

# **CURRICULUM INNOVATION OF AUSTRALIAN AMEP-CERTIFICATE IN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ENGLISH (CSWE)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is aimed to analyse Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) curriculum framework which is currently implemented for Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in Australia. The Curriculum framework that I presented in this writing has been implemented in Australia for more than two decades and has been researched and evaluated in delivering better output in order to foster better national economic development in the long run through English, job-seeking, and workplace skills courses. The analysis includes brief history of the curriculum, issues that have been resolved in the implementation and how modern sociolinguistic theories related to social-driven educational innovation in second language learning curriculum design has contributed CSWE development to meet the national demands.

**Keywords:** *cswe; language curriculum; curriculum innovation*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) was accredited by the NSW Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) in 1992 (NSW AMES, 1993). The Australian Government adopted this curriculum framework as the national Adult Migrant English Program to accommodate adult additional language learning as an integral part of Australian settlement program today. The settlement program was initiated after the Second World War, after huge waves of migration to Australia has become an issue due to the increased foreign investment in the country. The Australian government acknowledged that Australia has often been called as *nation of immigrants* and

therefore developed comprehensive policies in immigration, competitive tendering, labour-market development, and of course, language (Burns & Joyce, 2007) in order to instigate better social integration and economic mobility for the newcomers.

Second language learning for adult immigrants to some extent is regarded to require greater effort as they are not young anymore. There are some assumptions derived from the learner's critical period hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967) that the learner would learn the additional language better and faster in the younger age, but less effective in the post-critical period. Many debates and also studies have concluded that the phenomenon of early language learning would benefit the learner better, without giving an opportunity to see the amount of input given. However, other research revealed that the 'better' of a younger learner could achieve is only regarding native-like pronunciation ability. As an example, a research conducted by Larson-Hall (2008) described that her study found that younger starting age of the language learner makes a little difference to both phonological and basic morpho-syntactic abilities, even in a situation of minimal input.

Difference on how adult second language learning compared to how the younger learner performing is still an ongoing debate regardless that some researchers agree or disagree with the view that the younger the learner is the better. In fact, this is a potential issue that adult ESL curriculum should give attention to. There are other aspects that should be included in the teaching-learning process that accommodate variety of differences among language learners such as the adult immigrants themselves in their context.

CSWE is considered as a learning curriculum from the perspective of the framework it encompasses, which will be elaborated in further discussion in this paper. I am inclined to the definition suggested by Stenhouse seeing curriculum as a process (1975, as cited by Nunan, 1988, p. 13): "An attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice." Stenhouse's model in curriculum was developed within the context that integrates political, social and educational aspects consist of parts relating to planning, empirical study and justification. In the framework of language learning, Richards (2001, as

cited in Graves, 2008 p. 149) defines language curriculum development is “an interrelated set of processes that focuses on designing, revising, implementing and evaluating language programs.”

However, curriculum can also be regarded as a set of products developed by policy makers. Education is often seen as technical exercise, which developed under managerial control over all aspects of education. In this model, curriculum is designed to fulfill certain needs, and objectives are set to achieve needs and later taken into classroom to be applied, and the outcomes of education are then measured. View on curriculum as a product receives criticism because it neglects social aspects to guide the process of the curriculum. The focus on only measuring outcomes of the education reflects that the educators are only judged by their products of their performance, and there are very limited opportunities for educators to take the advantage of their interactions with their learners. Above all that, the curriculum only exists outside the classroom, whereas the learner’s learning experiences were not taken into account.

These two major views on curriculum can be utilised as a standpoint to analyse how certain curriculum frameworks are developed to account for innovation. Obviously, having such characteristics that a curriculum is regarded as a product, there will be very limited innovation that can be represented in the development process. On the other hand, having characteristics of curriculum as a process, there would be potential to develop and innovate the curriculum to account for different aspects of the needs in order to make the curriculum better in state and more effective in its implementation. Therefore, in the following discussion I will analyse how CSWE is innovative to some extent by taking a close look on how it was planned, implemented and reviewed.

## **BRIEF HISTORY**

To analyse the current curriculum framework of Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) for Adult migrant English learners in Australia, I found that it is important to understand how this came into place in the beginning. As we all know that the fact that Australia is comprised of multicultural and multilingual inhabitants is started back as long as 1788, which is recorded as the arrival of the first

British settlers in Sydney. From that point of time, the settlers' population grows to more than a million people in the 1860s after the discoveries of gold mining in the east Australia.

The development of the economy due to huge amount of natural resources requires the government at that time to open huge immigration policy to enable more people to come to Australia to support the demand of manpower. Later, as more people coming to Australia having no English language background, the government revise the regulation to only open migration access to those who are English literate. Onward to the enactment, more and more people from Europe migrated to Australia until it ceased in the beginning of World War 2.

However, after the World War 2, due to migration inactivity during the war, the problem of manpower shortage has again come to surface. An immediate action needs to be place in order to increase production of the idle factories and mining and for the reason of defence. Hence, agreements with Britain and some other countries to find possible sources of migrants across Europe made into realization. Later in 1945, the Australian government launched immigration campaign in a large-scale to building the country's post-war infrastructure (Allender, 1998).

Migrants with no English background are provided with English language tuition program, which was started in Bonegilla in 1948. This is the starting of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) which in 1951 being formalised by the agreement between the commonwealth and state government. The agreement in December 1951 enables the state Education Departments to take over all aspects of adult migrant education and requested the commonwealth to reimburse the expenditure incurred. This means that the states are authorized to continue the class activities and provide trainings and supervision. The commonwealth, on the other hand, is providing the textbook and teaching material and teacher trainings through the Commonwealth Department of Education and the Commonwealth Department of immigration provides the key control and the funding. This language program was later growing in size, scope and expertise in line with the needs of new migrants were understood (Martin, 1998).

## CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENTS

Later in the late 1970s, after having peaks and falls along the way as well as emerging issues due to increasing number of immigrants and shortage of skilled labour for economic advancement in the 1980s, the government conducted changes in migrant selection system. In late 1978, a joint commonwealth/State committee was established to develop on-arrival component of the program encompassing aspect of methodology, assessment and evaluation and to develop and approach to the content of the course (Martin, 1998). Among the features suggested were; focus on learner, focus on use, focus on social interaction and respond to the learner's felt analysis. Consequently, the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings Scale (ASLPR) was developed (currently known as the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings Scale or ISLPR). This methodology was developed to assessing placement, evaluating progress, setting goals to guide course design and delivery and provide referral and guidance of clients and the setting of longer-term English language objectives within which the AMEP might operate (Martin, 1998 p. 20). Finally, based on the AMEP National Plan 1990-1992, Adult Migration Education Services (AMES) NSW developed a national accredited curriculum framework of Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE) which was implemented nationally in 1993 and adopted the framework as the national AMEP curriculum.

CSWE was developed to meet the demand of policies from the federal government during the economic restructure in which competency based training focused on outcomes is the solution to make education to be more responsive to demands from the labour markets and more accountable to funding authorities. The curriculum framework of CSWE is centralize and out-come driven. It is contrasted with the previous curriculum development practices in the former AMEP classroom, where teachers are given full access to design and deliver the lesson to meet individual learner needs with very little accountability (Burns, 2003).

The Australian government, in this light, has taken ESL program into a very different level. Starting as a policy to increase the population, recruiting manpower, to the improvements of language learning service, has made Australia very dominant in the field. Numerous attempt of revisions setting the teaching-learning frame-

work to tendering the English program to private providers in 1997 has bring a successful result for the language learning program itself and in return to provide long term economic benefit and savings to the government. A note to be taken is that the long process of AMEP to cater the needs on new migrants to both learn the language and to settle, as well as to fully participate in the Australian society can be seen as a great investment and receive worldwide respect of its success.

## CSWE LEVELS

CSWE consists of 4 certificate levels which differ in terms of language proficiency. The competencies are described into Certificate I, II, III, and IV. However, there is also an additional level of language proficiency which is designed for learners with special needs. The level of proficiency is called the pre-certificate level. This level is aimed for learners who are somewhat having enormous difficulty in basic literacy. This special level is mostly intended for the illiterate refugees, whom having not only language problem, but also having certain psychological trauma that requires special treatment.

The certificate level is described as competency-based training in which the learners are described in level proficiency starting CSWE I as beginner, CSWE II as post-beginner, CSWE III as intermediate, and CSWE IV as advance learner. The learner, prior to undertake the lesson in particular level, is assessed using the ISLPR (formerly called ASPLR) on different language task across the four macro-skills that reflect the four levels of the certificate tasks. The result of the test will determine what certificate level that the learner is equivalent.

Beside the certificate level, during the lesson takes place, the learners of certificate level I and II are differentiated based on three bands of learning pace. Learners with slower learning pace are marked with band A, which most of the times indicate limited learning experience in formal settings, low literacy in the L1 and possibly having non-roman L1. Learners with standard pace are marked with band B, who indicates having learning strategy and resources, secondary education in the home country and L1 literate. Band C is marked for learners that has fast learning pace, whom indicates having high level of learning resources, some post-secondary education or technical skills training, and L1 literate.

The learners are also given opportunity to attend the course with their own learning focus. The curriculum framework enables the learners to set their personal goal based on their need of learning English. For certificate level I and II, the students are only given general learning focus, however, the teachers are able to extend and develop course according to the learners needs. In certificate III and IV, there are respectively four and three syllabus strands that the learner can choose based on the initial placement test. For certificate III there are; *vocational English* designed for learners who want to engage in vocational fields, further study is aimed for learners wanting to attend formal education, *community access* is designed for learners who do not have specific focus but aiming to learn English to be able to communicate in daily life context (for shopping, making friends, going to church, asking for information, and so on an so forth), mixed focus for learners interested to have all of the aforementioned learning aims. Certificate III also provides opportunity for learners to select optional learning focus through Numeracy module (NSW. AMES. Program Support and Development Services, 1998).

## UNDERLYING APPROACH AND THEORY

CSWE curriculum is developed based on the need to have English proficient immigrants to cater the development and participate in the economic society of Australia. The goal of this program is basically to enable the new arrivals having no background in English to communicate in the language used in the society. The specific need is generated from the understanding of language as a tool to mediate human social interaction. This notion of language emerged from Michael Halliday's view that "language and communication as multi-layered, containing at the same time an ideational meaning (topic-based meaning), interpersonal (role- and relationship-based meaning) and textual (meaning about message construction)" (1978, as cited in Block, 2003, p. 72).

The linguistics approach underlying the frameworks of CSWE is from Halliday's (1985) model of linguistics called *Systemic Functional Linguistics*. According to Halliday, people use language to exchange meanings (1985b) and they do not use language merely as set of grammatical syntax. On the contrary, language is used as a form of medium to exchange meanings in the account of the presented sociocul-

tural contexts. The CSWE learning contents presented meanings in different sociocultural contexts. The learners will be able to see how certain social purposes can be communicated through the language they are learning. In line with that, what is supposed to be one of the major features is that the CSWE incorporates affective aspect of the learning through the presentations of cross-cultural understandings. Besides, texts presented in relation to the actual use of the language, in which communicates about aspect of experience, interpersonal relationships and the role which language performs in the communication.

Christie (1999) describes language as systemic due to its offering systems of choices in language, in which each is significant for the realisation of meaning. Therefore, the aim of this learning set is the learner will be able to use their knowledge about text structures and registers to predict the language with considerable certainty to be used in given situation. Christie (1999, p. 759) adds that “language is said to be functional because its organisation quite fundamentally reveals the purposes for which any natural language came into being.” Halliday's model emphasizes on the relationship between language and the context, and in broader level, the learners of the language needs to consider the relationship between language and the cultural context (Derewianka, 2000).

CSWE is developed based on *Genre theory* which actually developed in Australia using the model of systemic functional linguistics that has made possible to identify the needs of the learners to do with language in order to be successful in education, employment and social community (Feez, 2002). This theory accounts the needs of the migrant to develop their English-language and literacy skills under the pressure of rapid increment of unemployment rate and funding issues in an effective and quick manner.

Systemic functional linguistic provides systematic detail of how the language system is structured according the different social context. The CSWE framework provides set of learning material and lesson modules vary in genres in which related to different registers and functions. Learners are taught to familiarise themselves with all different text genres, both spoken and written, in order to make them able to re-



spond in real life communicative interaction. Rothery, who is a pioneer in genre pedagogy, summarised the value of the model to literacy pedagogy as follows:

A strong and rich model of language description enables us to model the curriculum in terms of its literacy requirements, to map possible paths of development in literacy and learning and to develop criteria for assessment and evaluation. In short, it offers the opportunity to develop a language-based approach learning. (Rothery, 1996, p. 87)

The underlying principle of CSWE is a *competency based* training that focuses on outcomes of the individual learners rather than focus on the specific methods or periods of the course. The competency based principle concerns more on the learners' attainment and the demonstration of specific knowledge, skills and the application of the language. Assessment are based on the specific criterion rather than based on the group norms. Learners are treated as individuals due to their specific abilities and needs.

The learning syllabus suggested by the framework focused the communicative competence (Hymes, 1972 as cited in Paltridge, 2006) that requires a learner to not only having the knowledge about the language, but also to know what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in a situated context. The competencies in each certificate level are divided into four domains; learning skills and strategies, speaking and listening skills, reading, and writing. The learning competency is concerning in the learner's development of learning strategies, development of autonomous learning, understanding the role of assessment in learning and the ability to formulate future language and learning goals.

The classroom settings of the CSWE enable the teacher and the learner to work and interact closely. Through the interaction, the learners are expected to identify their needs of learning English and later the teacher will decide with certain topics. The learning setting can be represented by Gass' *IIO* model (1997; Block, 2003), in which a learner will reconstruct their understanding of the text through his/her negotiation for meaning. Learners will learn about the different texts and contexts through guided modules and the interaction with the peer and the teacher. Teacher in this context is the most dominant source of input. Moreover, teachers for

CSWE program are trained to accommodate the different learning styles and learning paces of their students, and they should be able to provide satisfactory information regarding the different needs of the students. The immediate goal of this classroom setting is that the student must be able to produce and respond to any communicative stimulation, and provide an appropriate output in return, either in written or spoken.

Syllabus design for CSWE is the responsibility of; individual teacher, collaborative group of teachers, or a syllabus designer. CSWE does not provide prescriptive syllabus for their clients. The teacher is expected to clearly understand the linguistic ability and the learning purpose of the learners, and able to develop his/her own sets of syllabus in regard to those matters.

## CSWE INNOVATION

CSWE was developed during the time when pressures on the need are remarkably high. The government of Australia was at that point of time looking at AMEP that has been conducted for some years but having very low visible achievements. Curriculum was not specifically defined and teachers are sporadically conducting their teaching in the classroom without any clear guidelines. This condition called for improvements and innovation, which later AMES NSW developed a curriculum framework to work solving the issue. From the point onward, clear roles have been assigned to different elements of the framework.

The commonwealth governments hold key roles as the adopters of the curriculum. It can be clearly seen that the distribution of roles and responsibility is structured at this level. The immigration department supporting the fund for the enactment of the curriculum claim for better future of the program that has been going on for long period since the beginning. In this light, the immigration department has very great concern to see how the program runs, and how it can be visible in terms of achievements and benefits considering the amount of expenditures that had been injected earlier. The commonwealth department of Education is also assigned to have its own role and responsibility in the provision of material and conducting trainings and supervising the enactment of the curriculum.

Teachers as implementers of the curriculum are required to be responsible to conduct their teaching in the classroom at their best. Curriculum cannot be innovative if the implementers have not placed themselves to be in the key role of the enactment. Teachers in the CSWE framework are required to work on the syllabus themselves. In order to give the highest benefit for the client, the teachers need to be able to closely familiar to the learner's condition. Syllabuses are then constructed to suit with the needs and ability of the clients, by accommodating different need of the learner.

The learners in the enactment of this curriculum are not simply regarded as the client who's receiving only benefit. They are also contributing to the benefit of the national government agenda to empower the people of Australia to participate in more globalized economic competition. On one hand, the learners are provided with the knowledge on survival in their new home; and on the other hand, they will represent Australia in a more competitive world as today.

By looking closely on how the elements of role are relating to one another with specific task and responsibility, AMEP-CSWE has a potential to be regarded as innovative due to the key 'players' involved in the framework that contributes their responsible function to develop better curriculum enactment. However, the following elements can provide an extended discussion of innovativeness of CSWE.

Markee (2001) elaborated that adoption has been conceptualised regarding the individuals and the institution engaged in the different phases of decision making process. There are five stages in decision-making process suggested by Rogers (1983, as cited in Markee, 2001 p. 119): "1) gaining knowledge about an innovation, 2) being persuaded of its value, 3) making a preliminary decision to adopt the innovation, 4) implementing their decision to adopt, and 5) confirming their decision to continue using the innovation. In regard of CSWE, the initial phase of adopting CSWE was during the difficult economic crisis in the 1990s, in which the government has been pushing hard to solve the problems of high unemployment of the earlier migrants who are not proficient in English due to the job market demands to recruit migrants with both skilful and English proficient. In addition to that, the need to have a national-wide framework able to accommodate AMEP clients who work moving

from state to state is also considered to be an advanced improvement of the system. Hence, the government of Australia found that the new framework developed by AMES NSW (CSWE) comprises with those advanced solutions to the time and formalised as well as adopted the framework to be implemented until what we see today. On the whole, the shift from the former to the implementation of CSWE is regarded as a total adoption to the innovative curriculum.

Although it is true that the government has committed to adopt fully, we also need to see to what extent other components involved in the framework implement the new curriculum. Teachers adopt this curriculum by conducting their roles in the classroom by designing syllabus for the learners according to the framework. In CSWE, the teachers are responsible to develop syllabus that address knowledge needed by the learners. The providers need to fully adopt the framework in their practices. Otherwise, there will be likely a failure in the end if there were key components that are declining to fully adopting the framework.

CSWE was developed from the promising description of language being seen as systemic functional (Halliday, 1985). Integrating the notion of language as function into the language learning curriculum has shown a quite remarkable success in AMEP language classrooms. As mentioned earlier, CSWE was designed to address English language knowledge to the migrants in order to prepare them to engage in the real Australian society, which has given a big success compared to the former approach. The new language learning approach, new pedagogical values, new concept of grammar pedagogy, as well as the new pedagogical materials used in the new framework reflect the adoption intensity of the qualitative change in the curriculum implementation. In addition to that, the concept of values in the new framework caters the sustainability of multiculturalism harmony, such as providing learning materials that advocate fighting against racism and stimulating tolerance of having such diverse society. This was not only newly being integrated in Australian context of language learning, but also provides a great innovation regarding social values Australians expected as the outcome of the migrant learning program.

This is a definite matter that must be integrated into innovative curriculum framework. The framework needs to provide access to integrate all socio-cultural

aspects of the world where it is being implemented. Multiculturalism for example, as discussed in the previous paragraph was contextualised in the new innovative curriculum of AMEP in Australia. In addition to that, ideological, historical, political, economic, and even institutional aspect must be also regarded as important factors of the innovation.

CSWE was adopted to suit the context of Adult ESL learning in Australia. The government invested huge amount of fund through learning programs to empower newly arrived migrants to be able to survive in the new home by providing them essential knowledge about the local language. This program, however, was not exclusively to empower the migrants with the survival knowledge, but in return, the migrants can fully participate to help developing the economy of the country.

The decision to place massive investment on AMEP is notably successful. The long process of planning, enactment, and evaluation of the AMEP since the earliest beginning has fruited profound social change in Australia. The national policy on languages oriented to pluralism, multiculturalism, and social equity was released in 1987 was replaced by the Australia's Language: The Australian language and literacy policy (DEET 1991) that promoted the government agenda emphasizing on 'producing' skilled Australian workforce to compete in a globalized economy (Burns & Joyce, 2007).

In general perspective, the CSWE suits the context of the Australian government's agenda. To add, the new curriculum was also compatible with the former implementation of the AMEP. There was not a specific complexity issue during the shift to CSWE, however, there are problems as the program grew in many states, AMES eventually have to distribute the responsibility of providing the service by tendering to qualified private learning institutions. Nevertheless, the *observability* as well as the advantage of the enactment of CSWE has greatly met the expectation. No wonder, the framework is still applicable today.

CSWE was developed as result of policies from reformist federal government due to demand of economic restructuring at the time. The government sees that the potent of competency-based training that focused on outcomes was respected to create educational climate to be more responsive to the demand of the growing la-

bour market as well as to fulfil the demand of funding authorities (Burns, 2003). The shift from the former state of the curriculum to the CSWE depicts power-coercive innovation strategy that involves political, administrative and economic power to resolve the problem.

## CONCLUSION

By referring to the extensive resources of the history of Adult Migrant English Program in Australia as well as the framework that encompasses multi-layered aspects of political needs, economical needs, and socio-cultural needs I come up to conclusion that the framework has been intensively developed. There has been great contribution from the academia providing reviews and evaluations toward the enactment as well as the mechanism of the framework of CSWE. Macquarie University hosting as the prominent support centre for English language support has been given lots of important reviews on the implementation of AMEP framework from the early beginning.

Shifting from the former setting of AMEP to the national wide AMEP's CSWE curriculum, was considered as a huge innovation in adult migrant second language learning pedagogy domain. CSWE was also developed to retain possible improvements in the later future. However, the main structure of the framework has been applied for more than 20 years now and still delivering the needs of the learner and the national objectives.

Nevertheless, there are some issues that still remain needing improvement, which is to advocate more cultural-diversity sensitivity among new migrants in the curriculum. The expanding population of multi-national and multi-ethnic in the context of Australia could have been more harmonious if newly arrived migrants are 'touched' with more affective educational objectives incorporated in the language learning. Also, there are other issues addressed by FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia) that perceived refugees received less attention that was reported to exit AMEP without having gained a functional level of English (FECCA, 2008). In addition to that, FECCA also submit a commentary that the 510 allocation hours (+100 for refugees) are perceived to not being able to bring competent level of English. On the other hand for professionals, 510 might exceed their

needs. To summarize, in overall CSWE has given a remarkable success, however, as demands of the implementation contexts are always dynamic; as long as the curriculum reserve channel for improvements and revisions, the framework will likely to progress instead of digress.

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