed qualitatively as factors that may contribute to the teachers' understanding.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Teachers' Understanding of the Core Curriculum Principles

The data from the two sources showed the same trend. The English teachers who participated in this study seemed to lack understanding of the key principles of the Core Curriculum, especially on how to develop a localized school curriculum. This finding is consistent with many previous studies in Thailand conducted in the early years after the first launch of the Core Curriculum until recently (e.g., Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Pramann & Pramann, 2016; Radchakom, 2014; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014). The following two sections elaborate on the findings from the drawing worksheets and the questionnaires.

4.1.1 Relationship Between the Core Curriculum and the School Curriculum

The drawings showed six different categories of understanding about the relationship between the Core Curriculum and the school curriculum. These categories were grouped under three themes: impeding understanding, facilitative understanding, and initial understanding, considering the potential effects each theme of understanding may have on the development of a localized school curriculum (cf. Burimas & Nakaro, 2013; Radchakom, 2014; Nillapun et al., 2015; Pramann & Pramann, 2016).

The first theme, *impeding understanding*, was the largest, and most concerned group (n = 54). Three categories of understanding were found in this theme: Core Curriculum as the Template, Partial Relationship, and School Curriculum as a Part of the Core Curriculum. These drawings reflected two types of misunderstandings, which may obstruct the development of the school curriculum in the way that the Core Curriculum intended (cf. Nillapun et al., 2015; Pramann & Pramann, 2016).

The first type of *impeding understanding* was reflected in the Core Curriculum as the Template category, which consisted of 23 drawings. Figure 1 shows a sample of the drawings in this category. The teachers who viewed the Core Curriculum as the template may not be aware that the Core Curriculum only provides a framework and minimum requirements, so schools need to design their own unique curriculum. This finding may explain why many schools around the country were found to have adopted the curriculum designed by the model schools, regardless of the school contexts (e.g., Burimas & Nakaro, 2013; Radchakom, 2014; TDRI, 2020).

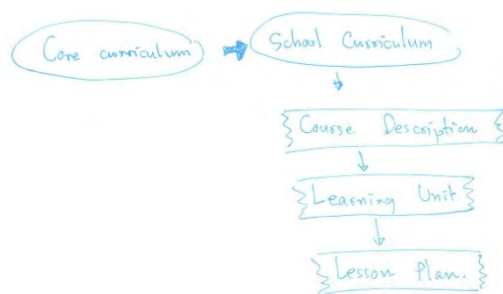


Figure 1. Core Curriculum as the Template (Impeding) (n=23)

The second type of *impeding understanding* was reflected in the second and third categories, Partial Relationship and School Curriculum as a Part of Core Curriculum. The drawings in the Partial Relationship category (n=19) showed the intersection of two circles—one representing the school curriculum and the other, the Core Curriculum (see Figure 2 for a sample). The intersection area seems to be the only part in the Core Curriculum that the school curriculum entails. The drawings in the School Curriculum as a Part of Core Curriculum category (n = 12) also suggested a selection of components from the Core Curriculum (see Figure 3 for a sample). The difference this third category had was that the drawings in this category did not show any part unique to the school. The whole school curriculum came from one part of the Core Curriculum.

The drawings in these two categories tend to suggest that a large number of teachers (half of the participants in this study) did not understand the concept of a standards-based curriculum, whose components are the minimum requirements that all school curricula need to fulfill (MoE, 2008; cf. Kibler, Valdés, & Walqui, 2014; Martin-Beltran & Percy, 2012; Nillapun et al., 2015; Wahlström et al, 2020). This finding seems to correspond with the consistently low performance of the students on the national examination, Ordinary National Educational Test (ONET) (National Institute of Educational Testing Service [NIETS], n.d.). If the school curriculum and instructional activities do not comply with the minimum standards of the Core Curriculum, it will be difficult for the students to develop the expected competencies (cf. TDRI, 2020).

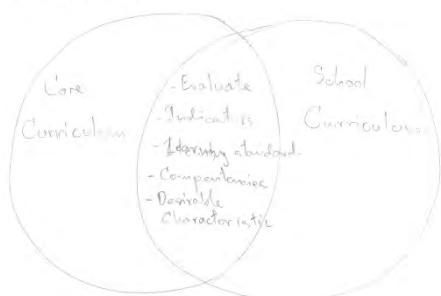


Figure 2. Partial Relationship (Impeding) (n=19)

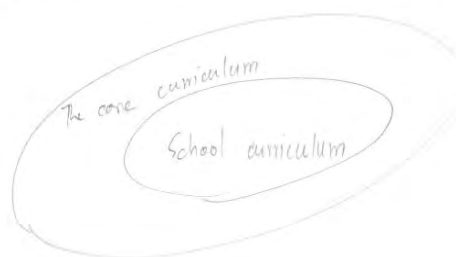


Figure 3. School Curriculum as a Part of Core Curriculum (Impeding) (n=12)

For the second theme, *facilitative understanding*, nine drawings were included. The drawings in this theme showed the teachers’ understanding that may facilitate the localization of the school curriculum (cf. Burimas & Nakaro, 2013; Radchakom, 2014; Nillapun et al., 2015; Pramann & Pramann, 2016). The nine drawings in this theme reflected the same concept that each school curriculum should be unique, but is based on the Core Curriculum. This interpretation is aligned with the intention of the Core Curriculum (MoE, 2008). Unfortunately, after ten years of its implementation, this facilitative understanding was not found to be the major trend of the understanding of the teachers in this study (cf. TDRI, 2020). Considering the implementation time, the Core Curriculum should have been firmly adopted in the system (Fullan, 2015).

Two categories were employed in this theme. In the first category, Core Curriculum as the Core of School Curriculum, five out of nine drawings were coded in this category. This group of teachers presented a school curriculum with a two-layered circle (see Figure 4 for a sample drawing). The inside layer depicted the elements of the Core Curriculum and the outer layer represented the local context. The other four drawings were categorized as School Curriculum as Varieties of Core Curriculum. Figure 5 shows one kind of variety. In this

drawing, the teacher presented the Core Curriculum as cow’s milk which can be flavored and made into milk with different flavors just like how each school curriculum can be localized and has unique characteristics.

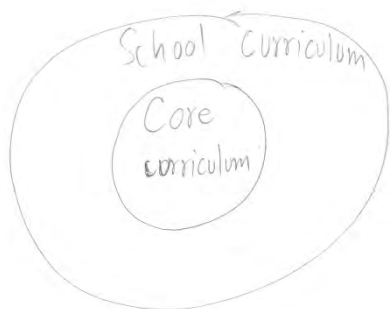


Figure 4. Core Curriculum as the Core of School Curriculum (Facilitative) (n=5)



Figure 5. School Curriculum as Varieties of Core Curriculum (Facilitative) (n=4)

The third theme, *initial understanding*, consisted of three drawings. The drawings in this theme presented the Core Curriculum and the school curriculum as jigsaw pieces, or two elements of one whole (Figure 6). These drawings tend to suggest that the teachers in this group understand that the Core Curriculum should be employed fully and the school curriculum should have some unique characteristics. However, they depicted them as two separate elements, not as integral parts where the Core Curriculum is built into the school curriculum as it should be (cf. MoE, 2008). The drawings in this theme were categorized separately from the second theme according to this interpretation. The application of this understanding has not been shown in any previous studies, however.

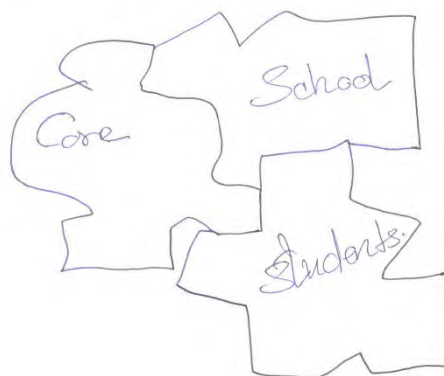


Figure 6. School Curriculum and Core Curriculum as Jigsaw Pieces (Initial) (n=3)

4.1.2 Questionnaire Data

Consistent with the findings from the drawings, overall, the teachers did not perform well on the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The average score was only 4.83 (Total score = 8, SD = 1.59). When examining each item individually, only two items obtained over seventy percent of correct responses (Item 3, 75.76%; Item 8, 83.33%). This lack of understanding of the Core Curriculum was found in many studies in Thailand (e.g., Jaitrong & Intarak, 2011; Nillapun et al., 2015; Radchakom, 2014; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012).

Similar to the findings from the drawings, the question concerning the relationship between the Core Curriculum and the school curriculum (Item 6) received the smallest number of correct responses (25.76%). When asked which document a new teacher should study first, only one-fourth of the teachers chose the school curriculum. Half of the teachers chose the Core Curriculum to be studied. This shows the lack of understanding that a school curriculum is based on the Core Curriculum. In other words, if the new teacher understands the school curriculum, they will already be able to design their instruction and assessment in alignment with the Core Curriculum. Another interpretation is that in many schools, the school curriculum may not reflect the unique

characteristics of the school and its context (cf. Burimas & Nakaro, 2013; Radchakom, 2014; Nillapun et al., 2015; Pramann & Pramann, 2016), some teachers may then not be aware of the importance of the school curriculum (cf. TDRI, 2020).

The item receiving the highest rate of correct responses addresses the Core Curriculum principle that every teacher had taken part, which is about how to enhance learners' desirable characteristics (Item 8). Most teachers (83.33%) showed their understanding of the shared responsibilities all teachers had in enhancing the desirable characteristics. This high rate of correct responses may be a result of the routine practice that all teachers had to conduct. Each semester, they are required to assess the students' desirable characteristics (MoE, 2008). In line with previous studies, this finding shows how involvement may affect teachers' understanding (cf. Nillapun et al., 2015; Obi & Ticha, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014).

Regarding the other items that addressed the details of the Core Curriculum (Item 4), the flexible framework for school curriculum design (Item 5) and the course design and management (Items 7, 9, 10), the percentages of correct responses ranged between 53.03 and 63.64. Since most teachers did not take part in designing their school curriculum, their lack of understanding in these areas is not surprising (cf. Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014).

4.2 Factors Contributing to Teachers' Understanding of the Core Curriculum

To examine the factors that may contribute to the understanding of the teachers in this study, the patterns in the questionnaire data, educational background, professional experience (years of teaching), involvement in curriculum development activities, and prior training, of the teachers with facilitative understanding were observed. No clear trend was found (see Appendix C).

First, teachers with an education degree and those without were found in this group even though the number of teachers with a Bachelor of Education may outnumber the rest. This finding suggests that the understanding of the Core Curriculum principles might not be affected by teachers' qualifications as found in some studies (cf. Pramann & Pramann, 2016; Rahman et al., 2018; Yuakkul et al., 2019). The implementation of some approaches may require specialized knowledge; teachers' educational background, therefore, impacted their understanding and the implementation of the approach (e.g., Rahman et al., 2018).

Second, professional experiences also did not seem to enhance understanding. The teachers with facilitative understanding had a wide range of professional experiences, from 1.5 to 26 years. Examining the questionnaire data, the two newest teachers performed differently. One obtained a full score while the other had almost the lowest score in the group. Moreover, the three most senior teachers did not do quite well. This triangulated trend suggests that teachers' understanding may not be based on their professional experience (cf. Saengboon, 2013; Viratkasem, 2014; Yuakkul et al., 2019).

Third, in terms of prior training about the Core Curriculum, only three of the teachers with facilitative understanding reported having previously learned about the Core Curriculum from workshops. Half of them studied the Core Curriculum by themselves. One teacher in this group did not respond to this question. These findings tend to suggest that many teachers might not have received proper professional development training (cf. Govender, 2018; Nillapun et al., 2015; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Radchakom, 2014; Rahman et al., 2018; Rusydi et al., 2020; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012). However, the teachers who reported having attended workshops about the Core Curriculum did not show better understanding than those who did not. This finding supports Vandeyar (2017) that not all kinds of professional development activities may enhance teachers' understanding (cf. Crary, 2019). Rahman et al. (2018) suggested that in-service professional development activities should be regular and based on the needs of the school and teachers. Discussion and reflections among teachers on the curriculum principles and how to implement them have also been recommended as more effective than training 'events' (Datnow, 2012; Fullan, 2000, 2010, 2015; Hargreaves, 2010; Yang, 2015). Little is known about the ones this group of teachers had attended, however (cf. Jaitrong & Intarak, 2011; Kaonawang & Phusing, 2019; Nillapun et al., 2015; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014).

Lastly, the facilitative understanding of the Core Curriculum that this group of teachers possessed did not seem to be a result of their involvement in curriculum development, as suggested in the literature (e.g., Datnow, 2020; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Vandeyar, 2017), since none of them had taken part in school curriculum development. Their participation in course design was also varied. Only five of them had a chance to design courses for the foreign language learning area or English courses. What most teachers were involved in was only writing lesson plans. These findings are consistent with previous studies in Thailand (e.g., Nillapun et al., 2015; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014) and elsewhere (e.g., Obi & Ticha, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018). Thai teachers were not given many active roles in the curriculum development process at the school

level (Nillapun et al., 2015; Seesamer & Khanto, 2012; Visessin & Sumettikoon, 2014), let alone having voices in developing the national curriculum (KomChadLuek, 2021; Nulah, 2021). When examining the questionnaire data closely, those who were involved in school curriculum development were also found to lack understanding of how to develop a localized school curriculum (many of them were found with ‘impeding understanding’) (cf. Burimas & Nakaro, 2013).

Even though the data trend may not show a clear relationship between any focused factors and teachers’ understanding, the high rate of correct responses to Item 8 of the questionnaire is worth noting. Compared to the responses in the other items, most teachers did the best on this item (83.33 % answered this question correctly). Considering that Item 8 addressed a semester routine concerning all teachers—enhancing and assessing learners’ desirable characteristics, their participation in this task seemed to help enhance their understanding of the Core Curriculum in this regard. This small finding may lend support to the literature on the importance of teachers’ involvement in curriculum implementation (e.g., Datnow, 2020; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Vandeyar, 2017).

5. Conclusion

In implementing a national curriculum framework that requires creativity of the implementers, i.e., schools and teachers, a clear understanding of the curriculum principles is a critical success factor. The findings in the present study raise questions about the effectiveness of the implementation of the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) since most teachers in this study were found to have *impeding understanding*, either viewing the Core Curriculum as the template or as a framework from which they can choose to adopt only some parts. With these types of understandings, the teachers may not be able to design a localized school curriculum or may not be able to enhance the whole set of learners’ key competencies and desirable characteristics, as intended in the Core Curriculum. For English teachers, the ability to design courses and lessons that are relevant to students’ needs for English communication is essential. The findings from the present study, though based on the data from a group of English teachers, shed some light on how the current Core Curriculum may or may not have been ‘institutionalized’ in Thai basic education schools.

When examining further, the factors found in previous studies as enhancing factors, such as educational background, years of teaching, involvement with curriculum development activities, and prior training, did not show the same effects on the teachers’ understanding in the present study. Considering these findings, the implementation plan for the new basic education curriculum, which is currently developed, should be designed carefully to ensure the understanding of teachers and the other stakeholders. To secure a full adoption of an important educational change as such, teachers need to clearly understand the goals of the curriculum and how to achieve those goals. Therefore, the implementation process should provide adequate time and opportunities for teachers to make sense of the new curriculum and to promote a sense of ownership. Lastly, schools should support teachers’ learning in professional learning communities. In this study, only a small number of teachers reported having discussed the Core Curriculum with colleagues. This is concerning since it suggests a lack of horizontal communication, which has been found to help teachers ‘make sense’ of a new curriculum.

Since the present study revealed no effects of prior trainings on teachers’ understanding of the Core Curriculum, further investigation on how to improve ongoing professional development activities for in-service teachers in Thailand will be worth analyzing.

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Appendix A**Participants' Experiences with Core Curriculum (Questionnaire Data) (n = 66)**

Items	Frequency	Percentages
1. What kind of experiences have you had with curriculum development or course development? (You can choose more than one answer)		
1.1 Having no experiences or responsibility in any curriculum or course development	3	4.55
1.2 Having taken part or being responsible in developing school curriculum	14	21.21
1.3 Having taken part or being responsible in developing courses for foreign language learning area	36	54.55
1.4 Having taken part or being responsible in developing English course syllabus	33	50.00
1.5 Writing lesson plans for the English courses I am teaching	51	77.27
2. How did you learn about the Core Curriculum before participating in this workshop?		
2.1 Never learned about the Core Curriculum	1	1.52
2.2 Studied the Core Curriculum myself	40	60.61
2.3 Asked my colleagues or educational supervisor(s)	8	12.12
2.4 Studied about it from some courses at the university	15	22.73
2.5 Studied about it from workshop(s) provided by OBEC, educational service area office, or school	33	50.00
2.6 Others: Please specify	1	1.52

Appendix B**Participant's Understanding of the Core Curriculum (Questionnaire data) (n= 66)**

Items	Frequency	Percentages
3. In which level of education is the Core Curriculum implemented in Thailand?		
3.1 kindergarten - grade 12	8	12.12
3.2 grade 1 - grade 9	1	1.52
√3.3 grade 1 - grade 12	50	75.76
3.4 all educational levels from primary to undergraduate	7	10.61
No response	0	0
4. Which is not the detail in the Core Curriculum?		
4.1 Indicators	1	1.52
4.2 Learning time structure	4	6.06
√4.3 Courses to be offered	45	68.18
4.4 Graduation criteria	15	22.73
No response	1	1.52
5. When developing a school curriculum, what can the school manage flexibly?		
5.1 Determining the evaluation criteria for students in each grade level	1	1.52
5.2 Identifying learners' desirable characteristics	3	4.55
5.3 Determining content and designing learning activities	18	27.27

Items	Frequency	Percentages
√5.4 All of the above	42	63.64
No response	2	3.03
6. Which document should you advise new teachers to study when they first join the school?		
6.1 Core curriculum	34	51.52
√6.2 School curriculum	17	25.76
6.3 Coursebook	1	1.52
6.4 Course syllabus	10	15.15
No response	4	6.06
7. How must schools organize courses in the curriculum for grade 12 students?		
7.1 8 subjects	4	6.06
7.2 At least 8 subjects	18	27.27
7.3 Number of subjects is not fixed. Schools can design freely based on their contexts.	8	12.12
√7.4 Number of subjects is not fixed but basic courses and additional courses must be provided.	35	53.03
No response	1	1.52
8. How must schools manage to enhance learner's desirable characteristics?		
8.1 Assign some courses to be responsible for the enhancement	0	0
8.2 Assign some basic courses to be responsible for the enhancement	2	3.03
√8.3 Assign all courses in each grade level to be responsible for the enhancement	55	83.33
8.4 Select to enhance only some characteristics that suit the students in each grade level	8	12.12
No response	1	1.52
9. Which is correct about how schools should design English courses?		
√9.1 Schools can choose to offer only English basic courses.	38	57.58
9.2 Schools must recruit foreign teachers to teach English additional courses.	8	12.12
9.3 Schools can choose whether to offer English courses for Grades 1-3.	7	10.61
9.4 Schools must design English courses to align with O-NET exam.	12	18.18
No response	1	1.52
10. How should schools manage English courses in the upper secondary education level?		
10.1 Design lessons in each academic year to cover the content in the coursebook	1	1.52
10.2 Develop learners' competencies in each semester to cover all grade-level indicators	19	28.79
√10.3 Design the basic courses to cover all interval indicators in three years	37	56.06
10.4 Use the indicators suitable for the context of school and students as the criteria when designing courses	7	10.61
No response	2	3.03

Appendix C**Teachers with Facilitative Understanding (n=9)**

Teacher	Age	Educational Background	Years of Teaching	Curriculum/Course Design Experiences	Prior Training on Core Curriculum	Understanding Questionnaire (Total 8 points)
2.5	53	B.Ed. in English	26	Writing lesson plans	Self-study	3
2.13	38	B.Ed. in English	14	Developing courses for foreign language learning area / Developing English course syllabus / Writing lesson plans	Self-study	5
2.17	26	B.Ed. in English	2	Developing English course syllabus / Writing lesson plans	No response	3
4.6	31	B.A in English	6	Writing lesson plans	Workshop	5
4.8	45	B.A. in English and Master's degree	20	Developing courses for foreign language / Writing lesson plans	Workshop	3
4.16	46	B.A. in English	21	Developing English course syllabus	Self-study	2
4.17	42	Master's degree	13	Writing lesson plans	Workshop	7
4.21	25	B.Ed. in English	1.5	Developing courses for foreign language learning area / Developing English course syllabus / Writing lesson plans	Self-study	8
4.25	33	B.Ed. in English	9	Developing courses for foreign language learning area / Developing English course syllabus / Writing lesson plans	University course	6

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