

Imperfections in syllabus designing of English course at the primary level of education in Pakistan: an obstacle in attaining language proficiency

Zohaib Zahid^{*1} | Asmara Shafqat²

1. Department of English, Islamia University Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan Campus, Pakistan.

2. Department of Humanities, NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author Email: zohaib.zahid@iub.edu.pk

Received: November 22, 2021

Accepted: April 14, 2022

Published: June 22, 2022

Abstract

The syllabus of English that has been adopted in public and private schools in Pakistan does not meet the criteria to achieve the targets. It has been revised at some point of times, but the problems persist and impede the students' learning performance, but the problems persist and impede the students' learning performance. The syllabus designers have developed it without considering the needs of the students and the instructors' abilities. The researcher has focused on evaluating the imperfection in syllabus designing that hampers learner to learn and instructors to teach. The objectives of this study are understanding, evaluation, and development of syllabus in English language skills. This study has been conducted at the primary school level to understand the learners' problems at an initial level. The selected material for analysis is the textbook of English taught at grade 1 in public schools of Pakistan. The analysis of the contents of the textbook syllabus would enable the researchers to develop a hypothesis to remove all the flaws from the syllabus of English textbooks. The questions of syllabus designing at the initial level, the contents of the syllabus, and to develop a functional-based syllabus have been addressed in this research.

Keywords: English language, syllabus designing, education policy, primary education, textbooks, public schools, curriculum of English, functional based syllabus.

How to Cite:

Zahid, Z. & Shafqat, A. (2022). Imperfections in syllabus designing of English course at the primary level of education in Pakistan: an obstacle in attaining language proficiency. *Journal of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences (JHSMS)*, 3(1), 312-321. <https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.jhsms/3.1.22>

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1. Introduction

The curriculum and syllabus are primary documents that must be developed as part of a course design assignment. Syllabus designing of the English language course plays a vital role in attaining proficiency in the English language, and its evaluation is essential to achieve the target. The syllabus is a key factor in language learning, and it describes some targets that are necessary for the teachers and the learners to achieve. The syllabus has been defined by various linguists and educationists differently. According to Dubin and Olshtain (1986), whereas a curriculum defines the widest settings in which language teaching planning occurs, a syllabus is a more specific document, generally written for a specific learners' group. It is also considered that the syllabus is much more definite than a curriculum, but a curriculum may have many syllabi. A curriculum may simply outline the objectives of what the students will be able to do by the end of the course. Whereas, as Krahne (1987) stated, the syllabus provides the material of the courses developed to facilitate students to meet their objectives (Krahne, 1987). Generally, the central aspect of syllabus design is said to be what is taught or its content. It incorporates the learning or behavioural objectives for learners and details on how the topic will be delivered and assessed. The syllabus presents a reflection of the performance of language and linguistics, and it aims to describe at the simplest level what is and has to be erudite (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The (1987) has defined the syllabus in a way that it is a summary of the contents to which the learners are exposed. The syllabus explains only the content that is taught, and it lacks the accuracy of what is to be learnt by the learners.

This study has been conducted to analyze the syllabus of English textbooks taught in class one at primary level education in Pakistan. The textbook analysis is essential because the main source of teaching English to a majority of the students in Pakistan is textbooks. The researcher has observed that the English textbook syllabus has deficiencies restricting learners from achieving language proficiency. The syllabus designers ignore the ground realities and the approaches that are required to be considered seriously before implementing textbooks at any level generally and initial level of learning specifically. English textbook for class three is found too complicated for the learners to gain the required knowledge of English. Considering the learners' approach, the aspects of the syllabus in the textbook of class three that obstruct the learning process will be explored in this study.

The research questions of the study are: a) what are the deficiencies in the existing syllabus of English at an initial level of school classes? b) what are the essential contents that need to be added to the syllabus? and c) how can the syllabus be made functional based to improve the learners' communicative skills? The research objectives of the research are: a) To examine the deficiencies in the existing syllabus. b) To investigate the content that need to be added on the capability of the teachers and learners requirement. And c) To explore how functional based syllabus be incorporated to improve the communicative competence of the learners.

2. Literature review

In a second language learning classroom, most of the teaching material is taken by the textbooks of English for teaching and learning. According to Harmer (2000), the teachers in various institutes do not have the authority to decide the course contents, and superior administrative authorities take such decisions about syllabus and course contents. In the institutes, a complete handbook is given to the teachers to teach, and nothing can be changed

in the course contents by the teachers. Theory of language, theory of learning and the types of learning are the features of the language teaching method closely linked to the syllabus. Setting and designing a syllabus requires the two main aspects to be considered to decide what gets taught and in what order. This is why the theory of language exclusively participates in deciding the kind of syllabus being adopted. Similarly, an important role is also played by the theory of learning in the choice of the syllabus. For instance, any of the language theories can be opted by the teachers in the class with no guarantee that the students will be in line with the theory adopted by the teacher.

Learner type is another variable in the choice of the syllabus. Learner types can be seen in practical and observable terms, such as type of cognitive activity, lifestyle, aspirations, employment, educational and social backgrounds and so on (Krahnke, 1987). Some research in teacher practice suggests that language teachers do not accurately describe their practice (Long & Sato, 1983), have contradictory and inconsistent beliefs about language teaching (Krahnke & Knowles, 1984), and when they become teachers, they keep on repeating their own experiences as students. Resultantly, the teachers can strongly influence the syllabus regardless of the syllabus given to them by the authorities.

On the other hand, the textbooks provide sufficient material to the teachers to form classroom dynamics (Byrd, 2001). It has been described by Coracini (2014) that the natural resource of learning a second language and shaping the direction of action and content are the textbooks used by the teachers in classrooms. The teaching and learning process takes place in the class by understanding the contents of the syllabus in the textbooks of English, and it further indicates the teaching methodologies adopted in the class.

The language researchers have observed that the weaknesses in textbook/syllabus design lead to a deficiency of language performance in English language classrooms. In this context, the syllabus designers have to follow all the directions to design a syllabus that would prove helpful to achieve the targets in English language proficiency. There are eight components of syllabus designing, which are essential parts of syllabus designing that are described by Nation and Macalister (2010). The components are:

2.1. Considering/following the environment

The course designers of language need to consider the environment in which teaching and learning occur. The syllabus designers must understand the course environment to include appropriate content in the course. Any content contrary to the environment can create unrest for the learners. It has been rightly stated by Graves (1996) that the syllabus/textbook designers ought to get complete knowledge about the context to make a proper judgment about the course.

2.2. Discovering/Knowing needs

This second component describes which content must be addressed and what would be an appropriate way to do it. Discovering needs is a continuous process to get full knowledge about the students, the requirements and priorities, analysing the information, and enabling the course designers to make appropriate decisions according to the interpretation of information to meet the needs of the students' (Graves, 1996). Knowing the needs of the students enable the syllabus designers to know in-depth knowledge of the target language, and it further helps to encounter

any problem and boost the growth of the language.

2.3. Following/Considering principles

The teachers, educationists and think tanks are essential to be considered in syllabus designing. However, the ideas presented by the researchers in various areas of language must be taken into consideration to include the final contents in the syllabus. Syllabus/textbook designers can take much helpful information based on research ideas. The research knowledge is valuable and reliable as it makes the language learning and acquisition process clear.

2.4. Goals/Targets

The syllabus designers must know the learners' goals to develop a useful syllabus for the learners as they must know what the learners are supposed to learn after studying the syllabus. These goals of language learners are known as “exit level outcomes”. These outcomes are usually considered as the results that develop priorities for teaching and assessment. These outcomes are linked with aims that provide the basis for interim goals, which are unit and lesson specific (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). There is a difference in goals and objectives as long term aims are associated with goals and learning outcomes resulting from present teaching as objectives (Brandt & Tyler, 2011).

2.5. Content and sequencing

Content and sequencing is the fifth important component for language syllabus design. The syllabus designers have to consider the content they are going to imply and the sequence in which they will be presented to the learners. A textbook having no sequence or organization of contents provides unsatisfactory results for the learners and negatively impacts their overall performance. The textbook contents contain grammar, reading and writing exercises, the formation of words and sentences etc. The syllabus designers have to arrange the contents according to the sequence of the learners' minds to adopt it quickly.

The course contents may be established according to the tasks, themes, and language learning situations. The sub-skills of language learning, including speaking, listening, reading and writing, should be organized by the course designers according to the content. The syllabus designers can also subdivide language skills into different parts to make them easy to understand. For example, reading models, writing goals, collecting ideas, organizing ideas, moving ideas into written context, reviewing every written passage, and editing in writing are the subtopics of writing skills (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Similarly, the other reading or speaking skills can also be sub-divided into further categories that are suitable for the learners to understand. Therefore, the sequence of the contents in textbooks is a crucial component of syllabus design.

2.6. Format/procedure and presenting material

The presentation and format of the material in the syllabus is the sixth component of syllabus design. All the contents in the syllabus are supposed to be taught so that it makes suitable conditions for the achievements in learning. Proper presentation of the material is necessary to achieve the language targets. The proper presentation of material according to reasonable

directions/instructions, procedures and techniques develop suitable conditions for the learners to achieve fluency in language and get appropriateness from the contents presented.

2.7. Assessing and monitoring

Assessing and monitoring are the processes the teachers analyze the learners' language competence that they have achieved after completing a particular unit or topic. Instructors use different methods to assess the learners' language proficiency, including tests, cloze tests, oral presentations, etc. The syllabus designers must assess and monitor material that can help language instructors analyse the learners' abilities. Formative assessment is explicitly used to provide feedback on performance to enhance, improve and speed up learning (Sadler, 1998). Therefore, the teachers get good feedback and the language learners get them aware to enhance language learning performance and point out areas that need improvement.

2.8. Evaluation

Evaluation is the process that the syllabus designers require to include in the syllabus/textbook. It is difficult for English language teachers to analyze the learners' abilities that they have attained after studying the course, and teachers evaluate the students' performance by taking tests and awarding grades. Designing a language syllabus is a serious responsibility because different parts and conceptualizations are part of the syllabus designing process (Mukundan *et al.*, 2011). These eight components are essential for the syllabus designers to understand and follow while developing a language syllabus.

3. Theoretical framework and hypothesis

Selecting a specific type of syllabus in second language learning is the most critical factor in language teaching as it has to determine what kind of knowledge or behavior is being conveyed and how effective the contents are. For instance, it has been in vogue for decades (Including the present times) in language teaching that the desired outcome of the syllabus in communicative competence of the learners in second or foreign language class. Structural and formal aspects of teaching language have been emphasized in this regard as the one kind of knowledge serves the second kind of language (From structural to functional). On the other hand, situational and skill-based content can also achieve functional targets. (Irfani, 2014).

Syllabus designing and adopting an appropriate syllabus for the learners is one of the essential aspects of English language teaching. The ongoing syllabus designed and adopted in Pakistani schools needs a proper revision to equip the students with the knowledge of English in order to achieve the targets. The research will help answer the questions of designing a proper syllabus and making it suitable for the learners and the instructors.

4. Methodology

This study is conducted to examine the syllabus of English textbooks taught in class one. It has been observed that there is a shortage of research conducted on the material of language textbooks in Pakistan. A majority of the researchers are found conducting research on learning and teaching English as a second language, but syllabus designing has not been considered for research at a larger level. Therefore, the analysis of textbook contents and syllabus of the textbook in the present

study will be helpful to understand the process of conceiving language and language learning processes.

In this study, the textbooks of class one being taught in public sector schools have been taken for study and data collection. The contents of the English textbooks are thoroughly analyzed to find the drawbacks and lacking content that may be helpful for communicative competence. Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA) has been used in this research to analyse the syllabus as it is a useful way to precisely explore the textbooks' syllabus. It helps to point out the aspects of the syllabus's contents that describe the effects of the textbooks on the proficiency of the language users and the level when the changes are necessary.

4.1. Data collection

Below is given the table of the contents used for English Textbook-1 and Primer English-Kachi (It is a term that is used in place of play group. It is a word of local language and it is frequently used in all the public schools of Punjab, Pakistan) or ECE. The contents of the textbooks are compared to develop a syllabus that would be helpful to achieve the target of language competence. Most of the contents are similar in the table, but a few of the changes are recommended by the teachers and syllabus designers to make it more effective.

Table-1: The contents used for English Textbook-1 and Primer English-Kachi

Primer English- Kachi or ECE	English Textbook –I
Reading and writing of alphabet	Reading and writing of alphabet
Colour names	Colour (names)
Names of the months	Months (Names)
Names of the Days of the week	Days of the week (Names)
Vowels	Vowels
Singular plurals	-----
Three letter words	Three letter words
Rhyming words- with difficult vocabulary like pad, bad, pat, rot, fed, led, etc.	Rhyming words
Nursery rhymes	Nursery rhymes
Courtesy words- without any context	Courtesy words used in context
Sentences with - This is a -----	Sentences
-----	3 Picture stories for language development
-----	Vegetable names
Shapes introduced in mathematic section of Primer	Shapes
-----	Things around – in classroom and home
-----	Name and telephone number
-----	Greeting cards
Numbers in words introduced in mathematic Section of Primer	Numbers in words from one-ten
Writing practice for big and small letters is far less than given in the English textbook for grade-I	A lot of writing practice.

5. Data analysis

The syllabus contents are described below with reference to their importance in the syllabus.

Reading and writing alphabets of English is the first step of learning, and the basic understanding of the language starts with the knowledge of alphabets. The children find it interesting to make shapes of alphabets. Names of colors, days and months are included in the syllabus for the children as they make it a practice to repeat it in their daily lives, especially colours and days. The frequent use of colors by the children in the class and at home make it convenient for them to learn their names. The children are found singing the names of the days of a week and months due to their similar sounds.

Vowels and consonants are important components in any language learning class, especially in English language learning. It is convenient to learn vowels at initial stage of learning as the pronunciation of the vowels is easy. The study of vowels has a positive impact in English language learning. Rhyming words are the most pleasant words for children to learn. At the initial level of learning, all the English language books worldwide contain rhyming words as they please the learners when they repeat them.

Picture and shapes are an essential part of the syllabus at the early level of learning English. Children feel immense pleasure while learning through pictures, and it creates a visible impression in the mind of the children to learn the names of different things with pictures. At the end of the content, the focus has been paid to excessive writing, enabling the children to practice writing. It is a good addition to the textbook syllabus to improve the learners' writing skills.

5.1. Analysis of shortfalls

Although the syllabus designers have developed a suitable syllabus for the learners, some weaknesses need to be addressed so that the targets of English language teaching are achieved. There are four basic skills of language learning; reading, writing, listening and speaking. The learners who are not provided an opportunity to experience these skills' practice remain unable to gain proficiency in learning the language. By studying the content of the textbooks of English, it is learned that reading and writing skills are focused, but little attention is paid to listening and speaking skills.

The syllabus of English textbooks hardly contains any material for listening and speaking skills. There are problems for the learners and the teachers in learning and teaching listening and speaking skills of the English language. Such problems exist in every region where English is being taught as a second language. This major flaw of syllabus designing prevails till the graduation level of the learners, and as a result, they never get fluent in the English language.

In the list of the contents, no topic is mentioned with the title of listening or speaking, which keeps the learners away from the importance of these skills forever. A part of the syllabus is designed by the teachers too in accordance with the situation of the class. A hypothesis can be developed that the teachers must include listening and speaking skills on their own, but it is not possible for the teachers where the textbook is the primary teaching resource. Several teachers practice their lectures from the textbooks. They remain reluctant to include any component of the syllabus because their work is evaluated according to the textbook syllabus, so they do not get the choice to impart knowledge on their own. It is the duty of the teachers to be restricted to the syllabus of textbooks to provide good final results. So, it is the responsibility of the syllabus designers to remove all the flaws from the syllabus.

5.1.1. Choosing and integrating syllabi

The concept syllabus, that has been used herein, corresponds to a broader theoretical understanding of the sorts of materials involved in language education rather than a document governing the teaching of a specific language course. Of course, it is uncommon for one sort of syllabus or topic to be utilised entirely over another in practical educational environments. Syllabi or content categories are typically mixed in a somewhat integrated manner, including one type functioning as the organizational foundation upon which the others are structured and interconnected. Many foreign language classes, for instance, are structured around a structural syllabus, with each chapter or unit focused on a different grammatical characteristic. Other sorts of content, primarily situational (conversations) and functional, like , “how to introduce yourself” complementing, the grammatical emphasis and arrangement . The first concern is whether to include or reject certain sorts of material. The follow up question is whether to blend several forms of syllabus material or focus on a particular type. The final consideration, presuming that many types of material will be provided, is either to utilise one kind as the foundation and construct all those around it, or to organize each kind almost autonomously of the other. as well as the foundations for organising language courses.

When discussing syllabus choices and design, remember that the problem here is not what type to choose, but what other kinds. and how well they are related to one another. Students and teachers are addressed before delving into this topic, three aspects that influence the selection of a syllabus or material in language teaching program.

5.1.2. Factors that affect syllabus choice and design

The primary factor in selecting a syllabus type for second language teaching must be the entire educational program's aims and objectives; that is, the sort of information or behaviour expected as a result of the instruction. This statement has not been regularly acknowledged. For instance, for many years, it has been generally believed that the capacity to behave communicatively in a foreign or second language is a desired consequence of secondary school of second or foreign language instruction. However, much of this teaching has remained focused on the formal and structural components of language, apparently with the notion that one type of information (structural) will lead toward the other function. Nonetheless, sufficient data suggests that more direct pathways to functional ability are available, including a range of instructional content categories such as situational, skill, and functional/notional information. As a result, the link between course objectives and instructional material has not been explicit. A last programme aspect influencing instructional material selection could be making teaching accountable to administrators or any authority or observable by external measures typically assessments. The impact of examinations on instructional material is a well-known phenomenon. Teachers and instructional programmes frequently educate toward a specific type of information if it will be assessed, even if the knowledge is not necessarily what the pupils require.

Evidently, the aspect that will influence the sort of syllabus that might be chosen is the availability of instructional resources. Duration, textbooks and other resources, visuals for instance: slides, videos, photographs etc., real, out-of-classroom materials like other language speakers, television, radio, films , films, field excursions, and so on are examples of resources. A last program variable influencing instructional material selection could be the necessity to

make teaching accountable to administrators or any authority or observable by external measures typically assessments. The impact of examinations on instructional material is a well-known phenomena. Teachers and instructional programmes frequently educate toward a specific type of information if it will be assessed, even if the knowledge is not necessarily what the learners require.

5.2. Steps to be considered to design an appropriate syllabus of English

- The syllabus development process should consider the goals of the students. Before designing a syllabus, what the learners are supposed to achieve should be considered.
- Restricting to one particular type of syllabus may bring unwanted results, so the developers should use multiple types to achieve the required goals
- Development of syllabus will not serve the purpose unless the teachers are trained to teach the required syllabus, keeping in mind the objectives of the syllabus
- The designed syllabus should be evaluated and re-evaluated to reach the final destination
- There must not be any hard and fast rules that strictly require the instructor to follow the set contents. Suggestions and improvements should always be included in the contents to revise and improve the syllabus according to the requirement.

5.2.1. A useful approach to syllabus design and selection

This study describes the materials available for practical language instruction syllabi and some limitations on selecting and integrating them. It is evident by now that no one form of material is suited for all instructional contexts, and the demands and constraints of each setting are so unique that explicit recommendations for combination are impossible. Furthermore, the process of planning and executing a genuine syllabus requires its own work.

6. Conclusion

The eight components described by Nation and Macalister (2010) play an essential role in developing a syllabus that can provide sufficient material to the learners to achieve fluency in English. The syllabus designers must keep in mind the components to develop a syllabus for language. Language proficiency cannot be achieved without knowing the basic four language skills. The textbooks, which do not contain material about reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, are found inappropriate to achieve the targets of English language learning. It is the prime duty of the syllabus designers to develop a syllabus that contains material about the basic four skills of language learning.

The study further reveals that the syllabus designers must not be restricted to only one type of syllabus design, creating obstacles to achieving the required goals. Multiple types of syllabus design should be considered to develop an appropriate syllabus for English language learners. Most of the time, the syllabus developers consider only content-based syllabus, which is effective in certain situations, but the other types of syllabus designing as functional or notional of task-based syllabus designing methods need to be opted to design syllabus as per the needs of the students.

The problems of measuring communicative and linguistic performances are well understood within the profession and are increasingly becoming more well-acknowledged outside of it.

This research intended to serve as an awareness for establishing syllabus selections for individual educational programmes. It is envisaged that quite distinct designs would develop for each application, which is to be expected. It is critical to consider all conceivable aspects that may impact the teachability of the curriculum while making practical judgments concerning syllabus design, and this is only possible at the programme level.

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