

Language Curricula: An Analysis of Content, Methods and Assessment Procedures

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ABSTRACT

Every educational curriculum has certain pedagogic objectives which are realized through the instructional praxis. ELT curriculum is no exception to this. It is also based on certain ideologies to be realized through the objectives of the individual learning programmes. Further, the objectives of the curriculum and the individual programmes are to be attained within a stipulated time. This happens when the teachers come to grips with the objectives of the curriculum stated with appropriate methodology. The curriculum, syllabus, methodology, and time together should allow the teacher to assess the linear progression of the learners during and at the end of the course. The rationale of this study is to analyze the factors: curriculum, methodology, materials, and assessment, how they are interconnected and interrelated to the programs/courses. The analyses are done based on the theories proposed by Richards (2001) and Nunan (1988). This study is focused on the syllabi of two different professional institutions, the design and deployment of their language curricula, in relation to the role of the teachers and tests. The analyses proved that the lacunae in designing the syllabus and its execution along with unrelated testing patterns fail the students in achieving their program objectives. The theoretical stance to analyse the curricula and syllabi and the findings along with implications for syllabus designers and teachers form the crux of this paper.

Keywords: Language curriculum; curriculum analysis; course content, methods, and assessment.

Introduction

India has a lot of potential with its human resources in this millennium as it is inclined towards technology and technical education. But many reports of different agencies say that the 'quality' is not adequate to the demands of the industry in this global scenario of the engineering undergraduates. The reports of these agencies further stress on the communication skills and language proficiency to be improved. These reports

make the English teachers rethink the conduct of language classes through their courses in the engineering classrooms. This situation eventually leads many language teachers to suspect the role of English language curriculum in engineering education. This provokes many language experts to analyse the language curriculum. In this regard, if curriculum-related problems are solved, then, the coming generations of young graduates will have the potential to fit into the industry.

Hence, the researchers selected two autonomous private engineering institutions from Andhra Pradesh (AP) in order to analyse the curriculum.

What is curriculum evaluation?

Any curriculum is developed with a lot of care and attention as it is a document that directs the teachers on what to teach and guides the students on what to learn. There are several practices across the world that are implemented in planning the curriculum and teaching the language course. This includes the context of teaching and learning, curriculum and syllabus models, purposes and goals or the objectives, syllabus products and experiential content, and assessment rubrics. According to Richards (2001, p.286), though the curriculum is in place, a number of important questions still need to be answered. These include:

- Is the curriculum achieving its goals?
- What is happening in the classroom and the schools where it is being implemented?
- Are those affected by the curriculum (e.g., teachers, administrators, students, parents, employees) satisfied with the curriculum?
- Have those involved in developing and teaching a language course done a satisfactory job?
- Does the curriculum compare favourably with others of its kind?

There is a need to focus on English language curriculum evaluation as a whole. This means that the curriculum factors (needs of the learners, course objectives, methodology, materials, and assessment) need to be analysed to find the merits and demerits that help to overcome the issues. This may lead to best practices to develop the language curriculum. In the literature survey, very little and rare research happened in this area and abundant literature is available individually on either methodology or on materials or textbooks or on language assessment. Consequently, the researchers decided to analyse the syllabi based on different theories.

Methodology of study

The researchers followed a quantitative approach for this analysis because in this approach the researchers can denote the set of underpinning assumptions that can be applied to the ‘natural science model’ of research. This approach helps to analyse and evaluate various variables while implementing the curriculum. And this approach is very close to the positivist approach. The researchers prepared a checklist based on various theories on curriculum evaluation.

Syllabi description

Syllabus-A

In this syllabus document, the course title is ‘English for Communication’ with three credits and a number (114) is indicated, which is the course code. In addition, the

lecture hours (3) and a tutorial period per week are indicated. It is observed that the duration of the course and the duration of the period is not mentioned. The division of marks is also indicated: 'Internal Marks' (40) and 'Semester-End Exam Marks' (60). The 'Semester-End Exam Duration' (3 hours) is also stated. This is followed by course objectives and course outcomes.

Syllabus-B

The course is given the title 'Functional English', the number of lectures is 4, and the internal and external marks are 40 and 60 respectively; there is no course code. The duration of the lecture hour is not specified but the number of hours of instruction per unit (8) is given. The 'Syllabus Designers'(SDs) have provided the information in a small table which can be grasped with a glance. This is followed by five course objectives and four course outcomes.

Syllabus-A is provided in Appendix-A and Syllabus-B is provided in Appendix-B.

Analysis of language curriculum

Needs analysis

When a language syllabus or curriculum is planned to be developed, the first and

foremost step to follow is to find the needs of the learners and analyse them systematically. This process helps us to understand the needs, gaps, and problems of the learners. The purpose of needs analysis in curriculum/syllabus design is clearly stated by Richards (2001, p. 52):

Needs analysis in language teaching may be used for a number of different purposes, for example:

- ❑ To find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role, such as sales manager, tour guide, or university student;
- ❑ To help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students;
- ❑ To determine which students in a group are most in need of training in particular language skills;
- ❑ To identify a change of direction that people in a reference group feel is important;
- ❑ To identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do; and
- ❑ To collect information about the particular problems learners are experiencing.

Table 1: Comparison of Syllabus-A and Syllabus-B in terms of Needs Analysis

#	Question	Syllabus-A		Syllabus-B	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Is there any evidence of the assumptions of the learners' needs?		✓		✓
2	Are the problems of the learners taken into consideration?		✓		✓
3	Is this an ideal curriculum at this level to the learners?	✓		✓	
4	Are there any gaps to be filled in the present course through a link from the previous course?	✓		✓	
5	Does this course cater to the industry needs or help the learners to get through the qualifying tests to pursue their higher education?	✓		✓	

Analysis

Syllabus-A

There is hardly any evidence of needs analysis in the syllabus document. However, we could see that the syllabus designers' observations of their previous learners and their own knowledge of industry demands are taken into the consideration. The learners' assumptions and their needs do not have any room in the syllabus document and their problems are not taken into consideration, as the learners' factors are varied. Another cause may be the large classroom situation. At this level, the curriculum is ideal, when it is delivered properly in the classroom. There is a great need to link the present course level to the previous course level, where the learners come from, because the present course must help the learners to improve their competencies to the next level. If we assume the learners' competency level to be A2 on the CEFR scale

through their previous course, the present course must help them reach B1 level of proficiency on the same scale.

Syllabus-B

There is no evidence of needs analysis in this syllabus document either. The assumptions of the learners' needs are predicted by the syllabus designers and they are incorporated in the syllabus. In general, the common needs are predicted and incorporated by them. Thus, they developed the syllabus without any direct consideration or the involvement of the learners. This is an ideal curriculum in one way where the learners are convinced by the teachers that the stated needs are the learners' needs. There are many gaps to be filled in the present course/ curriculum through a link from the previous course. The course partially caters to the industry needs or helps the learners to get through the qualifying tests in their future.

Course objectives

Stating the objectives in curriculum document is a difficult task for the syllabus designers. There are different opinions on specifying the objectives, the content, and the activities. The two major opinions are:

- i) Objectives → content → activities
- ii) Activities → content → objectives

Tyler (1949) suggested four ways of stating objectives related to course content, patterns of behaviour, exit behaviour after instruction, and the role of the teacher.

Table 2 helps us analyse both the syllabi in relation to objectives.

Table 2: Comparison of Syllabus-A and Syllabus-B in terms of Course Objectives

#	Question	Syllabus-A		Syllabus-B	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Is the 'objectives-content-activities' formula followed?	✓		✓	
2	Are the objectives achievable?		✓		✓
3	Do the objectives specify what the teacher and learners do?		✓		✓
4	Do the objectives specify the course content?		✓		✓
5	Do the objectives specify the kind of behaviour which learners will be able to exhibit after the course?		✓	✓	
6	Are the activities stated in the syllabus document?		✓		✓

Analysis

Syllabus-A

In this syllabus, the syllabus designers followed Tyler's (1949) and Nunan's (1988) principles by stating the objectives first and then the content and activities. Further, the objectives do not specify the role of the teacher(s) as well as the role of the learner(s) in both syllabi, inside and outside the classroom situation.

Another important aspect is the relation between the objectives and the content. These two are neither interconnected nor

interrelated in these two. For instance, "— the correct usage and application of grammar principles" is vague to the teachers as well as the learners. Which grammatical item, in specific, will be used and where? For instance, the syllabus designers might link how the past tense forms can be used in writing narrative paragraphs along with spatial and temporal prepositions with appropriate adverbs. Another example is, 'to get acquainted with the features of successful professional communication' is related to "Unit-IV Communication". In this unit, the content is entirely theoretical and there is no

mention of the methodology and activities that are to be used in the classroom. This may not help in achieving the outcome “*understand and overcome the barriers of communication*”, unless the learners have experiential learning with appropriate aids and constructive feedback from the teachers and peers. This kind of ambiguity might influence learners’ behaviour and their motivation levels in the classroom.

Another deficiency in the syllabus document is that the activities are not stated. It is the responsibility of the syllabus designers to incorporate certain activities and the teacher can adopt or modify the activities according to their classroom environment to attain the intended outcomes.

Syllabus-B

In this syllabus, the syllabus designers followed the method which was supported by Tyler (1949) and Nunan (1988). There is no scope, according to this document, to achieve the course objectives. It is observed that the course objectives are not mapped and matched with the unit objectives. The course objectives did not specify any course content. One positive attribute of this course is one of the objectives states the kind of behaviour which learners will be able to exhibit after the course. For example, “*———— students develop their basic communication skills in English for academic and social purposes*”.

The major problem with this syllabus is that the skill set which is mentioned in the course objectives is based on the language skills (e.g. LSRW), cognitive skills (e.g. critical thinking) and employability skills. In contrast, the objectives under each unit deal with different skills like ‘*to criticize——*’, ‘*——know the*

value of——’, ‘*—— understand that——*’, ‘*to enlighten ——*’ and so on. However, the syllabus designers’ effort was successful in stating the objectives under ‘Unit-VI’. This is because the objectives deal with reading and its sub-skills which can be mapped with ‘course objective 5’. This is the systematic way to state the objectives under each unit, which is matched with the course objectives.

Course content

Objectives are the set of goals to be achieved by the teachers and learners. For this, the teaching materials, in the form of content, direct the teachers on what to teach and guide the learners on what to learn. The content can be further divided into teaching items with specific objectives. These teaching items can be arranged in different ways based on a variety of theories. Tyler (1949) and Tuba (1962) support linear progression; on the other hand, Kumaravadivelu (2006) supports simultaneous learning.

The teaching items may be generally related to: language system (vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and pronunciation), language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and/or their subskills), communication skills (language functions), study skills (reference skills), and literary skills (appreciation of poetry, biography, fiction, and short story). Based on these items, the syllabus may be named where the major focus is aimed. That is, there are different syllabi termed grammar syllabus or structural syllabus, functional syllabus, situational syllabus, notional syllabus, skills syllabus, and so on and one of these can be chosen.

Table 3 helps us to analyse both the syllabi in relation to course content.

Table 3: Comparison of Syllabus-A and Syllabus-B in terms of Course Content

#	Question	Syllabus-A		Syllabus-B	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Is the content selection appropriate to the syllabus?		✓		✓
2	Is the content graded?		✓		✓
3	Is the content sequenced?		✓		✓
4	Is the content interrelated?		✓		✓
5	Is the content experiential?		✓		✓
6	Is there a thematic link between some of the items?		✓		✓

Analysis

Syllabus-A and Syllabus-B

When the content of both the syllabi was examined, there was no evidence of grading and sequencing of the content. The reason is that there is no integration among the different units and each unit is independent of the others. Further, the content is not interrelated and the thematic link is missing. This kind of content selection by the syllabus designers demotivates the learners. This is a great hindrance to the process of learners' autonomy in second language learning in the absence of the teacher outside the classroom.

Methodology: developing instructional blocks and micro level objectives

The curriculum philosophy or ideology is effectively carried into the classroom by

choosing appropriate methodology. The two popular models are: the operative model and problem-solving model. Both these have their own advantages in different situations. The choice of methodology depends on the nature of the language and the learning content. This helps the teachers as well as the learners to realize their roles and responsibilities. This process eventually leads to effective and appropriate gradation and use of instructional materials. Thus, methodology incorporated in the syllabus document helps the teachers to prepare their lesson plan, the techniques that are to be used while teaching, and the activities/tasks to be designed for the class. In this way, the methodology stated in the syllabus document helps navigate the whole teaching-learning process.

Table 4 helps us to analyse both the syllabi in relation to methodology.

Table 4: Comparison of Syllabus-A and Syllabus-B in terms of Methodology

#	Question	Syllabus-A		Syllabus-B	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Is the methodology stated in the syllabus document?		✓		✓
2	Are the selections of learning tasks stated clearly?		✓		✓
3	Are the selections of learning activities stated clearly?		✓		✓
4	Is the syllabus amenable to adaptation by the teacher?	✓		✓	
5	Is the syllabus consistent with the syllabus statements and outlines?		✓		✓

Analysis

Syllabus-A

The methodology is not stated in the syllabus document. This is one of the problems for the teachers to implement the syllabus in the classroom. Methodology directs the teachers on how to engage and motivate the learners in the teaching and learning environment. Hence, the syllabus is not consistent with its statements and outcomes. This leads different teachers to adopt different methodologies. This is another major issue where teachers adopt different methods, tasks, and activities for the same syllabus. In this process, some of the methods may fail to implement the syllabus in the right way. This may lead to chaos in trying to achieve the desired outcomes of the syllabus.

Syllabus-B

The major advantage with this syllabus document is that the methodology is stated. However, under the heading ‘Methodology’

it is stated: ‘*The methodology of teaching will be chalk and talk. PPT, audio-visual and activity based.*’ Another positive thing is that the syllabus is amenable to be adapted by a teacher with the resources provided to certain components (but not for all). The syllabus is not consistent because the outline of the syllabus does not match the content.

Assessment

In teaching and learning contexts, assessment plays a crucial role, whether it is formative assessment or summative assessment, or a combination of both. Assessment is a multidimensional process. In the motivated environment, assessment helps to monitor the progress in teaching and learning. Hence, assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process in order to achieve the expected outcomes of the course and also experience a sense of achievement by fulfilling and reaching the course objectives.

Table 5 helps us to analyse both the syllabi in relation to assessment.

Table 5: Comparison of Syllabus-A and Syllabus-B in terms of Assessment

#	Question	Syllabus-A		Syllabus-B	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Is the assessment procedure stated in the syllabus document?		✓		✓
2	Is the model question paper suggested in the syllabus document?		✓		✓
3	Is there scope for both summative and formative assessments?	✓		✓	
4	Are the assessment criteria mapped to the learning objectives?		✓		✓
5	Is the assessment reinforcing the course outcomes?		✓		✓

Analysis

Syllabus-A

In this syllabus document, the marks stated as ‘internal marks’ can be interpreted as formative assessment and ‘semester-end exam marks’ can be interpreted as summative assessment. But the syllabus designers have not provided any information related to assessment. Besides, they have not specified whether the skills or the content will be tested. In addition, the model question paper is not suggested in the syllabus document. This is not helpful to map whether the learning objectives are achieved through assessment or not.

Syllabus-B

There is scope for both summative assessment and formative assessment. This can be inferred from the phrases ‘internal marks’ and ‘external marks’. The document does not suggest any model question paper

or model questions. There is no clue about ‘assessment criteria mapped to the learning objectives’ and the reinforcement of the course outcomes through assessment.

Findings and solutions

Needs analysis

It is found that the syllabus designers of both the syllabi have neglected this important phase of course design, that is, needs analysis. Even though there are limitations, the syllabus designers may overcome them by:

- ❑ Giving a detailed syllabus on the skills and proficiency levels to be achieved by the end of the course rather than just limiting it to the content in the form of reading-text-based units;
- ❑ Administering the questionnaire to those who have completed the course to check the outcomes of the course;
- ❑ Randomly selecting students who join

newly the course, administering the questionnaire to them, and mapping their needs with the existing syllabus;

- ❑ Attending the exit meetings of the industry people after the selection process;
- ❑ Mentioning the other sources through which the course objectives are achieved giving scope for partial autonomy of the learners, which might also result in better motivation of the learners.

Course objectives

The objectives which are stated in the syllabi:

- ❑ Are over-ambitious and impractical;
- ❑ Are not related to the content and methodology;
- ❑ Cannot be divided them into unit wise and lesson wise ones; and
- ❑ Cannot be translated by the teachers into classroom activities.

To overcome these, the syllabus designers need to:

- ❑ Gain theoretical knowledge on formulation of course objectives;
- ❑ Formulate practical and realistic objectives that can be achieved within the given timeframe (Rojas);
- ❑ State flexible objectives to realise them unit wise and class wise; and
- ❑ Accommodate individual learner differences.

Course content

In both syllabi, the content does not:

- ❑ Match with the objectives;
- ❑ Seem graded and sequenced;
- ❑ Possess thematic link among the units; and
- ❑ Leave any scope for self-learning or for further courses.

The syllabus designers should focus on:

- ❑ Developing a collaborative syllabus (Handelzalt, 2009);
- ❑ Linking the content to the course objectives/outcomes;
- ❑ Grading and sequencing the content either in linear fashion or in spiral progression;
- ❑ Interlinking the units of this course and also with the previous course;
- ❑ Leaving scope for self-learning because the learners are adults and motivated; and
- ❑ Skills and language proficiency rather than on content.

Methodology

In Syllabus-A, the syllabus designers do not mention the methodology and in Syllabus-B, it is a general statement. However, the syllabus document must include:

- ❑ A clearly stated methodology, which defines the roles of the teachers and students (Rajae Nia, Abbaspour and Zare)
- ❑ Information related to the material/textbook to be used;
- ❑ Freedom to the teachers to alter/supplement the methodology or material

which is suitable to their teaching and learning environment.

Assessment

Assessment criteria are partially mentioned in these two syllabi, but it is not sufficient. The problem is setting the rubrics for the assessment. The confusion lies in the ratio of language skills and language elements in the examination. However, the syllabus designers must:

- ❑ State clear rubrics for assessment; (Luke, Woods and Weir)
- ❑ Give a model question paper; and
- ❑ State whether the content of the textbook is tested or the skill set of the learners;

Conclusion

The present analyses show that there are many lapses in the syllabus designed in both the autonomous colleges selected for the study. The syllabus designers need to focus on finding out a suitable curriculum model and various levels of the curriculum/syllabus design. Hence, the teachers in the autonomous engineering colleges, who play the role of the mediators between the syllabus and the learners, have to observe and note the merits and demerits of the syllabus related to the teachers' problems and learners' problems during the execution of the syllabus. If the syllabus designers keep in mind the setbacks mentioned in these analyses and consider the solutions, this study might help them provide a better syllabus/curriculum. If the language curriculum is developed well and implemented successfully, the learners will improve their

proficiency in the language. This helps the learners to grab a wider spectrum of employment opportunities globally. Moreover, the learners will exhibit their language skills when they appear for any language proficiency examinations, like IELTS, and qualify with outstanding scores. On the whole, the syllabus/curriculum must have practicality, validity, and reliability. Curriculum development is an endless process, so it has to be open and give scope for flexibility. It should accommodate the varied levels of proficiency of the learners who take the course along with the differences in their socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. This can be achieved when the syllabus is not so rigid and allows the teachers to mediate and modify the textbook according to their class profile.

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Appendix-1: Syllabus-A

Title: English for Communication (3 Credits) – 3 periods of lecture per week and a tutorial

In the syllabus document, the Syllabus designers stated the course objectives and course outcomes. The course is divided into five units and all units have separate headings. They are:

Unit and Title	Content
Unit-1: Lexis	Synonyms, antonyms, words often confused, one-word substitutes and analogies
Unit-2: Written communication	Note taking and note making, writing a proposal, memo writing and paragraph writing
Unit-3: Exposure to basic grammar	Articles and prepositions, tenses, voice and speech
Unit-4: Communication	Types: oral and written, barriers to communication, non-verbal communication, kinesics, proxemics, oculesics, haptics,
Unit-5	E-mail, letter writing: order, complaint, job application, invitation, precis writing, biographical writing: APJ Abdul Kalam, Ratan Tata, Sudha Murthy and Mother Teresa

Appendix-2: Syllabus-B

Title: Functional English (4 Credits) – 4 hours of lecture per week

Unit number	Title of the unit and hours of instruction	Vocabulary	Grammar	Listening	Writing
Unit- I	Humour: An Astrologer's Day (8 hours)	Prefixes, suffixes	Nouns pronouns articles	—	Sentence structures
Unit- II	Inspiration: Building a New State (8 hours)	Homophones homographs homonyms synonyms and antonyms and commonly confused words	Finite Verbs non-finite verbs and question tags	Main points and sub- points	Paragraphs note making expansion of proverbs
Unit- III	Sustainable Development: Water: The Elixir of Life (8 hours)	One-word substitutes	Tenses	Listening for the theme and gist	Official letters curriculum vitae covering letters
Unit- IV	Relationships: The Wood Rose (8 hours)	Phrasal verbs and idioms	Subject verb agreement Active and Passive voice prepositions	Listening for specific detail and information	Official reports
Unit- V	Science and Humanism: Progress (8 hours)	Collocations technical vocabulary common errors in vocabulary	Conditional sentences conjunctions common errors in grammar	Listening for opinion and attitude	Events and essays

Unit number	Title of the unit and hours of instruction	Vocabulary	Grammar	Listening	Writing
Unit- VI	Reading: Intensive and extensive reading, predicting the content, skimming, scanning, inferring meanings: lexical and contextual (8 hours)	—	—	—	—

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