

THE SCHOOL-LEVEL CURRICULUM POLICY TRANSFER PROCESS: LEARNING FROM A RURAL SCHOOL IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Public tends to assume that high scores achievements in a National Exam are strongly related with the success of education. This study was an exploration of this phenomenon. Using grounded theory, a rural school in Indonesia in which the students could achieve relatively high scores in National exam in three academic years was studied. The study focused on how the School-Level Curriculum (SLC, Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan, KTSP) policy was interpreted and transferred from the National Education Board to the related school. The study indicated that during the curriculum policy transfer process, a number of significant ideas were adjusted and left out. Based on the findings, this study suggested that educational practitioners should be able to pin down the terms of reference in the SLC policy transfer process in order to reduce misunderstanding, and to do so, they should be equipped with strategies to implement ideas into practice, including the strategies to embed pedagogical theories within the curriculum.

Keywords : decentralization, policy transfer, rural school, School-Level Curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public assume that successful schools are those that can achieve high scores in the National Exam. *Kompas* dated June 23, 2009, for example, said that some urban schools in Semarang are considered to improve because of the students' achievement in the National Exam. Similar argument also appears in *Tempo* (June 3, 2012), which reported that the quality of a private school in Malang is of concern due to the degradation of students' score achievement in National exams from year to year. Those claims indicate that schools are considered to be good when the students in the related schools are able to achieve high scores in the National Exam. People tend to neglect that in fact such students are usually from relatively well-off families who live in the city, in which the school facilities and teachers are relatively better (*c.f.* Lareau, 2003).

Considering this fact, when *Kompas* (June 22, 2009) reported that ten poor rural elementary schools in Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta Province, Indonesia obtained high results on the National Examination (*Ujian Akhir Sekolah Berstandar Nasional*, UASBN), it was considered phenomenal since Gunungkidul is known to be challenging geographically and demographically (Pemerintah Kabupaten Gunungkidul, n.d.; Regional Development, 2005; Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010). Studies on the data from Badan Pusat Statistik in 2010, Pemerintah Gunungkidul and Regional development 2005 revealed this region in general has limited human capital, financial capital, social capital, and intellectual capital.

With less than adequate social, cultural, financial and intellectual capital, the implementation of the decentralization of the school curriculum, in which each region has to fulfill its own education needs including the school curriculum, should have made education in that district less developed and resulted in students getting poor grades on the UASBN. However, as reported, ten schools in this region had performed well on the UASBN. According to Winarti (2011), the challenge of the policy transfer process in the decentralization of education system lies on the ability of the unit involved in education practices to interpret education policies. This occurrence encouraged me to study how education policies in such area are interpreted and transferred.

To understand the policy transfer process the data collected was divided into three different sections covering hierarchy and responsibility of each education body, the understanding of the members of the school body, especially the head of the *seksi kurikulum* (curriculum section), the staff member of the *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (UPT, Technical Implementation Unit), the school principal and the classroom teachers about the *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP, School-Level Curriculum) and their understanding about the National Examination (UASBN).

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to study how the educational policies are understood and transferred, grounded theory was implemented. According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory can be used when the researcher is trying to understand the phenomenon in the field. It is said that by a systematic process of problem identification, the researcher is able to generate a theory or a pattern. This is the reason that like in any other qualitative researches, this study did not begin with the literature review.

The setting of the study was a rural elementary school, which was able to obtain high scores in the National Exams. This school was located in a relatively poor area like the one in Gunungkidul. The sources of the data were from document analysis, interviews, and observations. The documents consisted of education policies and regulations, and school reports. The interviewees and observations were people who got involved in policy transfer process, such as the staff in education department in the related district, the school principal and classroom teachers. It is important to note that in order to maintain the privacy of the research participants, the use of pseudonym in this research was applied (see Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002).

To begin collecting data, the researcher had an initial interview with the head of the education department, who was deemed to be the resource to lead to other participants, such as the interviews to the staff of *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (UPT, Technical Implementation Unit), the school principal and the classroom teachers. The main topic of the interview was their understanding of School-Level Curriculum and its implementation.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 The Hierarchy and Responsibility of Education Bodies in the District

The results of the study indicated that the regional autonomy had resulted in differences in addressing education bodies in each district in the same province. In the location where the research was conducted, it was indicated that the education department was called *Dinas Pendidikan dan Olah Raga* (Youth and Sport Department). Meanwhile, another education department in another district in the same province was divided into two; namely *Dinas Pendidikan Dasar* (Elementary Education Department) and *Dinas Pendidikan Menengah* (Secondary Education Department).

Another finding is that in the related district, the people in charge might interpret the hierarchy based on their understanding. For example, referring to Figure 1, the head of the seksi kurikulum TK dan SD (kindergarten and elementary school curriculum section) explained that the department of education at the district level is divided into 6 sections. It was indicated that among the six, only three are directly related with formal education. Those three were the sections of kindergarten elementary school education, junior high school education, and the senior and vocational school education. In addition to the three mentioned previously, it was indicated that there are another three that were not directly related with the formal school. They were *pendidikan luar biasa* (special education), and *pendidikan luar sekolah* (non-formal education), which were included into one term that is *pendidikan non-formal* (non-formal education), *kesekretariatan* (secretariat section) and *Unit Pelaksana Teknis* (UPT, Technical Implementation Unit). This does not match with the diagram since based on the diagram, the *kesekretariatan* and the UPT are not at the same level as the sections previously mentioned.

In relation to the hierarchy, it was explained that because of the regional autonomy, the education department at the district level was not responsible to the province, but to the district. It was emphasized that the relationship between the district and the province was not organizational, but coordinative. This understanding is similar to that explained by the staff of UPT. The relationship between the UPT and the education department at the district is the same as the relationship between the education department at the province level and at the district level. While the education department at the province level becomes the bridge between the national and the regional, the UPT becomes the bridge between the education departments at the district level to the individual school in a *kecamatan* (region). Regarding this approach, the staff of UPT added that the UPT served more as the extension of the education department at the district level. This indicates that the UPT was not the policy decision maker. However, an inconsistency appeared when it was explained that UPT had the right to determine whether or not the SLC developed by schools in the *kecamatan* could be proposed to the education department at the *kabupaten* (municipality) level to get approval or not.

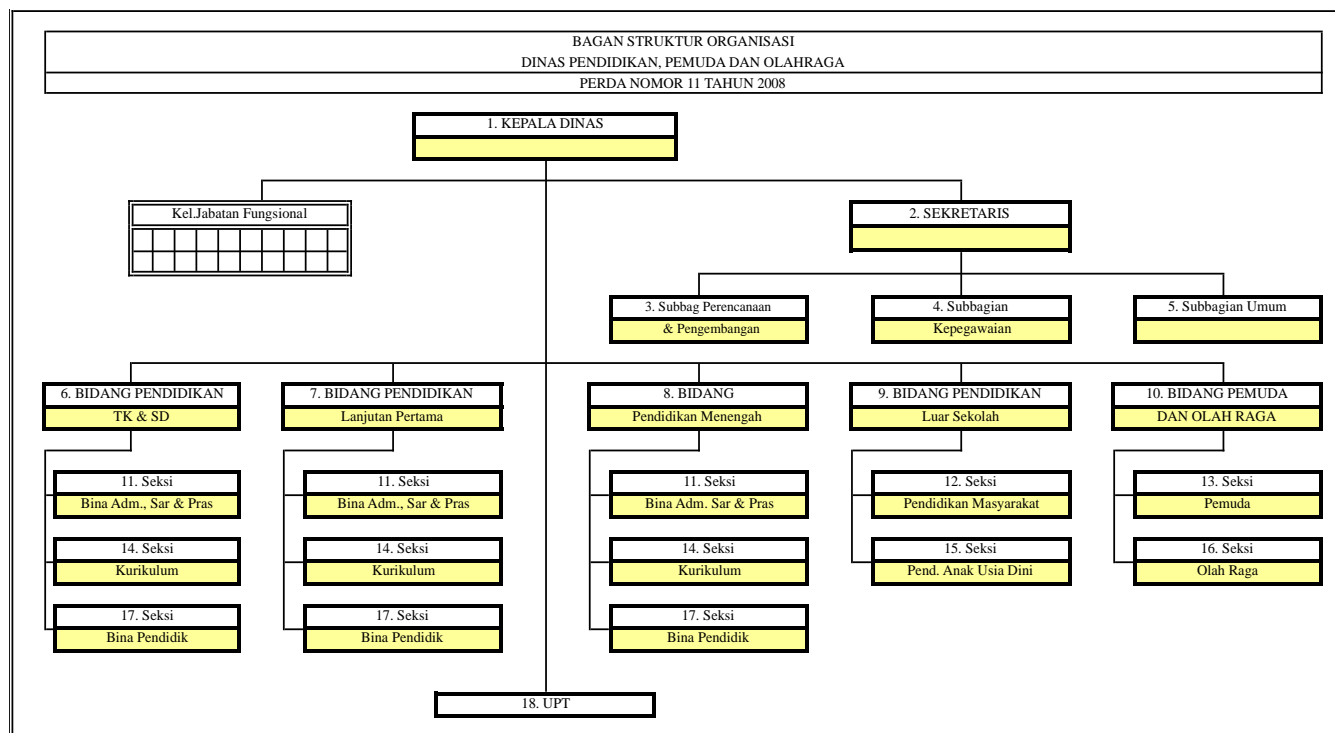


Fig. 1 The hierarchy of the education bodies

My free translation:

The hierarchy of the education bodies

1. Head of the National Education Department
2. Secretary of the National Education Department
3. Planning and Development Division
4. Staffing Division
5. Facilities and Infrastructure Division
6. Kindergarten and Elementary School Education Division
7. Junior High School Education Division
8. Senior High School Education Division
9. Informal Education Division
10. Youth and Sports Division
11. School Administration and Facilities Section
12. Community Education Section
13. Youth Section
14. Curriculum Section
15. Pre-School Section
16. Sports Section
17. Educators Enhancement Sections

3.2 School-Level Curriculum (SLC)

3.2.1 Defining School-Level Curriculum (SLC, Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan, KTSP)

Results indicated that the national government presented the national curriculum in the form of education standards. The research also revealed that the head of the *seksi kurikulum*, the staff member of the UPT, the school principal and the classroom teachers, were mandated to work together to expand the national standards so that those standards could be implemented in the individual school. However, based on the interviews, the units that were expected to work together placed different emphasis on the standards.

In relation to the understanding of the SLC, the head of *seksi kurikulum* conceptually embraced the idea of *Dokumen 1* and *Dokumen 2* that were supposed to be included in the SLC. While theoretically *Dokumen 2* should be generated from *Dokumen 1*, the head of *seksi kurikulum* did not reveal clear distinction between these concepts. Meanwhile, despite the responsibilities to check the individual school reports, including the appropriateness of the SLC of each school in *kecamatan*, the staff member of UPT did not refer to any of these documents in his understanding about SLC. It was simply mentioned that the elements in the document were checked for completion, such as the rationale of the SLC at the school level, the school vision and mission, the

local content courses (*muatan lokal*) offered in individual schools, the academic calendar, and the examples of syllabi and lesson unit plans, without indicating that SLC at the school level (*Dokumen 1*), syllabi and lesson unit plans (*Dokumen 2*) should be relevant.

Becoming more problematic, without using the terms *Dokumen 1* and *Dokumen 2* as indicated by the head of *seksi kurikulum*, the term *kurikulum sekolah* was used to refer to *Dokumen 1* and *kurikulum* for *Dokumen 2*. For classroom teachers, the term *kurikulum* is defined as lists of topics and materials to be delivered in the classroom, which should be extended in lesson plans. The classroom teachers did not indicate that these lists of topics and materials as well as their organizations should be generated from the *kurikulum sekolah* by the school principal, regardless of the professional development training the teachers had attended.

3.2.2 School-Level Curriculum Development

To make the standards more operational, the unit in the higher level in the hierarchy allowed the unit in the lower level to develop policies to make the transfer more applicable. However, the unit in the lower level in the hierarchy could not fully recognize the rationales given by the unit in the higher level in the transfer process.

Stressing the obstacles that the schools in *kabupaten* might face, the head of *seksi kurikulum* took this exception to adjust the national government policies in developing SLC. While emphasizing the steps of curriculum development suggested by the government, the head also introduced the idea of school clusters (*gugus*) and teachers' working group (*kelompok kerja guru*), in which schools and teachers in the same clusters work together to develop the SLC since the SLC was newly implemented. However, the rationale about the significance of the *gugus* and the *kelompok kerja guru* did not get strong emphasis from either the staff member of the UPT or the school principal and classroom teachers.

Similar inconsistency happened at the school level. Considering the limited human resources, the school principal adjusted the policy in developing SLC. The school principal did not actively involve stakeholders in the SLC development process as outlined by the government since the community was not well informed about curriculum development process. The national government, however, rarely recognized this challenge (cf. Pedomian pengembangan model KTSP SD sosial ekonomi rendah, 2008).

As the curriculum was developed to be more specific, the teachers developed the SLC at the institutional level into the classroom level in the form of learning instructions. In articulating the learning goals and objectives, one of the sixth grade teachers tended to be more precise according to what is listed in the *standar kompetensi lulusan*. Unlike this teacher, the other sixth grade teacher seemed to consider more the students learning. He indicated not only the formal, but also the hidden learning objectives that the students should cover.

3.2.3 School-Level Curriculum Implementation

In delivering the learning materials to the students, the first teacher followed the traditional way of teaching using deductive methods. This teacher greeted the students and began the learning by directly mentioning the topic that the students were going to study that day. This approach is completely different from the other teacher. This teacher instructed the students with experimental and contextual learning with the reason that engaging the students into learning would make the students learn better. Meanwhile, the government suggested joyful learning to make learning fun and engaging.

3.3 National Examination: Ujian Sekolah Berstandar Nasional (UASBN)

The *Undang-Undang Pendidikan Nasional* (2003) and the *Peraturan Pemerintah tentang Standar Pendidikan* (2005) explicitly indicated that the UASBN is not the only measure of Indonesian education. The results of the study of the process of the UASBN development and the blueprint of the UASBN indicated that as a measure, the UABN was lacking in validity due to the test developers and the test item coverage. While the findings indicated that as a measure, the UASBN was lacking in its validity, the interviews with the head of *seksi kurikulum*, the school principal and the sixth grade teachers revealed that they tended to treat the UASBN as if it were the only measure of academic success.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

While the presentation of the hierarchy of the school bodies provides the context of the school, the order of the categories reveals definite discontinuities of concepts and ideas in the curriculum transfer process from the national government to the school level. Some of the ideas proposed by the national government to the district are left out. The same case also happens to the transfer from the district to the UPT. At the school level, instead of generating the ideas directly from the UPT, the school appears to generate them directly from the national government with less recognition of the ideas generated from either the education department in the district or the UPT level. For example, the terms of reference of SLCs, such as *curriculum*, *SLC*, *syllabi*, *lesson plans* and *UASBN* were not recognized the same way along the various levels in the hierarchy.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are addressed to the curriculum developers and toward future research. For the curriculum designers, especially those who are directly involved in curriculum development, it is necessary to equip themselves with the knowledge of curriculum, especially development and evaluation so that they can interpret and smoothly transfer the ideas of the curriculum. The knowledge of curriculum development involving the philosophy of education and the philosophy of learning will give the curriculum designers insight to what students need to learn, and how students could better learn (cf. English, 2009; Oliva, 2009). Meanwhile the knowledge of curriculum evaluation, in which various learning measures are widely discussed, will help the curriculum designers determine the appropriate learning measures.

As Hall (1980) stated, in the communication exchange, the message delivered could be perceived differently, depending on which part of the messages is important to either the sender or the receiver. At the same time, both parties, the sender and the receiver, probably encode and decode the meaning differently. It is in this meaning making process that a message might further change. In other words, it is possible that the message from the source of information will definitely change by the time the messages reach the destination. Therefore, it is necessary to pin down terms of reference in any kind of communication to minimize misunderstanding and any discrepancy between the encoded and the decoded.

In relation to further research, as seen in every single step of the curriculum transfer process, there are often messages left out and at times, some added. It would be helpful if the process of meaning making at every single step could be clearly mapped. This clarity will contribute to the identification of appropriate materials for the curriculum training programs and the identification of the training methods appropriate to the trainees. In addition to the mapping, a specific study of test development will also be important since the results of further study could respond to questions about the validity of the existing National Tests.

In addition, studies related to education documents are needed, especially how education policies are transferred and put into practice, and how academic success is perceived and measured. These answers would provide a fuller picture of the Indonesian Education System. No less important is further study about other rural elementary schools in Indonesia. This study was conducted in a small rural area of Indonesia, which is different from other rural areas within Indonesia. This difference may also be related to difference in phenomena. Also, as in any qualitative studies, the interpretation of this study is influenced by the personal opinions of the researcher (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Although this study might offer new insight to understand the recent phenomena of the curriculum implementation in Indonesia, studies in a similar field in either the same location or in different rural schools in Indonesia are further recommended. These researches would serve to provide better perspective before other studies are authorized to cope with various challenges and opportunities for innovation in curriculum development.

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