

Making It Local: Teachers' Sociomaterial Practices in Localising Global Curricula

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Curriculum borrowing in Southeast Asia (SEA) is a prevalent strategy to align educational practices with global standards, foster economic advancement, and support development of local curricula. However, this process requires localisation to ensure that borrowed content aligns with local pedagogical and cultural contexts. While past research has documented the borrowing trend, few studies have illuminated how localisation is enacted by educators in diverse SEA settings. This gap is addressed in the current study by exploring the sociomaterial dynamics of localising borrowed curricula. It specifically seeks to: (1) describe how localisation unfolds in particular SEA contexts, and (2) examine the process of localisation through the lens of Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

Methodology: This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with six participants: two school administrators, two teacher educators, and two teachers from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Participants were selected via convenience sampling and interviewed via online platforms or email. Data were analysed using ANT, focusing on three dimensions: sociality, textuality, and materiality. This was to examine the interplay of human and non-human elements in shaping the localisation process. Member-checking was conducted to ensure transcription accuracy and interpretive validity.

Main Results: Findings suggest that localisation is often confined to the classroom level and shouldered by teachers with little institutional support. Administrators and teacher educators viewed localisation as the responsibility of teachers, albeit influenced by top-down discourses on globalisation and curriculum legitimacy. From the findings, three key themes emerged:

- a. Sociality revealed who was involved or excluded from the localisation process, with teachers operating with limited systemic backing.
- b. Textuality examined discourses surrounding localisation, showing how global legitimacy pressures coexisted with expectations for local cultural responsiveness.

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- c. Materiality referred to actual pedagogical actions, such as modifying materials, incorporating local examples, or using students' home languages.

Discussions: The study shows that localisation is both a pedagogical and political act, which is shaped by sociocultural values and institutional priorities. Borrowed curricula serve symbolic and practical functions, such as enhancing legitimacy, expanding networks, and demonstrating modernisation; however, localisation is rarely collaborative as it tends to be reactive, fragmented, and emotionally challenging for teachers navigating between institutional mandates and students' realities. Teachers' efforts to reconcile global standards with local needs illustrate their professional adaptability and sociomaterial engagement. Yet, this also reveals systemic neglect, as these individualised efforts are often unrecognised and unsupported.

Conclusions: Localisation of borrowed curricula in SEA occurs within complex sociomaterial ecologies where teachers, often acting in isolation, draw upon contextual knowledge and pedagogical creativity to enact culturally relevant instruction. While administrators recognise the need for localisation, structural systems rarely provide the necessary resources or authority to facilitate it. Future research should include voices of students and community members and adopt longitudinal and ethnographic approaches to capture the evolving and situated nature of localisation. Institutional support, participatory curriculum development, and pedagogical autonomy are critical for sustainable and inclusive localisation practices.

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Introduction

In Southeast Asia (SEA), the borrowing of educational curricula has become common. Globally, curriculum borrowing has become a key strategy for nations to seek legitimacy and comparability with each other. Besides this, curriculum borrowing has been linked with educational reform and the promise of improving educational quality and competitiveness (Cantley, 2019). Furthermore, borrowing can forge working relationships with administrators or even educational experts. It may also serve as a stepping-stone for future development of local curricula (Pham & Renshaw, 2015). Across SEA nations, curriculum borrowing is integrated into educational plans and initiatives in a top-down manner, where a foreign educational framework may be mandated and interpreted into existing frameworks.

While borrowing curricula may facilitate wider recognition, its implementation may create tension in the local context. This may be evident in places that have sociocultural

perspectives and practices that are distinct from the curriculum that is borrowed. Moreover, to implement a borrowed curriculum, the onus typically lies with the teachers, as they would need to work towards reconciling foreign educational policies or perspectives with sociocultural realities in their communities. In particular, localising a borrowed curriculum involves deep engagement between the curriculum expectation with elements and entities found in the immediate community. This renders the localisation process a sociomaterial endeavour, where teachers consider different social and material elements that shape their decision-making processes and practices. To demonstrate the localisation of borrowed curricula in the SEA context, this paper will utilise a qualitative approach to expound on insights of relevant participants. Specifically, this study is guided by the principles of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), given its focus on factors and processes that are encountered when localizing a borrowed curriculum. The research objectives that this study aims to address are:

1. To describe the localisation of borrowed curriculum in particular contexts; and,
2. To examine the process localisation.

Literature Review

Borrowing and Localising Curricula in SEA: Factors and Examples

There are different factors that prompt the borrowing of curricula. A prominent factor in SEA is the desire to be involved in the process of globalisation. As an example, an educational framework that has been borrowed extensively across SEA nations is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (see discussion by Foley, 2021). In Malaysia, CEFR was found to be appealing given the availability of research to attest to its utility, as well as external agencies that have provided validated evaluation or benchmarking of the teaching capabilities of English teachers, or levels of proficiency of English speakers against CEFR standards. This has offered a convenience for educational institutions, especially those at the tertiary level, to have a consensus for what English courses should be (Ahmad Afip et al., 2019). In Vietnam, the adaptation of CEFR was driven primarily by the nation's long-standing practice of borrowing, given the influence of major external economic powers over the country (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). This has led to a form of xenophilia, where the nation is quick to rely on foreign influences or ideas to resolve or address local concerns. Besides practical and utilitarian factors, borrowing may be driven by sociopolitical factors. For instance, the adaptation of foreign educational policies in Thailand was spearheaded by Thai elites to demonstrate an interest in modernisation, while preserving social-cultural traditions and national sovereignty (Lao, 2019).

With the borrowing of curricula, there are efforts to localise them to better suit the immediate teaching and learning culture, as well as the needs of the surrounding community. In the field of political science, localisation of policies may be viewed as a process where congruence is built between local and foreign norms, which Capie (2012) explains as a process that involves "reconstructing the content of a norm to make it fit better with regional norms and preferences." (p. 88). To ensure that foreign elements are appropriate, the process of localisation needs to be driven by those working in the classroom, as these people would be more familiar with the local norms. Localisation in the education sector may be viewed similarly. This process is illustrated by Xiong and Feng (2020), who reported about the integration of an English as a foreign language program at a school in China. Their study discussed the selection of aspects of

the foreign language program to be integrated into the local curriculum, to ensure a sociocultural fit with local teaching and learning practices (Liu & Xu, 2011; Loo et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2023). Localising a curriculum is not only a matter of using new teaching materials, but it will also involve teachers' adjusting their pedagogical perspectives and practices. To do this, teachers will need not only recognise their own personal beliefs, but also intermediate factors that could have a bearing on how the curriculum is localised and implemented. Through this process, teachers will need to reconcile 'local and extended knowledge networks' (Tronsmo & Nerland, 2018).

In SEA, there are reports of curricula or educational policies being used without further contextual adjustments. In some cases, those working at the classroom level are not empowered with the space and agency to make necessary adjustments (Bush et al., 2023). Furthermore, when borrowing has become a norm or is rampant, it may lead to a lack of desire or motivation to know reasons for such borrowing, especially if it is a top-down mandate (Sairattanain & Loo, 2021). Even in Singapore, which is well-known for high educational standards, the adaptation of curricula may not be necessarily effective. For instance, Singapore's early childhood curriculum was found to merge both Confucian and western-based approaches in teaching children, but the curriculum does not elaborate on socio-cultural or ecological aspects of the local sociocultural context. This creates tension, given the importance placed by Singapore on maintaining the harmony of its ethnic and religious groups (Yang et al., 2022). In Myanmar, at least one report has noted the lack of institutional support or professional training for teachers in the implementation of changes on primary-level English language curriculum (Hall & Gaynor, 2020).

While the prevailing discourse suggests that SEA countries tend to borrow curricula from the west, it should be noted that western countries have also borrowed educational practices and curricula developed in the east. It should also not be assumed that curriculum adaptation or policy borrowing is done wholesale, without adjustments attempted to fit the needs of the local setting. Nonetheless, very few researchers have sought to highlight how adjustments or localisation efforts were carried out in a classroom or an educational environment. This is a gap that this study intends to address. By highlighting how the localisation is a pedagogical agenda of educators in the region, this study aims to counter the simplistic notion that the borrowing of pedagogical approaches or materials from the west may be countered.

Localising as a Sociomaterial Endeavour

As mentioned, teachers need to engage with local social and material elements to implement appropriate adjustments to a curriculum. When teachers are involved with these elements, a teacher's plan for a lesson becomes unpredictable. Given this dynamism, the notion of sociomateriality aligns with the process of localisation. In particular, sociomateriality acknowledges that there is not one absolute way to carry out a practice. This openness allows the questioning and even critique of hegemony, as a sociomaterial approach recognises the availability of spaces for transformation (Postma, 2012). For those in teaching and learning, this is important as it may be considered an empowering source for agency. Regardless of the educational level taught, teachers need to be encouraged to be independent in their pedagogical practices. While mandated materials may be assigned to them, teachers would still need to make modifications to fit not only their students' immediate needs, but also to align with institutional, economical and sociopolitical-objectives. Previous research, such as that by Ahamat et al. (2018), has shown how teachers had to create culturally relevant material and adjust the language of the tasks to suit the students' level of proficiency. For teachers to be able

to localise a borrowed curriculum that contains unfamiliar information, they need to be creative and imaginative. This should be shaped by teachers having an inherent desire for students to be successful and useful members of the local society. This would entail utilising beliefs from the students' immediate context as inspiration for classroom activities. Doing so would not only create a sustainable teaching and learning environment, but it would also further encourage teachers and students to have the agency to shape their own educational trajectories (Postma, 2012; Mulcahy et al., 2015).

A sociomaterial approach allows the understanding of "professional practice beyond individuals' discretionary decision-making, beyond stable communities and beyond given knowledge" (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 3). More specifically, a sociomaterial approach "challenges the established individualised, psychological perspective, where teaching is primarily seen in terms of the intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of people, and directs attention to the complex, socio-material character of teachers' work" (Mulcahy, 2012, p. 134). This means that a sociomaterial approach advocates for the examination of the whole environment, and not necessarily direct or specific elements, as its interest lies within the interaction between human with human (social), and human with non-human (material). This may include objects such as teaching and learning tools and technologies, texts, as well as social norms. These objects are pertinent to a profession, as they serve as a catalyst that prompt certain epistemological approaches or practices (Fenwick et al., 2012).

Methodology

This study aims to describe the localisation of borrowed curriculum in particular SEA contexts. To do this, a qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Participants and Their Context

The participants of this study had administrative roles or taught at different levels; as such, their collective insights offered a glimpse into unique processes and perspectives related to localisation. When taken together, these insights offered a constellation of stories that can expand or even contradict prevailing discourses (Parker & Craig, 2017). The participants comprised those who had the responsibility of managing a curriculum or enacting a curriculum through teaching; hence, administrators, teacher educators, and teachers were invited to volunteer in this study. All the participants described below (pseudonyms) were recruited through purposive sampling, as the educational establishment where they were working at the time of the study used a borrowed curriculum. As such, the participants were 'information-rich' as they would have had the experience of working with borrowed curricula (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). During recruitment, the participants were informed of the purpose of this study, and their express consent was taken. They understood that their participation was voluntary and that their data would be kept confidential and anonymized.

The participants with administrative posts were Shane (Singapore), Vincent (Cambodia): Shane is a principal for a school that offers kindergarten, primary, and secondary programs; Vincent sits on the administrative board of a network of K-12 international schools in Cambodia; meanwhile, Sean (Thailand) and Jane (Thailand) are teacher educators in Thailand. Sean works with foreigners looking to be English teachers in Thailand while Jane works at a public university

offering teacher training in the Northeastern region of the country. Both Sean and Jane teach budding teachers for primary and secondary-level education. The teachers involved in this study were Misha and Kris. Misha is a secondary school English and music teacher in Malaysia, while Kris is an English teacher at an international school in Laos. Kris teaches English and social science subjects at the secondary level. Since many of the participants involved were either teacher educators preparing future English teachers, or English teachers, it was expected that their example or experiences would revolve around English language education in their respective contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

Five participants were interviewed online (Vincent, Sean, Jane, Misha and Kris) while one participant (Shane) was interviewed over email. The two broad interview questions, along with the corresponding research objectives, are shown in the table below. In both modes of interview, subquestions were posed to the participants to elicit further information about their experience and perspectives regarding the borrowing of curricula. These subquestions were determined based on the necessity for the participants to provide further elaboration of their initial responses. There were three rounds of online interviews with each participant, lasting between 20 to 30 minutes. Meanwhile, the participant who was interviewed via email was engaged in an extended correspondence with the researcher over several weeks. Data collection took place between May and July 2023.

Table 1

Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objective	Interview Question
1. To describe the localisation of borrowed curriculum in particular contexts	What does localising a borrowed curriculum mean in your context?
2. To examine the process of localisation	How does the process of localisation take place?

Online interviews were conducted at a convenient time for the participants. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, and the data from the email interviews were presented as is. To ensure the trustworthiness of the transcription, member-checking was conducted by means of inviting all participants to read and comment on the transcription. This step was also repeated at the point of data analysis for the purpose of avoiding any misrepresentation or to seek further clarification from the participants (Kabilan & Annamalai, 2022). As for the email interview, data directly taken from the responses of the participant. Both the online and email interviews were done in English and as such, no translation was required. This ensured that the language and meaning from the interviews were retained. It was important that after data was collected, all identifying information was removed to maintain confidentiality. This step was informed by the researcher's formal training in conducting social science research. Furthermore, all the data were handled with strict anonymity, with no information traceable to individual participants.

Since this study employed a qualitative approach to address the research objectives, data collected through interview was examined as narrative case studies. The theoretical lens used as the analytical guide was the ANT. Using this theory is appropriate when there is an

interest in social and material elements as pivotal factors that shape a process, such as the localisation of a borrowed curriculum. Fenwick (2012) explains that “ANT is useful to illuminate different forms of participation in practice—in fact, it shows the limits of notions of ‘participation’. An ANT approach can trace the ways that human and non-human entities negotiate their connections and their mutual influences to assemble into some form of practice (or not), that can become extended, or powerful, or contingent, or partial, or prescriptive and so forth.” (Fenwick, 2012, p. 77). In other words, using ANT would cast a comprehensive net to identify different and contextualised factors that shape the pedagogical perspectives and actions taken to make suitable adjustments to curricula, pedagogical practices, or materials that are borrowed.

The interview data were initially analysed through inductive and iterative reading, where recurring meanings or patterns related to the participants’ pedagogical decisions, institutional practices or constraints, and curriculum strategies were identified. These preliminary themes were then compared and re-examined against ANT’s analytical foci, which are sociality, textuality, and materiality. Sociality refers to the social organisation of an institution, or the grounds that initiates social interaction; textuality refers to perceptions and discourses surrounding the object of study; and materiality refers to the actions or practices taken and spaces for where these may be enacted (see Mulcahy et al., 2015). From the interview data, sociality was identified based on references made regarding the working relationship with colleagues, the school or educational institution, or the school management; textuality was determined based on attitudes or opinions of the participants towards any elements found within the educational environment; and materiality referred to the participants’ pedagogical decisions or practices.

Data from this study is presented separately according to role of the participant. The narratives of those who held administrative posts served as a backdrop to inform teachers’ localisation of curricula, which was presented as case studies. This approach sought to examine discursive meanings emergent from the talk or text of the participants. As stated by Johnson and Mercer (2019), sociocultural discourse analysis considers “word choices and cohesive patterning [that] can represent ways that knowledge is being jointly constructed” (p. 268). Next, participants who are teachers were presented as case studies to offer an insider’s view of the process of localisation. This allowed for the sharing of distinct examples, and even critical incidents (Simons, 2014).

Findings

In the following parts, narratives from two school administrators and two teacher educators about the localisation of borrowed curricula are presented based on sociality, textuality, and materiality. These three aspects were further distinguished as discourses of involvement, initiation, and the drawing in of contextual and local resources.

Sociality: Inclusion and Exclusion through Involvement

For the aspect of sociality, the discourse of involvement was pertinent, in that there were inclusions and exclusions of people in the process of localisation. For Shane (#1), this process was a collective effort for everyone, including the administrators.

Shane (#1)

Why reinvent the wheel if we can intentionally assess an evidence-based curriculum ... one benefit is to learn from their continuous improvement of the curriculum (overseas) while we simultaneously do our due diligence to improve, with data collected locally ... If we don't blindly "borrow", the benefits are evident, recognising no one-size-fit-all curriculum suffice in a highly learner diversified environment.

Vincent (#2), on the other hand, considered teachers as shouldering the bulk of the responsibility when it comes to localising the curriculum. Vincent excluded administrators from this process. This is seen in the excerpt below, where Vincent mentions what teachers – “they” – need to do. To facilitate and support teachers, administrators would need to find ways to empower them. Nonetheless, while this may indicate that administrators recognising that their teachers would know what to do in classroom, there was still a distance or hierarchy between them, and that teachers were not in full control of how a curriculum may be interpreted or implemented. This was made evident when Vincent mentioned that those from the local political and business scene could also contribute; thus, setting an expectation for how teachers can localise the curriculum.

Vincent (#2)

Check the material, redesign the material they can take what is good and include what, experience, knowledge, or facts relevant in the context, yeah. So in order to redesign the curriculum or redesign the materials they may have to invite the local professionals ... Of course they don't have to go sit in the room, at the round table with the lecturers, no need. Survey the students' perspective and teachers', because teachers are real practitioners ... From the teachers and also school administrators and also you know, politics is also important, you may have to invite some politicians to talk about that and also business people in the country, because you know education is influenced by politics and business.

The sentiment of Sean (#3) and Jane was comparable to that of Vincent's, where the teachers were the ones directly involved in the localisation of curriculum. For Sean, it was because the teachers are considered guardians of the local context. In Thailand, teachers are typically viewed as upstanding members of the community. This view is thus extended to what they teach the students, and how they go about doing it.

Sean (#3)

Schools are very traditional. They are the holding pins for culture, really, in schools and Thai teachers, particularly Thai and especially female Thai teachers uphold the traditions of Thai culture very, very strongly.

Jane (#4), on the other hand, compared what was expected of her as a teacher educator and a faculty member with what teachers may need to do. This may not be surprising, given the sociocultural context where Jane is operating. As she is in Thailand, there is the expectation for her to defer to top-down mandates given to her. At the societal level, Jane is also expected to

inhabit a particular professional identity. This is why teachers, along with the educational administrators, may be answerable to other people who may not necessarily be an immediate member of the learning environment. The localisation process was not strictly bound to the experiences of the classroom but extended into the community as well.

Jane (#4)

When I was defending the new curriculum, the committee asked to add more information about how the program can add value to the local community, such as promoting youth in the community to speak English as local tour guides, or allowing student-teachers to be involved in efforts to internationalise local products ... similarly, future teachers will need to do this on their own in their own classroom. They will need to answer to someone else, and that person may be outside of the school, like the community.

Textuality: Initiation of the Localisation Process

Textuality refers to the prevailing discourses affecting the context of the phenomenon being examined. In the case of localising curriculum, it appeared that the discourse of initiation was pertinent for participants holding administrative posts. As seen in the earlier excerpt from Shane (#5), the localisation of curriculum was a top-down process; moreover, there was an expectation that it should have 'local flavours', which were to be 'lauded'. It should be noted that this form of borrowing was also common in Singapore, a context that is often viewed as being modern and progressive in terms of education. An explanation for this may be that the nation needs to maintain its competitiveness with others in the region and beyond. To do this effectively, control over curriculum may still need to be centralised.

Shane (#5)

With globalisation (despite the pandemic, and without a geopolitical bifurcation of East versus West), an internationally recognised curriculum, albeit with some local flavor, is to be lauded.

Shane's comments demonstrate that the top-down policy in Singapore was not unexpected. In fact, it was important given the perceived need to be internationally competitive, and thus more appealing to international students. This was similar to the discourse of Vincent (#6), Sean (#7), and Jane (#8). For them, the localisation of curriculum was expected of teachers, and should aspire for the learning environment to be context sensitive, with careful attention paid to the local culture. Furthermore, as mentioned in the case of Jane, the community should also be involved in this process.

Vincent (#6)

It's very important, you cannot import all the materials from other countries, like you have mentioned earlier. It may be good in those countries, but it may not bring the same impact on the students, when you take to your own country, because the students find it irrelevant to their experience.

Vincent's response above demonstrates an understanding of the need for contextual awareness in curriculum design. This was evident through his understanding of how a foreign curriculum still needs to resonate with students for it to be impactful.

Sean (#7)

So we would try and take whatever was it that they saw and deconstruct it and say, well there's actually a reason for so and so. It would normally be a discussion around the relationship between foreigners, and ties with the foreigner in a foreign country as a visitor, and the neo-colonialist imposition of Western ideals on to... we would normally go down that route and say well I mean it's not your place or your, you know, and you're just going to get yourself into trouble if you start being all American in a non-American country.

Sean's (#7) response also demonstrates an awareness of the need to modify materials that are borrowed. This was driven by the recognition that even the teacher (or the students) may not fully embody the culture or knowledge being conveyed through the foreign materials. In fact, Sean's response showed a careful consideration of the ideals that may be implicitly promoted through materials, and how these may be potentially problematic.

Jane (#8)

For this reason, each teacher is encouraged to integrate local development into the program such as making academic camps for local schools as the way to familiarise students with local children and community before going for practicum. With this in mind, teachers in each program seem to have the extra added pressure of having students put in the extra effort outside of the classroom because working in local community will need more incentives.

In Jane's (#8) response above, the need to include and integrate local perspectives and practices were mentioned. This was also done in consideration of the extra effort on the teacher's part. Specifically, making modifications would take time and effort, as teachers would need to identify local meanings that would be appropriate substitutes to foreign materials. This also needs to be done in alignment with the broader curriculum objectives.

Materiality: Drawing in on the Local

From the narratives of the participants, materiality was found within the school setting. The four participants conceded that the localisation process may be carried out by drawing in local views and practices into the learning environment. This may be a complex process, especially in school settings where top-down directives are common. However, even in situations where the bottom-up approach may be taken, there may still be other intervening structures. For instance, when we consider the response of Sean (#7), teachers were instructed on the necessity to fine-tune lessons to fit the cultural system of the local context. However, this should not be mistaken as flexibility; teachers need to be cautious so as to not work against the inherent cultural structure found in the broader learning environment. The same may be seen in Jane's (#8) response, where even though localisation was expected, it had to be done in light of potential benefits to the community.

Case Studies of Teachers

Next, let us consider the insights for teachers, revealed through a case study approach. These case studies provide further details on how the process of localisation took place. The case studies also considered sociality, textuality, and materiality.

Misha

The first case study for consideration is that of Misha. The borrowed curriculum which Misha needs to work with is CEFR, which the Malaysian government had adopted in its recent national revamp of the English language curriculum (Ahmad Afip et al., 2019). In the top-down approach, materials such as textbooks and a teacher's guide had been provided; yet, Misha still found herself making modifications to the learning materials to ensure relevance.

I localise materials by relating it with their daily lives, and be more flexible to their needs. Well actually, from real life situations and the challenges that I face, I learn how to manipulate the materials, relate and adapt them with the students' situation, and also, with the resources that I find on the Internet, which actually helps me understand e-learning better. This needs to happen because otherwise, students would not be interested. They will not participate, even though they know that the English subject is important for the national exam. So, what I do is to present lessons that are practical for them in their everyday activities, and I hope that this will motivate them to put in more effort to study English.

The localisation process was not only confined to making materials relevant but also being sensitive to the practical needs of students, as a way to motivate them. It is interesting to note that despite the prominence of CEFR in Malaysia and the complete materials provided – a textbook with a teacher's guide – Misha still had to venture beyond these. Rather than having the national exam as a point to teach towards, Misha's initiation of the localisation process begins with wanting to relate the materials to the students' lives. What Misha did was aligned with that reported by Ahamat et al. (2024), where modifications to materials in the textbook had to be made to ensure relevance to students' local background.

The principal encourages localisation, especially during the pandemic. We, teachers, have to adapt to the real learning environment and the opportunities. My principal wanted every teacher to build our own capacity for self-learning. So that we can adapt to the situation. We were encouraged to look for workshops online, to explore opportunities for material development. Most importantly, the principal wanted the teachers to be knowledgeable in learning, so that we can adapt to the changing situation.

Sociality in Misha's case was similar to the narratives of the school administrators and teacher educators, where the process of localisation was one where the teacher had direct responsibility. This was reified in the textual discourse in Misha's case, where it was apparent that she worked within a top-down context. The localisation process was also confined to the learning environment. As seen in Misha's case, she had to source her own replacement or even supplementary materials, and also to identify professional activities useful for her teaching.

Kris

The next case is Kris. She explained that her school operates with the IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) curriculum, with many materials from Cambridge University Press. Similar to Misha, while there were assigned materials, Kris found that these materials were insufficient for the lessons or irrelevant to the students, and that she had to make replacements or modifications.

There are quite a number of times when I need to add to the lessons because they do not have enough activities for the students. In the office, we have activities in our resource bank. You can choose different games, even. Or you can go online. There is this one particular website where I get my materials from ... Many times also we find that the lessons talk about things students might not understand. It can be simple things. For example, for holidays, we talked about holidays and we will have to use the example in Laos. We do that so that they will be familiar with the discussion, right? They won't understand like, holidays in America, holidays in Europe. They won't understand so we'll have to use holidays in Laos.

It may be observed that Kris critically engaged with the materials to ensure an extent of culturally responsive pedagogy. This pedagogy goes beyond the modification of learning materials, as it also takes into account the learning processes significant to the cultural context. This includes the choice of an optimal medium of instruction for the students. Kris did this by having to 'improvise' and 'translate' in her classroom.

If I tried to speak English, they would have question marks on their faces. They won't understand a single word I say. So, I have to improvise. I give like, maybe, like four or five instructions. I will translate myself in English twice. I will have to do this with very basic English so that they will understand what we're trying to do in class. But all the materials will be in English.

Kris' use of students' language is a snippet of a form of translanguaging, where there is displacement of use English only with a linguistic code familiar to the students. This presents a more wholistic pedagogical practice, as it takes into account students' knowledge and ability, and calls into question the status of borrowed curriculum.

We learn different kind of teaching methods that you know, to help our teaching to be better and to be relevant in class, and stuff like that. So there will be different opportunities for us to do that, like lesson demos where the school principal will come and give us some examples and activities to do in class and then we can try it out with our students. It is good to see what the principal might be interested in, because why would the principal demonstrate something if she wasn't interested right? But I actually find that it is through my own trial and error, my own experience that I learn the most. The demonstration helps, too, in some ways, but only as, like a counterpoint to what I do in class.

Similar to the aspect of sociality seen in the case of Misha, Kris also shouldered the process of localisation, especially in terms in re-developing materials to meet the students' needs; however, there were also efforts put in place by the school principal, who organised teaching demonstrations for the teachers. These demonstrations were useful for teachers to gauge what the principal had in mind, yet there seemed to be no expectations for the teachers to adapt practices shared at these demonstrations. Moreover, there seemed to be sufficient space for teachers to enact agency, as Kris stated that trial and error had been valuable for her own teaching. This helped Kris determine teaching practices that may not work in her classroom. What was gleaned from the response of Kris is that the top expects teachers to make necessary adjustments. Furthermore, the position of the borrowed curriculum, which in this case is the IGCSE, was not questioned; rather, teachers would need to manoeuvre their way around by identifying aspects of the materials that can be localised (Jeong & Hardy, 2025).

In terms of materiality, it can be observed that the localisation process occurred within the school setting. In particular, Kris described this process as taking place in the teacher's office, where one would be able to find possibly helpful resources; otherwise, like Misha, a teacher would need to go to the Internet to source materials.

Discussion

From the narratives of the school administrators and teacher educators, factors that instigated the borrowing of curriculum, and the subsequent localisation were economic and sociopolitical. Borrowing was seen as an entry point to partake in a product used globally, and at the same time borrowing was also a cornerstone for local educational institutions to set themselves apart from others (e.g., Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). Moreover, borrowing was done given its accessibility to materials, which were modified to better suit the education or sociopolitical needs of the new context. Furthermore, from the narratives of Vincent, Sean, and Jane, we could see how localisation took place primarily in the classrooms. These were all directed towards different outcomes, either to be impactful to the students, or to not commit cultural faux pas, or to seek and create opportunities to get to know the community better. The intention here may be the need to create a relevant learning environment for the students. While efforts to create contextually meaningful learning experiences for students are valuable, the risk of being removed from the global context may arise. This has been discussed in the context of SEA. For instance, in Thailand, Satienchayakorn and Grant (2023) described the social and political tensions in maintaining local views and practices while also pursuing a global outlook. While a balanced or equitable approach may be challenging to achieve, what may suffice is to instil the awareness of different views, and the knowledge and skills to respond to these views. This may be compared to Tronsmo and Nerland's (2018) discussion regarding the localisation of curriculum, where materials that are not necessarily local need to be reconciled with networks of local knowledge. Furthermore, allowing teachers the space to do so would assume that there is trust by the educational system, and agency of the teachers (Bush et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, from the perspective of the teachers, localisation was not a process that involved guidance or cooperation. Instead, teachers had to independently manoeuvre and meet expectations laid out for them. This rendered the process of localising as quite isolating, as teachers were left to their "own devices to manage on their own" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 36). This also indicated a distance between the teacher and higher management or stakeholders,

as their concern was with the implementation of the curriculum, and not the teaching and learning practices enacted in the classroom. This demonstrates how the localisation of a borrowed curriculum resides at the micro- or lower levels of the larger educational setting (Tronsmo & Nerland, 2018).

Given that the localisation process was confined at the micro-level, there seemed to be a resolution that teachers had to work with the borrowed curricula. Those holding administrative roles and responsibilities, on the other hand, were removed from the learning environment (Heng & Song, 2023). In the teachers' quest to make the borrowed curricula relevant, the localisation experience became a form of necessity as teachers wanted to create a meaningful learning environment. This process may not be grounded in any social or cultural agenda, as teachers may be driven by the need to teach well, and to meet curriculum objectives. Furthermore, while teachers may be going through extensive localisation processes, these may not have any impact on the curriculum. In fact, successful localisation may add value to the curriculum, and further justify its borrowing.

Conclusion

This study examined the insights of participants regarding the localisation of curriculum through ANT. Three particular aspects were considered, namely sociality, textuality, and materiality. These were understood in terms of involvement, initiation, and the drawing in of contextual and local resources. From the narratives of the participants, the localisation of borrowed curricula involved only the teachers in their classrooms, where they had to also independently decide on appropriate cultural and contextual adjustments with no clear guidance or support from their institutions. This affirmed that pedagogical practices and knowledge were not necessarily executed or transferable in a linear manner, which was also indicative of teachers' ability to recognise various elements, and to interact with them in an optimal manner so that teaching and learning can take place with minimal disruption (Mulcahy, 2012; Postholm, 2012).

What may be seen from this study is the established practice of borrowing curricula in SEA. This would require those in the educational environment, including students, to navigate through perspectives or aspirations that may not necessarily align with local meanings. Despite this challenge being a constant, we note that teachers would have the best interests of students in mind. Furthermore, teachers would be agentic and make use of any space afforded to them to adjust borrowed pedagogical materials and advocate for the learning of local aspirations.

A limitation of this study is the focus on a small group of participants or stakeholders involved in managing borrowed curricula. The study also relied on reported data derived from approaches that may not provide an in-depth view into the processes involved in borrowing curricula. Future research should focus on a specific context whilst involving other stakeholders, such as students and community members affected by a borrowed curriculum. The role of institutions and administrators should also be analysed to determine actions or perspectives that would be supportive of the teachers' work in implementing a borrowed curriculum. Researchers should also consider providing a longitudinal perspective to be able to offer insights into the consistency and varied challenges that may arise in the efforts of localising a borrowed curriculum. Moreover, researchers should also consider teachers' pedagogical approaches at pivotal periods in the learning environment, such as at the time of preparing students for

standardised examinations. It would be interesting to investigate the compromises or the enhancements that teachers introduce into their classrooms, especially in retaining or insisting on lessons about local perspectives. Future research should also take on a more ecological perspective using ethnographic methods. This would ensure a more encompassing method to account for the varied sociomaterial elements found in an educational environment.

Author Contributions

DBL: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Review and Editing.

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT5.2 to assist with language editing and polishing of the draft. The tool was used solely to improve clarity, grammar, and overall readability. The authors reviewed and revised the output as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Ethics

No formal ethical request was made for this study; however, it strictly followed relevant ethical guidelines, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Data was handled confidentially with all identifying details anonymized or removed. The researcher possesses an ethics certificate for conducting Social & Behavioral Research (Reference number: 42053677).

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