Policy and ELT Curriculum: A Systematic Review of the Research Literature in the Years 2010-2020

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Abstract

This study was conducted to systematically review the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum and policy studies. A systematic literature review was utilized to describe the features, trends, and patterns of ELT curriculum and policy studies through the Preferred Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines. Seventy-three empirical articles published between 2010 and 2020 were analyzed based on geographical region, research methodology, participants, and research focus. Results revealed that most of the reviewed studies (58.90%, n=43) were conducted between 2016 and 2020, whereas about 41.1 % (n=30) of the reviewed studies were carried out between 2010 and 2015. Moreover, about 68.49% of the reviewed studies employed a qualitative research design, followed by a mixed-method (about 24.65%), whereas only about 6.86% used a quantitative research methodology. Results showed that most of the studies targeted ELT policy and curriculum in Asia (54.79%), followed by Europe (20.55%), America (13.70%), and Africa (6.84 %). Furthermore, 4.10 % of the studies examined ELT curriculum and policy globally. Thirty-four ELT policy and curriculum studies focused on teachers, three articles focused on learners, and only two papers targeted other participants. Findings showed that it would be difficult to discern a strong pattern in the ELT curriculum and policy studies since they targeted various issues. The majority of the reports were small-scale qualitative studies conducted in Asian

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countries; therefore, to address the issue of generalizability in ELT, more extensive quantitative studies in different geographical areas are needed.

Keywords: ELT policy, curriculum planning/practice, language policy, curriculum policy, systematic review

Introduction

The emergence of English as a lingua franca has had a significant impact on language planning and curriculum policy in many countries around the world (Nguyen, 2011). In response to the spread of English as the language of globalization and its dominance in communication (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Low, 2018), language curricula and policies have experienced significant changes in different parts of the world. Many countries have adopted the English language on the assumption that it is the language of industrialization, development, and international communication (Tupas, 2018). And they have included it in their curriculum as a compulsory course and, in some cases, as a medium of instruction (Channa, 2014).

In parallel with the global expansion of English, language policy has turned into a major area of research that continues to develop (Hult, 2018), and the number of systematic peer-reviewed articles in the field has increased significantly. To date, researchers have addressed a variety of issues including ELT policy, ELT curriculum, ELT policy evaluate, ELT curriculum analysis, and ELT policy practice, which have constantly broadened the scope of research and contributed new insights into the current progressions and objectives of English language curriculum and policy in various countries around the world (e.g., Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Bruen & Sheridan, 2016; Fang & Garland, 2014; Hayes, 2018; Hult, 2012; Kepol, 2017; Machida & Walsh, 2015; Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016; Nguyen, 2011; Yang & Jang, 2020).

However, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of ELT curricula and policies and construct "a strong evidence base from current research findings to inform policy and practice" (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018, p.26), a systematic literature review is also needed. Although the ELT curriculum and policy field is well documented (e.g., Firman et al., 2019; Kostoulas & Stelma, 2017; Low, 2018; Tohidian & Ghiasi Nodooshan, 2020; Tupas, 2018), the scope of research

findings in the field has not yet been probed by a systematic review to build a robust evidence-based literature review. In addition, few research studies have documented the existing body of knowledge globally and speculated about the field's future research direction.

In this respect, this paper intends to review the ELT curriculum and policy studies to provide an international insight into the field and speculate about the future direction of the studies. In this article, first, we briefly describe ELT curriculum and language policy and cite some studies from the literature to illustrate the importance of the issues. Next, we pose the research questions. Then, we review the literature on ELT policy and curriculum. And finally, we conclude with recommendations to fill in the research gap in this area.

Literature Review

ELT Curriculum and Language Policy

Curriculum is a formal report of what learners are required to know (Levin, 2008). According to Atai and Mazloum (2012), "curriculum is a multi-layer multi-component enterprise in which several interlocking components are at play" (p.2). One of the most crucial and important factors which plays a key role in curriculum planning is policy. Politics governs every aspect of education (Levin, 2008), including curriculum. Deciding what to teach is not a matter of purely academic decision but a matter of institutional policy which is motivated by social and political elements (Sarani &Ahmadi, 2013). In most cases, government officials set policies that reflect the sociopolitical and economic interests of the ministries and try to train teachers to implement the planned policies. In fact, "policies influence and orient almost the entire administrative and practical scene of any social institution in any social context, including language and education concerns and, more specifically, ELT" (Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2015, p. 23).

The language policy defines the language-related rights, functions, and access; therefore, the curriculum design should significantly cover the stated objectives (Ahmad & khan, 2011). This has led to a substantial body of research studies addressing the issues of language policy formation and implementation from a variety of conceptual positions (e.g., Al-Issa, 2007; Amir & Muska, 2012; Bruen & Sheridan, 2016; Cruz Arcila, 2018; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Heineke, 2015;

Kiany et al., 2011; Kirkgoz, 2009; Machida & Walsh, 2015; Nguyen & Burns, 2020; Sharbawi & Jaidin, 2020).

According to Low (2018), in order to have developed through the proposed policies, the planned curricula and policies for English must be implemented in the schools. Despite the controversies in practicing and implementing a curriculum, there is a core component that is emphasized: the key role of stakeholders (teachers) in curriculum policy implementation (Atai & Mazlum, 2012). Researchers have suggested that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions are key to successful curriculum implementation (e.g., Hardman & Rahman, 2014; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013; Kırkögz, 2009). Teachers' involvement in the process of curriculum development is essential for its improvement (Bantwini, 2010). In addition, teachers' understanding of professional development activities and policies increases the success of educational policies and improves their performance in implementing the policies (Penuel et al., 2007; Shihiba & Embark, 2011; Smit, 2005).

Given that many curriculum issues are as much about policy as they are about curriculum guidelines (Levin, 2008), debates over planning and practicing of the policies are an essential part of the curriculum. The ELT curriculum literature can be strengthened if it is better linked to the larger literature on public policy, specifically language policy. In addition, due to the growing emphasis on English teaching, ELT curricula and policies are also liable to variation and may change over time. Therefore, a systematic review is needed to track the emerging trends in the field.

This Study

The current systematic review of research into ELT curriculum and policy intends to synthesize the literature in the field, examine current thinking about the ELT curriculum, and identify critical points to provide a comprehensive literature review for researchers, policymakers, and ELT teachers. To this end the following research questions are posed:

What publication trends do the ELT curriculum and policy studies reveal? (Years of publication, journals that publish articles, and the number of published articles)

What is the context of ELT curriculum and policy studies? (Geographical context)

What sort of methodology has been used in the ELT curriculum and policy studies? What are the main focuses of the ELT curriculum and policy studies?

Methods

This study utilized a systematic literature review to describe the characteristics, trends, and patterns of current empirical research studies on ELT curricula and policies. This study used the Preferred Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) and conducted a systematic review by taking the following steps:

(a) Specifying the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

(b) Identifying the keywords and establishing the search strategy.

(c) Identifying the research studies.

(d) Reviewing the included articles.

(e) Analyzing and reporting the findings (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018).

Databases and search strategy

A systematic search strategy was executed to identify the relevant studies. The search keywords used in this study included curriculum and policy terms. Before deciding on the final list of keywords, a pilot search was performed using single and combined terms (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2018). The search keywords were presented in Table 1. In order to obtain more relevant studies, the search was limited to the title of publications in the databases. In addition, the search period of this systematic review was limited to 2010 until 2020.

Table 1

Key words

Curriculum terms	Policy terms
ELT curriculum	English language teaching policy
EFL curriculum	ELT policy
English language curriculum	English language policy
English language teaching curriculum	foreign language policy
Foreign language teaching curriculum	English language planning
Foreign language curriculum	EFL policy

Second language teaching curriculum	ESL policy
ESL curriculum	English language teaching planning
Second language curriculum	Foreign language planning
	Second language policy
	Second language planning

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To be included/excluded in this study, the articles had to meet the predefined inclusion / exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Topic: studies which were designed /entitled /described as English language teaching curriculum and policy.
- Type: Scholarly articles of original research from peer-reviewed journals.
- Language: journal articles written in English.
- Date: studies which were published between 2010 and 2020.
- Level: school level

We excluded:

- Book chapters, short communications, reviews, editorials, reports, theses, and dissertations
- Publications which were not written in English.
- Publications which were about higher education studies.

Figure 1

Flow chart
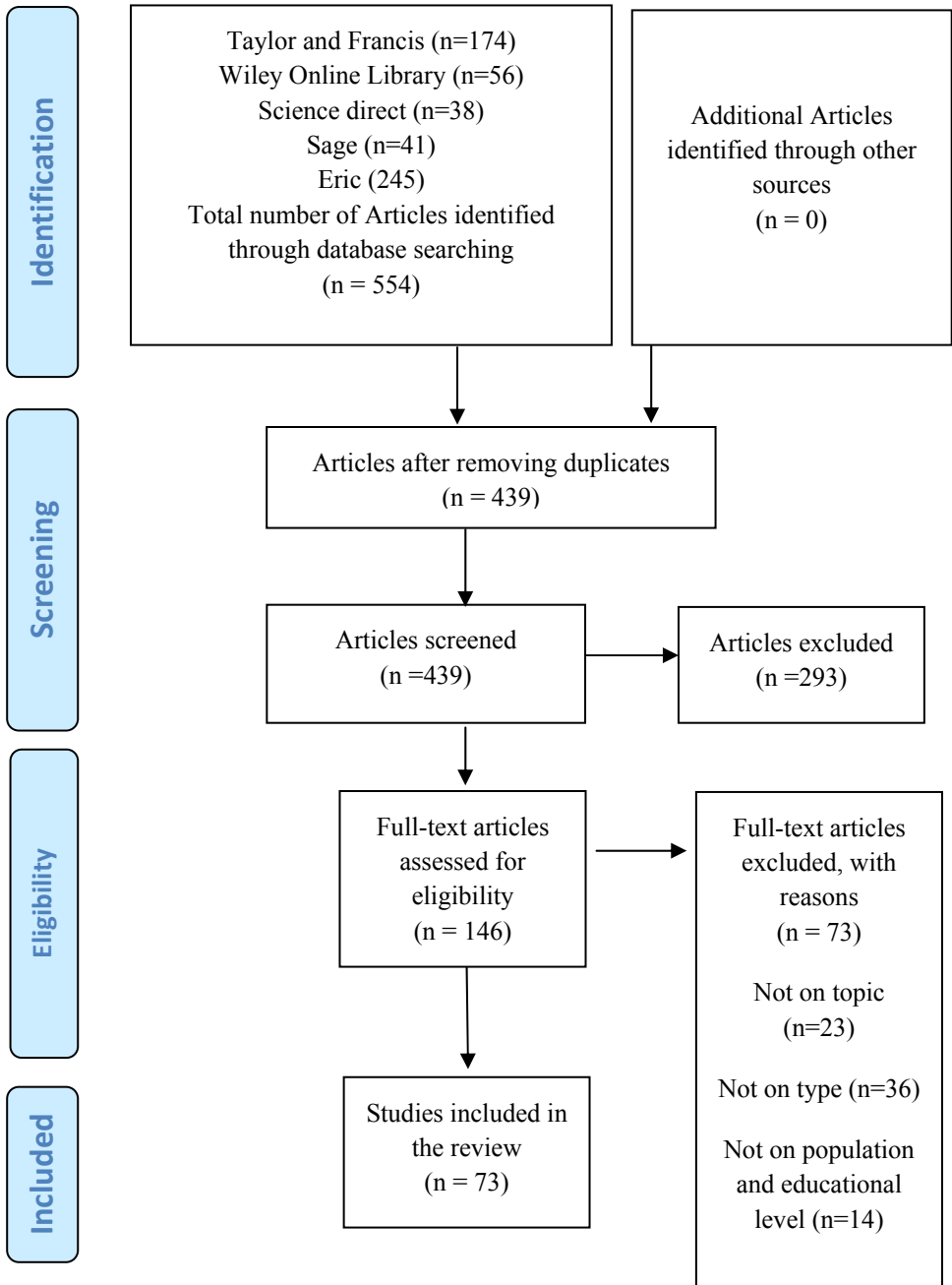
Process Flow of the Study

A team of three researchers specified the keywords (Table 1) and conducted a systematic search in the bibliographic databases such as Eric, Taylor and Francis, Sage, Wiley online, and Science direct. The search was limited to the title of the publications in the databases. The primary search yielded 554 studies for possible inclusion. After the initial search, the references were imported to EndNote for removing the duplicated references and overviewing the citations. After removing 115 duplicated references, the remaining 432 articles were divided between the researchers, and their titles and abstracts were screened by using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Book chapters, short communications, reviews, editorials, reports, theses, and dissertations were removed. Next, titles and abstracts were reviewed and non-empirical studies, higher education publications, and irrelevant studies were excluded. After screening, 146 studies were selected for full-text analysis. Out of the 146 studies resulting from the screening stage of the study, 73 were excluded based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria (not being on the intended topic, 23 articles; type, 36 studies; population and educational level, 14 studies). In order to minimize the discrepancies between the researchers during the review process, the researchers discussed until the highest amount of agreement (about 100 %) was reached. Finally, the process yielded a sample of 73 articles that were included in this study (Figure 1).

Data Coding and Analysis

The analysis of the selected research studies involved both descriptive and analytical analyses. After evaluating the studies based on the eligibility criteria, the research team synthesized the findings of the studies and summarized the characteristics of the articles. The research team developed and used a data coding template that recorded basic information of the studies: (1) paper information (author/s, year of publication, and journal name), (2) participants, (3) context (geographical region), (4) research design, and (5) research focus (see Table 3). Descriptive statistics, including percentage and count, were used to describe the surface characteristics of the reviewed studies. In addition, in-depth thematic analysis was used to analyze the focus of the studies.

Findings

ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies' Publication Trends

The analysis revealed that most of the reviewed research studies were undertaken between 2015 and 2020. About 41.1 % (n=30) of the reviewed studies were carried out in the first five years, whereas 58.90% (n=43) were conducted in the second half of the decade (from 2016 to 2020). In addition, the data analysis showed that the included ELT policy and curriculum articles were published in 53 different peer-reviewed journals such as The Current Issues in Language Planning, Language Policy, The Curriculum Journal, Curriculum Studies, TESOL Journal, and so on (Table 2).

Table 2

Journal List

Journal	N	Studies
American Journal of Education	1	Cha and Ham (2011)
Current Issues in Language Planning	11	Nguyen (2011); Hashimoto (2013), Poon (2013); Zacharias (2013); Garton (2014); Machida and Walsh (2015); Bruen and Sheridan (2016);Cruz Arcila (2018), Liu, Wang, and Zhao (2020); Sharbawi and Jaidin (2020)
Journal of Homosexuality	1	Sauntson and Simpson (2011)
TESL Canada Journal	1	Fallon and Rublik (2011)
TESOL Quarterly	2	Hult (2012); Mohamed (2020)
TESOL Journal	2	Hayes (2018); Plaisance, Salas, and D'Amico (2018)
Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences	1	Gunal and Engin-Demir (2012)
Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education	1	Martin (2012)
International Education	1	Trube (2012)
Critical Inquiry in Language Studies	1	Al-Issa (2012)
Classroom Discourse	1	Amira and Muska (2012)

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The Curriculum Journal	1	Atai and Mazlum (2013)
Journal of International Education and Leadership	1	Azmi and Nazri (2013)
English Language Teaching	2	Alméciga and Yesid (2013); Pérez, Rey, and Rosado (2019)
The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher	1	Fang and Garland (2014)
International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning	2	Hawanti (2014); Paul Glasgow (2014)
System	2	Lee (2014); Zhu and Shu (2017)
International Journal of Educational Development	1	Wang and Clarke (2014)
Advances in Language and Literary Studies	1	Yusuf (2014)
Literacy	1	Flynn (2015)
Educational Policy	1	Heineke (2015)
Journal of Curriculum Studies	1	Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak (2015)
Language and Education	2	Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018); Manan, Dumanig, and Naqeebullah (2015)
Issues in Teachers' Professional Development	1	Garzón (2018)
International Journal of Leadership in Education	1	Li, Poon, Lai, and Tam (2018)
International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education	1	Peele-Eady and Foster (2018)
Language Teaching Research	1	Chan (2019)
Educational Research and Reviews	1	Firman, Tersta, Riantoni, and Sekonda (2019)
International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction	2	Gherzouli (2019); Agçam and Babanoglu (2020)
Africa Education Review	1	Kamwendo (2019)
European Journal of Educational Research	1	Kaya (2019)
The Educational Forum	1	Murphy and Torff (2019)
Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research	1	Rashidi and Hosseini (2019)

International Journal of Instruction	2	Sulaiman, Sulaiman, and Rahim (2017) ;Sofiana, Sofiana, Mubarok, and Yuliasri (2019)
Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education	1	Li (2017)
ELT journal	1	Kostoulas and Stelma (2017)
Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction	1	Kepol (2017)
Language policy	1	Bhattacharya (2017)
Uşak Üniversitesi Eğitim Araştırmaları Dergisi	1	Zorba and Arikan (2016)
Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching	1	Yeni-Palabiyik and Daloglu (2016)
International Journal of Inclusive Education	1	Russak (2016)
Journal of Education and Practice	2	Tom-Lawyer (2015); Okoth (2016)
Journal of Multicultural Discourses	1	Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2016)
Bilingual Research Journal	1	Fredricks and Warriner (2016)
FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education	1	Elyas and Badawood (2016)
Cogent Education	1	Alnefaie (2016)
International Journal of Applied Linguistics	2	Chan (2020); Sahraee Juybari and Bozorgian(2020)
Asia Pacific Journal of Education	1	Lei and Medwell (2020)
International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism	1	Yang and Jang (2020)
International Journal of Development Research	1	Ulum (2015)
The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language	1	Teo (2017)
Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)	1	Fisne, Güngör, Guerra, and Gonçalves (2018)
AILA Review	1	Sayer (2019)

ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies' Research Design Approaches

The analysis indicated that the reviewed studies were varied in terms of research methodology; however, most of them employed a qualitative approach (Table 3). In order to get a clear understanding of the distribution of the research designs, we summarized them in Figure 2. Out of 73 studies, 50 (68.49%) used a qualitative research design, 18 (24.65%) used a mixed-method approach, and five (6.86%) employed a quantitative methodology (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Research Methodologies
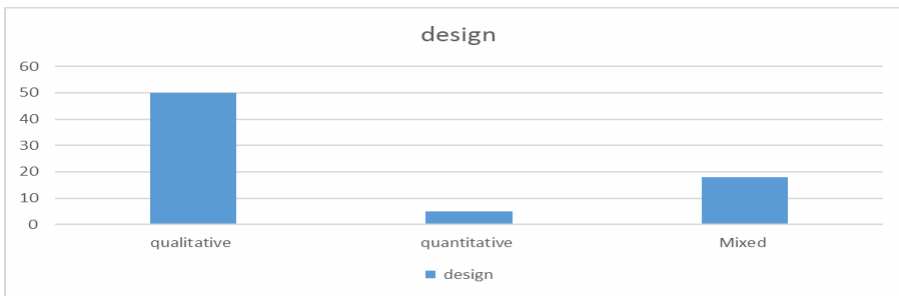
The Context of ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies

Based on the analysis, the included articles investigated ELT curriculum and policy in a large number of countries (Table 3). To get a better understanding, we summarized the contexts of the studies based on their continents (Asia, Africa, America, and Europe). As figure 2 showed, most of the studies analyzed ELT policy and curriculum in Asian countries (n=40, 54.79%), followed by European countries (n=١٥, 20.55%), American countries (n=10, 13.71%), and African countries (n=5, 6.84. %). In addition, three studies (4.10%) compared the policies in different countries.

Figure 3

Setting
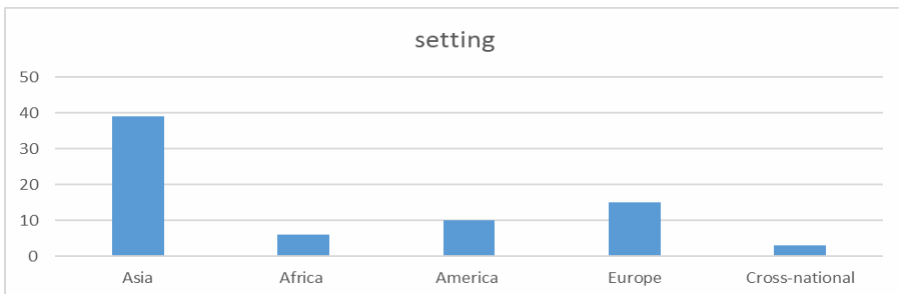
The Participants of ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies

As shown in Table 3, the ELT policy and curriculum studies were varied in terms of their main participants. The key participants of the ELT policy and curriculum studies were teacher trainers, head teachers, key official members, key administrators, school principals, ELT lecturers, experts, curriculum developers, students, and teachers (Figure 4). The analysis showed that most of the articles focused on teachers (n= 34, 46.58%), whereas few studies targeted learners (n= 3, 4.11%) and other participants (curriculum developers and ELT lecturers) (n= 2, 2.74%). In addition, there were some studies with combinations of different groups of participants such as teachers and students (n=6, 8.22%) and teachers and other participants (n=9, 12.33%), including school principals, administrators, and key official members, experts, teacher-trainers, lecturers, material developers, and head teachers. Moreover, 19 out of 73 articles (26.02%) were qualitative studies which were conducted by applying document analysis with no inclusion of participants.

Figure 4

Distribution of Participants
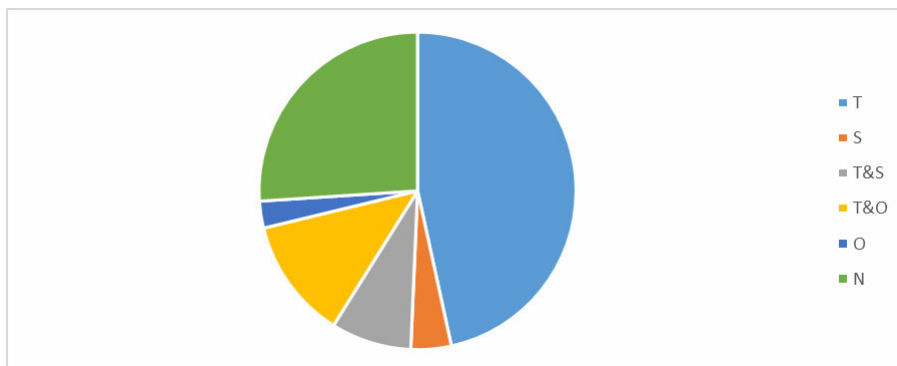
The Main Focus of the ELT Policy and Curriculum Studies

The analysis indicated that the studies targeted various issues, such as English language policy, policy planning, policy implementation, policy reform, ELT curriculum planning, curriculum reform, curriculum reform implementation, EFL/ESL policy and practice, and so on (Table 3). Most of the studies were context-specific and tended to investigate how the macro policies were planned and how they were implemented in the schools. In addition, some studies evaluated the

planned ELT curriculum based on the policies prescribed by the government or the local authorities and the implementation of the policies by examining the perception of the participants, mainly teachers.

Table 3:

Main Characteristics of the Studies

Author/s	Setting	Research Methodology	Participants	Focuses
Cha and Ham (2011)	Cross-national	Mixed methods	------	Curriculum policy analysis
Nguyen (2011)	Vietnam	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy implementation analysis
Sauntson and Simpson (2011)	UK	Qualitative	Teachers and students	Curriculum policy analysis
Fallon and Rublik (2011)	Canada	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy analysis
Gunal and Engin-Demir (2012)	Turkey	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum implementation
Hult (2012)	Sweden	Qualitative	---	Policy and practice analysis
Martin (2012)	England	Mixed methods	Learners	Languages Strategy evaluation
Trube (2012)	China	Qualitative	Curriculum developers	Curriculum planning and implementation analysis
Al-Issa (2012)	Oman	Qualitative	Students and teachers	Policy Implementation analysis
Amir and Muska (2012)	Sweden	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy and micro level practice analysis
Atai and Mazlum (2013)	Iran	Qualitative	Key officials , material developers, head teachers , and teachers	Curriculum planning and practice analysis
Azmi and Nazri (2013)	Malaysia	Qualitative	Teachers and Experts	Macro-level Policy analysis
Alméciga and Yesid (2013)	Colombia	Qualitative	-----	Decision making and policy analysis

Author/s	Setting	Research Methodology	Participants	Focuses
Hashimoto (2013)	Japan	Qualitative	-------	Macro-level policy analysis
Poon (2013)	Hong Kong	Qualitative	----	English-medium of instruction policy analysis
Zacharias (2013)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Teachers	Macro policy implementation analysis
Fang and Garland (2014)	China	Qualitative	Teachers	Macro curriculum planning analysis
Garton (2014)	South Korea	Mixed methods	Teachers	Curriculum policy analysis Material policy analysis
Hawanti (2014)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Teachers and school principals	Policy implementation analysis
Lee (2014)	South Korea	Qualitative	School principals, Teachers, and students	Curriculum implementation analysis
Paul Glasgow (2014)	Japan	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy analysis
Wang and Clarke (2014)	China	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum reform analysis
Yusuf (2014)	Nigeria	Mixed methods	Teachers	Curriculum implementation analysis
Flynn (2015)	England	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy and practice analysis
Heineke (2015)	USA	Qualitative	Teachers	policy and practice analysis
Lavrenteva and Orland-Barak (2015)	Cross-national	Qualitative	------	Top-down curriculum policy analysis
Machida and Walsh (2015)	Japan	Mixed methods	Teachers	Policy reform implementation analysis
Manan et al. (2015)	Pakistan	Mixed methods	Students, teachers, and school principals	English-medium policy analysis

Author/s	Setting	Research Methodology	Participants	Focuses
Tom-Lawyer (2015)	Nigeria	Mixed methods	English language lecturers	Curriculum implementation analysis
Ulum (2015)	Turkey	Qualitative	--------	Policy analysis
Alnefaie (2016)	Saudi Arabia	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum development analysis
Bruen and Sheridan (2016)	Cross – national	Qualitative	Teachers, teacher-trainers, and English language lecturers	Policy and practice analysis
Elyas and Badawood (2016)	Saudi Arabia	Qualitative	--------	Policy analysis
Fredricks and Warriner (2016)	USA	Qualitative	learners and teachers	policy analysis
Mirhosseini and Khodakarami (2016)	Iran	Qualitative	learners	policy analysis
Okoth (2016)	Kenya	Mixed methods	Teachers	Top-down curriculum innovation analysis
Russak (2016)	Israel	Quantitative	Teachers	Macro policy analysis
Yeni-Palabiyik and Daloglu (2016)	Turkey	Qualitative	Teachers	Macro-level curriculum implementation analysis
Zorba and Arikan(2016)	Turkey	Qualitative	-----	Curriculum policy analysis
Bhattacharya (2017)	India	Qualitative	-----	Policy analysis
Kepol (2017)	Malaysia	Qualitative	-------	Policy implementation analysis
Kostoulas and Stelma (2017)	Greece	Mixed methods	Teachers and Learners	Curriculum change analysis
Li (2017)	China	Qualitative	Stakeholders (teachers, key administrators, key members of departments)	Policy analysis

Author/s	Setting	Research Methodology	Participants	Focuses
Sulaiman et al. (2017)	Malaysia	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum implementation analysis
Teo (2017)	China	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy and practice analysis
Zhu and Shu (2017)	China	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum innovation analysis
Cruz Arcila (2018)	Colombia	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy interpretations and translations
Fisne et al. (2018)	Turkey	Mixed methods	-------	Macro-level policy implementation
Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018)	England	Mixed methods	Teachers	Policy and practice analysis
Garzón (2018)	Colombia	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum transforming analysis
Hayes (2018)	Bahrain	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy implementation analysis
Li et al. (2018)	Hong Kong	Quantitative	Teachers	Curriculum reform implementation analysis
Peele-Eady and Foster (2018)	USA	Qualitative	…….	Policy analysis
Plaisance et al. (2018)	USA	Qualitative	Teachers and experts	Curriculum policy analysis
Chan (2019)	Hong Kong	Mixed methods	------	Curriculum change analysis
Firman et al. (2019)	Indonesia	Mixed methods	Teachers	Curriculum implementation
Gherzouli (2019)	Algeria	Mixed methods	Teachers	Curriculum reform implementation
Kamwendo (2019)	Malawi	Qualitative	Teachers and Readers of the policy	policy analysis
Kaya (2019)	Turkey	Mixed methods	Students and Teachers	Curriculum implementation analysis
Murphy and Torff (2019)	USA	Quantitative	Teachers	Curriculum analysis
Pérez et al. (2019)	Colombia	Qualitative	-----	Curriculum analysis

Author/s	Setting	Research Methodology	Participants	Focuses
Rashidi and Hosseini (2019)	Iran	Qualitative	---	Policy analysis
Sofiana et al. (2019)	Indonesia	Mixed methods	Teachers	Curriculum planning and implementation analyses
Agçam and Babanoglu (2020)	Turkey	Qualitative	-------	Curriculum reform analysis
Chan (2020)	Hong Kong	Mixed methods	-------	Curriculum analysis
Le et al. (2020)	Vietnam	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy implementation analysis
Lei and Medwell(2020)	China	Mixed methods	Teachers	Curriculum policy analysis
Liu et al. (2020)	China	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy change analysis
Mohamed (2020)	Maldives	Mixed methods	Students	Curriculum policy analysis
Sahraee Juybari and Bozorgian(2020)	Iran	Qualitative	-------	Curriculum planning analysis
Sharbawi and Jaidin (2020)	Brunei	Quantitative	Students and teachers	Macro policy planning and micro policy practices
Tohidian and Ghiasi Nodooshan (2020)	Iran	Qualitative	Teachers	Curriculum reform and policy analysis
Yang and Jang (2020)	Korea	Qualitative	Teachers	Policy implementation analysis

The included articles showed variety in terms of focus. However, this review categorized the studies into three main themes: curriculum change, curriculum planning and practice, and ELT policy and practice.

Curriculum Change. Out of 73 reviewed studies, 14 (19.18%) investigated curriculum reform/change and its implementation. The articles used different research designs, including qualitative (n= 7; 50 %), mixed methods (n= 5; about 35.72 %), and quantitative (n= 2; about 14.28 %) approaches. In addition, seven studies (50%) were conducted in Asia, three (about 21.46 %) in Europe, two

(14.28%) in America, and two (14.28%) in Africa.

Curriculum Planning and Practice. Twenty-four studies addressed curriculum planning around the world. Most of the studies were implemented in Asian countries (n=14), followed by European (n=4), American (n=2), and African (n=2) countries. In addition, two studies were done in a cross-national setting. Thirteen studies used a qualitative methodology, nine studies used a mixed method research design, and only one study used a quantitative approach.

ELT Policy. Thirty-five studies addressed ELT policy around the world, out of which nineteen policy studies were conducted in Asia, eight in Europe, six in America, and one in Africa. In addition, two studies examined ELT policies in a cross-national context. Moreover, the analysis showed that most of the studies employed a qualitative research design (n =17), followed by a Mixed methods approach (n =4) and a quantitative methodology (n =1).

Discussion

The findings were discussed in light of the research questions. For each section, research gaps were identified and suggestions for future research were presented.

What Publication Trends do the ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies Reveal?

The analysis showed that the reviewed articles were wide-ranging in terms of focus, participant, and research methodology. The analysis revealed that the debate over ELT policy and curriculum has resulted in a rich array of research studies. According to Larsen and Von Ins (2010), the number of journals and the growth rate of articles generally are considered important and indicate the productivity of the field. The increasing number of research studies in recent years and the diversity of journals publishing ELT curriculum and policy studies manifest the importance of the field.

What Sort of Methodology Were Used in the ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies?

The results of this study showed that there was a great tendency towards qualitative research approaches in the reviewed articles. The issue of generalization is complicated and controversial in qualitative studies. According to Polit et al.

(2010), qualitative studies seldom explicitly address the issue of generalizability. Given that a large number of ELT curriculum and policy studies are qualitative, it seems that the generalizability issue has been ignored and the results of the studies are not sufficiently conclusive. Therefore, as Lawson et al. (2015) note, more quantitative and large-scale studies are needed to address the generalizability issue in the ELT curriculum and policy field.

What is the Context of ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies?

Our analysis showed that the majority of studies targeted ELT curriculum and policy in East Asia. Most studies were conducted in China, followed by some countries such as Indonesia, Hong Kong, and other countries. This finding can be explained by the fact that language teaching policy in East Asia has undergone significant changes since the mid-twentieth century due to the spread of English in the region (Gorter, 2013; Liddicoat & Kirkpatrick, 2020; Low, 2018; Tupas, 2018). Therefore, a rich array of studies has been conducted to investigate the policy reforms and the position of English in the east of Asia.

Although ELT policies in East Asia have been considerably well documented, the policies in West Asia have gained much less research attention. There have been some papers focusing on English language curriculum and policy in the region (e.g., Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016); however, most of them investigate the policy in a specific country (Iran). In line with this study, Arik and Arik (2021) report that Iran is the most frequent context in which TEFL studies are conducted.

In addition, the analysis revealed that few studies have been conducted in Africa. These studies have documented the policies in four countries, including Nigeria (Yusuf, 2014;Tom- Lawyer, 2015), Kenya (Okoth, 2016), Algeria (Gherzouli, 2019), and Malawi (Kamwendo, 2019). In line with this study, Mahboob (2013) and Bern (2005) found few studies on World English in Africa. Furthermore, Hillman et al. (2021) reported that the English language in this region has not been sufficiently explored.

Moreover, findings revealed that, similar to Low's (2018) and Halt's (2018) findings, the studies have investigated the ELT policies in a variety of regions; however, few articles have documented the issue globally (e.g., Bruen &

Sheridan, 2016; Cha & Ham, 2011; Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015). This indicates that further studies in different geographical regions, particularly African countries, are needed. Moreover, more research is needed to be conducted on a global-scale to provide an international picture of the field.

Who Are the Main Participants of the ELT Curriculum and Policy Studies?

As the results showed, 34 out of 73 ELT policy and curriculum studies focused on teachers, three of them focused on learners, and only two studies targeted the other participants (curriculum developer, ELT lecturer, etc.). The findings showed that teachers played a key role in the planning and practicing of ELT policy and curriculum. The crucial role of the teachers has also been emphasized in previous studies (e.g., Bantwini, 2010; Hardman & Rahman 2014; Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013; Kırkögz, 2009).

According to Borg (2019), students are one of the important stakeholders in the collective decision-making of educational institutions. They are the institutional customers and are the focus of decision-makers' attention. However, by considering the number of studies that targeted students, it seems that the importance of students' role in ELT policy and curriculum has been marginalized in the literature.

The analysis of the participants showed that most of the ELT curriculum and policy articles were relatively small-scale studies. It can be explained by considering the research design of the studies. Because most of the studies were qualitative-focused, their findings mainly were derived from a small sample of subjects.

What Are the Main Focuses of the Studies?

The data analysis indicated that the ELT policy and curriculum studies were context-specific and were conducted in different educational settings and countries. According to Lawson et al. (2015), the cultural and educational contexts in which the studies are conducted greatly influence the studies and make them unique. Hillman et al. (2021) report that countries have their own unique historical, cultural, and political characteristics, and they use English for a wide variety of reasons. For this reason, each country has its own English language policy and curriculum. This heterogeneity of English policy and curriculum has been reflected

in the research efforts. The heterogeneity of the studies and the variety of topics targeted by the studies make it difficult to discern a consistent pattern in the ELT curriculum and policy studies.

Although the studies addressed various issues in different countries, three general theme were selected for classifying the focus of the studies: curriculum change, curriculum planning and practice, and ELT policy and practice. Regarding the ELT policy category, the studies tried to evaluate the ELT policy/practice in some regions by addressing issues such as the medium of instruction (e.g., Hashimoto, 2013; Manan et al., 2015); policy and practice (mis)matches (Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Rashidi & Hosseini, 2019); the impact of globalization in ELT policies (Bhattacharya, 2017); policymakers' and stakeholders' perceptions of language policy/practice (Fallon & Rublik, 2011; Li, 2017); politics of culture in ELT (Azmi & Nazri, 2013); and power relationships and irregular conditions in English education (Alméciga & Yesid, 2013).

Based on the analysis, the policy papers were categorized as ELT policy evaluation and policy implementation. Out of 35 ELT policy studies, 19 studies intended to analyze the policy. Ten studies were implemented in Asian countries (Azmi & Nazri, 2013; Bhattacharya, 2017; Elyas & Badawood, 2016; Hashimoto, 2013; Glasgow, 2014; Manan et al., 2015; Mirhosseini & Khodakarami, 2016; Poon, 2013; Rashidi & Hosseini, 2019; Teo, 2017); five studies in European countries (Fisne et al., 2018; Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Martin, 2012; Russak, 2016; Ulum, 2015); three studies in American countries (e.g., Alméciga & Yesid, 2013; Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Peele-Eady & Foster, 2018); and one study in African countries (e.g., Kamwendo, 2019).

Out of 35 ELT policy studies, 15 studies addressed policy implementation. Nine studies were conducted in Asia (e.g., Al-Issa, 2012; Zacharias, 2013; Hayes, 2018; Hawanti, 2014; Kepol, 2017; Le et al., 2020; Li, 2017; Yang & Jang, 2020); three studies were done in Europe (e.g., Amira & Muska, 2012; Flynn, 2015; Hult, 2012); and three others were carried out in America (e.g., Cruz Arcila, 2018; Fallon & Rublik, 2011; Heineke, 2015). Furthermore, there was one cross-national study that addressed ELT policy implementation (Bruen & Sheridan, 2016). In addition, regarding research methodology, the analysis showed that ELT policy implementation studies used only qualitative methods for data analysis.

Considering the curriculum change studies, the reviewed papers tried to address curriculum reforms and changes by focusing on some issues such as teachers' perceptions and understandings of ELT curriculum reforms and implementations (e.g., Machida & Walsh, 2015; Yeni-Palabiyik & Daloglu, 2016); teachers' intention and willingness to support or even delay the ELT curriculum innovations (e.g., Kostoulas & Stelma, 2017; Murphy & Torff, 2019); ELT methods and their impact on ELT curriculum innovations (e.g., Chan, 2019); teachers' role in curriculum change (e.g., Garzón, 2018); the interplay of contextual factors (middle leadership, teachers receptivity to change , and the performance of teacher agency) and their impact on the implementation of English language curriculum reforms (Li et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020); issues, challenges, and barriers to teachers' involvement in curriculum development and implementation (e.g., Gherzouli, 2019; Okoth, 2016; Tohidian & Ghiasi Nodooshan, 2020; Wang & Clarke, 2014); and the outcome statements in the revised English language curriculums (e.g., Agçam & Babanoglu, 2020).

Regarding the curriculum studies, the articles intended to specify the process of ELT curriculum development and assess the curriculum policies, plans, and practices. Most of the curriculum planning studies focused on teachers; therefore, they reflected teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and reactions towards the ELT curriculum plans and practices (Alnefaie, 2016; Fang & Garland, 2014; Firman et al., 2019; Garton, 2014; Lei & Medwell, 2020; Mohamed, 2020; Sofiana et al., 2019; Sulaiman & Rahim, 2017; Yusuf, 2014). In addition, some studies tried to investigate other stakeholders' (students, curriculum developers, school principals, lecturers) perceptions, views, reactions, and roles (e.g., Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Kaya, 2019; Lee, 2014; Plaisance et al., 2018; Sauntson & Simpson, 2011; Tom-Lawyer, 2015; Trube, 2012). Moreover, some studies evaluated the curricula by analyzing national documents, textbooks, and classroom practices (Cha & Ham, 2011; Chan, 2020; Juybari & Bozorgian, 2020; Zorba & Arikan; 2016; Pérez et al., 2019).

The findings showed that, similar to Garcia and Menken's (2010) findings, the policy and curriculum studies focused on various issues around ELT (e.g., language policy, language policy and practice, policy analysis, and etc.). In addition, the findings revealed that most of the studies investigated the policy and curriculum in specific countries, and there were few cross-national studies. In this period of

globalization, the competitive nature of universal trade has extensive impact on the local, national, and international education policies and evolves them. Therefore, considering the evolving nature of education in general and language education in specific, more studies are needed to investigate ELT policy and curriculum globally and shed light on the impact of globalization on the policy and curriculum changes in a wide range of regions. In addition, since most of the studies were context-sensitive, comparative studies can be more fruitful and have a significant contribution to the literature.

Conclusion

The current systematic review has identified the key features and trends regarding ELT policy and curriculum. Considering the publication trends and geographical regions, it can be concluded that the studies were context-specific and were carried out in some specific countries. Although the reviewed studies covered a large number of countries, there were few and scanty studies in some regions. Therefore, further studies are needed to investigate the issue in the countries where ELT policy and curriculum are little known (e.g., African, Central Asian, and South American countries).

Although the included articles focused on different participants, teachers were the main concern of the studies, and students, as one of the key stakeholders in the ELT field, have received less attention. Therefore, more studies are needed to address the issue in the field. Regarding the research methodologies, although the ELT curriculum and policy studies utilized a variety of different research approaches, they mostly used a qualitative one. The generalizability of the studies seems to be overlooked because qualitative researchers rarely address the issue of generalizability. It can be concluded that the results of the ELT curriculum and policy studies are not conclusive. Therefore, more quantitative and large-scale studies are needed in this area.

The reviewed studies in the field were conducted in different educational and cultural settings, and they were varied in terms of focus. It can be concluded that it is difficult to identify a robust pattern in the focus of the studies and see the whole picture of the field. To address this issue, more comparative and international studies are needed.

Implications

This study has implications for researchers, policymakers, and ELT teachers. They need to know the current state of ELT curriculum and policy for decision-making and future actions.

Limitation of the study

The current study analyzed 73 peer-reviewed articles which were limited to the school level. Secondly, the study was limited to the articles published between 2010 and 2020, so the time limit was short. Thirdly, since all reviewed articles were scholarly articles of original research from peer-reviewed journals, other types of studies like book chapters, short communications, reviews, editorials, reports, theses, and dissertations might have contributed to this systematic review.

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