

“English Language Syllabus in B.Ed Colleges: Problems and Perspectives”

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Abstract: *English is often treated as a subject rather than a language in the Indian linguistic context. The focus of English language teaching courses seems to be examination oriented and its performance rather than communication. Also the classroom interaction sets target towards passive programs like examinations. Often teachers who deliver the curriculum based syllabus comfortably ignore the course objective and tend to concentrate on examination results. In order to throw more light on the actual teaching environment, this paper explores the problems experienced by the second language learners in undergraduate level B.Ed in Tamilnadu (India) through a detailed study.*

Keywords: *curriculum, ELT Course, curriculum based syllabus, B.Ed syllabus, ELT curriculum.*

1. INTRODUCTION

B.Ed college student-teachers' of Tamilnadu have specific English needs. This reality has inspired a variety of ESP course designs to address them. Not surprisingly, satisfactory results are always reported in these courses, because they follow the fundamental ESP principle of needs analysis. A basic ESP philosophy is to cater to specific needs of learners as much as possible (Robinson, 1991). It might be appropriate to say that no ESP courses should be conducted without needs analysis, be it formal or informal.

Student-teachers and teachers have expressed long-term dissatisfaction with their English ability (Wattanasakunpusakon, 1996; Kittidhaworn, 2001). It is not evident whether the ESP courses offered to these student-teachers' have seriously considered their specific needs. Very few re-ports on the needs of student-teachers are available, and most of them focus on problems and desires in English courses rather than addressing actual needs in ESP courses (Ongsakul, 1984; Wittayapirak & Preechapanit, 1992). It is also questionable whether or not the General English & special English course presently offered at the Tamilnadu Teachers Educational university is up-to-date and truly catered to student-teachers' needs, for it has been designed more than three years prior to this study. A thorough review of related literature is conducted so that a course update can be implemented. The host university supports the research process, and is open to research findings that might alter way in which the course will be conducted.

2. CONDITIONS FOR APPLICATION

- The research aims to re-design the curriculum and syllabus of B.Ed (UG) student-teachers' syllabus.
- The research can be extended to P.G and the higher degrees in the same field.
- The study is possibly applicable to the student- teachers in the lower level to higher secondary level.
- The research explores the innovative methodologies of the relevant subjects and the field.
- The study enquires and re-design the curriculum and syllabus of the under graduate syllabus only.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Evaluation is conducted to improve a curriculum by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of it (White, 1988). The main objective of this study is to evaluate the B.Ed course (English curriculum and syllabus) in Tamilnadu (Salem) according to the student-teachers' needs and their perceptions to the whole B.Ed course offered.

This study aims at investigating B.Ed student-teachers' English Curriculum and syllabus towards learning the English language. The objectives are as follows:

- To determine which of the various types of syllabus (curriculum based syllabi) could be skilful for the B.Ed student-teachers' towards learning the English language.
- To determine the type of syllabus that B.Ed student-teachers' have towards learning the English language.

The study is presented as a process involving syllabus design, materials development, and implementation of the course and evaluation of its efficacy by the teacher-researcher. In line with the methodology of action research, variety of methods is used to gather data. In many cases syllabus design is a greatly overlooked area of course planning with many EFL schools and institutions relying on a textbook as the sole syllabus. Such an outlook eliminates the need of a time consuming and often-expensive syllabus design process and is often adequate for many general English courses where a suitable textbook exists. However, such an approach ignores the specific learning needs of the target student-teachers', something that could be examined through a needs analysis (NA) process. Research has shown (Gardener & Winslow, 1983; Long, 2005; Richterich, 1983; West, 1994) that there is often a lack of awareness of the existence of NA as a tool in EFL course design, especially in General English courses where the specific needs of student-teachers are difficult to determine. In fact, there are documented cases of teachers and course planners paying little or no regard to any concept of need (described by Abbott (1981) as TENOR – teaching English for no obvious reason). One area that has a higher regard for NA is ESP (English for specific purposes) (Jasso-Aguilar, 2005; West, 1994) as student-teachers' needs are often clearer and of such a nature that a published textbook would not adequately fulfill their needs. To assess how the course fulfills student-teachers' needs in terms of:

- Course Objectives
- Course Content
- Teaching and Learning Materials
- Teaching Methodology
- Time Allocation
- Evaluation System

4. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Syllabus and curriculum development has a long history that shares the historical development of education itself. In the discussion of education, the terms curriculum and syllabus' have considerable ambiguity and conceptual overlapping, Stern(1), for example, referred the word 'curriculum', in American educational context, to the contents of courses or subjects offered in a certain institution or college, whereas these same courses or contents were referred to as syllabus in British education system. That is, similar elements of educational domain have been named differently in different countries like America and Britain.

Recently, however, there seems to have a common understanding of terms, curriculum and syllabus. The word curriculum has been defined as the overall contents and aims to be taught and realized in a given colleges White (2) syllabus, on the other hand, has been considered as contents of a particular course or subject matter. Curriculum, in a broader sense, is referred to the mission, purpose, design, and implementation of an education programme, while syllabus is understood as a specification and sequencing of courses and course contents. Syllabus is, thus, part of a given curriculum and plays a major role in realizing the curriculum of a particular education programme. It attempts to define and interpret the philosophy of the curriculum into detail elements of teaching learning. Curriculum and syllabus design as a Significant plays in English language teaching (ELT). According to Richards, (5)

several countries have a unit of language curriculum development in ministries of education with a mandate of evaluating and designing national language curriculum. Language curriculum determines basic principles of language, language teaching and language learning: based on these principles the aims, objectives and learning purposes as well as implementation programs or drawn. That is, language syllabus is developed based on the philosophy of the language curriculum where general and specific objectives, contents, learning experiences and evaluation mechanisms of a course or courses can be developed. Based on the underlying assumptions of the nature of language and language teaching and learning, there are various types of language syllabus. The earliest and most common type of language syllabus is the grammatical syllabus. This type of syllabus is designed based on the assumption that language is a system of grammatical rules and mastering these grammar rules enables learners to use the language in their communication. Inputs of the syllabus focus on various grammatical elements. The other type of syllabus is the lexical syllabus. It is used widely in ELT; vocabularies are assumed to determine learning a language. Thus, listed lexical items are organized to be taught and learnt. The skill-based syllabus is also another type of syllabus, which has been used in many parts of the world. In this type of syllabus, the micro skills (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary) and the macro skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) of language are identified and organized. The functional notional syllabus is still another type of syllabus that emphasizes on language functions (e.g., requesting, agreeing, suggesting and complaining), and a list of language functions is taken as a syllabus. Content – based, on the other hand, considers topics, themes, situation, and other academic contents as the basis for teaching and learning a language. The task-based syllabus is relatively a recently used type of syllabus that considers classroom processes as the main determinant factors for learning a language, and a variety of tasks and activities or listed for engaging learners in the classroom. Given these varieties of language syllabus discussed by different scholars, there are a few areas of shared understanding on the nature of language syllabus. That is, the language syllabus usually determines learning objectives and learning contents in which teachers, curriculum experts and student-teachers', in one way or the other, involve in the designing process (6). Generally, various types of syllabi have been used for effective implementation of language education programme. A well developed language education program, indeed, needs not only a well structured and organized syllabus but also enriched teaching and learning materials and resources that enable teachers and learners to translate the syllabus into classroom activities and interactions for the attainment of intended objectives. Given the dynamic nature of ELT syllabus design, there is a direct link between language syllabus and teaching materials. Teaching materials and resources are basically prepared based on the given language syllabus that is used for a particular ELT program. As Nunan (7) notes, practical instructional processes of a language education program begins with designing and preparing teaching material to be used for actual classroom instructions. The author further indicates that the already defined goals and objectives as well as learning experiences in the syllabus are made tangible with the teaching materials. That is, the teaching materials bring flesh to the bones of the syllabus.

5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

To date, there has been no empirical investigation of the communicative needs of Tamilnadu teaching professionals in the teaching fields. Therefore, teaching English for student-teachers is far from satisfactory in terms of B.Ed courses by using the language communication at the teaching field as the input to feed ESP courses. When the specific language needs are not defined based on language use, learners will end up disappointed with the language proficiency level that they achieve once they join the teaching field, regardless of the effort that they put into their language training. On the other hand, the effort of English language teachers would lack focus if the language needs are not defined in terms of language use. In order to contribute empirical data to the ESP context in Tamilnadu education, this study investigates the English language communicative needs of a targeted group of learners in teaching fields by investigating their targeted needs in the Teaching field.

The Skillfulness of English language and the course in the present curriculum and syllabus in this study reflects the need for re-design and high level of proficiency in the curriculum and syllabus since the need of English communication in the teaching field. Moreover, English has become the world dominant language of all scenarios (Crystal, 2003). The English language has therefore become crucial to teaching professionals.

The hope of this study is to provide empirical information about the uses of English language and better course content in the teaching field which, in return, can be used as an input to feed the larger structure of the ESP context in language teaching.

6. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Not many studies have been undertaken to evaluate ESP courses designed for B.Ed college student-teachers. In light of this, it is significant to assess the effectiveness and adequacy of the Present B.Ed course in Tamilnadu (Salem) which is designed for student-teachers. This study will help to increase the body of knowledge that is available in terms of course design, content, teaching methodology pertaining to Teaching field.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be helpful to all teachers who are teaching the B.Ed course to student-teachers, especially those concerned with the design of future courses. In addition, the strengths and the areas of weaknesses and new ideas and suggestion could be used for the improvement of the course.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were a number of limitations to the present study which should be highlighted so as to avoid any overgeneralizations and misinterpretations of the results. The present study was confined to 100 B.Ed student-teachers' in the academic year 2012-2013 at The Kavery College of Education for Women. Although the minimum sample size recommended by many researchers (Cohen et al., 2006) is five subjects, the findings might be a reflective of the competency and skillfulness of the present curriculum and syllabus. Second, all the participated respondents were females as there were no male student-teachers' in the college. Therefore, the generalization from the findings should be made with caution. Finally, the pedagogical implications of this study are limited to those which can be based on the participants' responses.

8. METHODS AND MATERIALS

“The systematic appraisal of the value of materials in relation to their objectives and to the objectives of the learners using them. Evaluation can be pre-use and therefore focused on predictions of potential value. It can be whilst-use and therefore focused on awareness and description of what the learners are actually doing whilst the materials are being used. And it can be post-use and therefore focused on analysis of what happened as a result of using the materials” (Tomlinson, 1998, p. xi).

In this study, the author approaches the skillfulness of the present course content (English curriculum and syllabus) from the perspective of student-teachers in classroom. A questionnaire is used as a neutral tool so as to find out the course content, kind of methods used in teaching English skills and the kind of difficulties student-teachers face.

The language used in the questionnaire is English and as such it was straightforward for student-teachers' to answer the questions in the questionnaire. For purpose of the study, the author distributed the questionnaire among student-teachers in The Kavery College of Education for Women in mechery, Salem, Tamilnadu, India. Participants in the questionnaire were homogenous in terms of linguistic skills, socioeconomic background, educational system, and field of study. The concept of this study was given to student-teachers in the classroom through their professor(s). The researcher intentionally avoided conducting personal interviews with the student-teachers to give those respondents the freedom to answer the questions and express themselves without any interference by the researcher.

The research was aimed to test the effectiveness and competency of General English syllabus of student-teachers in Educational colleges in Salem, Tamilnadu, India. The brief procedure of the study was as under:

9. INSTRUMENTS

For this study the following instruments were used for the collection of data:

- Questionnaire for the principals of the B.Ed colleges

- Questionnaire for the English language teachers of B.Ed College
- Questionnaire for the English language student-teachers of B.Ed College
- Document Analysis.

10. DATA ANALYSIS

After collection, the data were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted in the light of objectives of the study and the research questions by using the t-test and chi square for comparison of the both the courses and also relevant documents were analyzed. Kruskal-wallis Test has been involved.

11. DELIMITATION OF STUDY

The study was delimited to the exploration of General English syllabus with special reference to curriculum objectives, contents, teaching methodology and the examination system in Salem district of Tamilnadu.

12. RESULTS

The findings of this study were organized based on three thematic areas: conceptions of language syllabus, roles of language syllabus and views of using the prescribed textbooks in classrooms.

12.1. Commencement of English Language Syllabus

The participants of student-teachers' do seem to have a similar understanding of a language syllabus, and they reported their conceptions of language syllabus as follows:

- Guide for the teaching and learning of English
- convention between the teachers and learners
- preparation of accomplishment
- glimpses of language and learning
- Consist of aim, general and specific objectives, content methodology and evaluation system
- Incorporation of textbooks, teaching materials and teaching methods
- scaffold teaching and learning
- Learning out comes, contents, classroom activities, the methodologies and instructional materials.

Generally, the student-teachers' seemed to have considerable understanding of language syllabus. The considered a syllabus as a comprehensive frame that defined the purpose, learning experiences and evaluation mechanisms of a language program. The student-teachers', however, did not appear to see the differences between the language syllabus and the teaching materials. For example, one of the major aspects of a language syllabus they mentioned was inclusion of textbooks and teaching materials. The teaching materials and textbooks are not part of any language syllabus. Material designers rather use the given language syllabus as a basis for preparing and writing textbooks and other resources of teaching.

12.2. Roles of Language Syllabus

The participants seemed to acknowledge the significant roles of developing language syllabus in language education program. The thought that language syllabi could serve as:

- resources of materials development (e.g., classroom tasks and activities)
- foundations of adapting the lesson
- Indicator of direction
- Guide for teaching and lesson planning
- resources of identifying the learners capacity problems
- inspirational teaching materials (textbooks)
- direction for developing teaching materials

Concisely, the student teachers' conception of what roles a language syllabus has in language education program appears to be acceptable and clear. However, there seems to be some kind of ambiguity in the above listed roles. That is, the student-teachers' did not seem to understand the essential functions of a syllabus in language teaching program. For example, they considered the language syllabus as a base for preparing lessons and identifying language proficiency of student-teachers'. In fact, with diverse socio cultural and economic background of student-teachers', nationally designed syllabi could not have accurate presumption of student-teachers'' language learning capacity, and in practical terms, the syllabi could not serve teachers as bases of classroom lesson planning. This is rather the student-teachers'' misconception of the roles the syllabi used in the teaching and learning process.

On the other hand, the student-teachers' acknowledged the language syllabus as a framework of selecting and designing teaching materials, as well as classroom implementation procedures. The student-teachers', in this sense, did seem to conceptualize the essential purposes of language syllabi. In fact, the student-teachers' did not explain how syllabi help teachers select their teaching materials and classroom procedures.

13. DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, the teachers' mere conception of a language syllabus and undefined position for using textbook in classroom instruction could reflect two major implications, Firstly; the students did not seem to have more access and exposure of the syllabus they had been using at their work place. Even, the graduate course they took previously did hardly expose them the major tenets of language syllabus and material design. Nevertheless, on the contemporary conception of language syllabus, the most important element is learning objectives; and if teachers have the capacity to design their own strategies and evaluation mechanisms, mere lists of learning objectives could be a meaningful syllabus of a education program. That is, in order to achieve the required or stated objectives in the syllabus. Students and teachers could choose their own way out based on the existing resources and materials. Then, the teachers with a good grasp of language syllabus could determine or select the instructional methodology and learning experiences that they need to have for helping students achieve the stated objectives. Therefore , understanding the core component of the language syllabus not only enables teachers to be flexible and effective in addressing contextual constraints of the teaching and learning process but also make the teachers become more independent and active participant in the instructional process.

It seems imperative to suggest that teachers could consider the existing syllabus for ensuring effective teaching and learning process other than saving themselves from hard working and tiredness. That is, the focus of making decisions on using syllabi must be student-teachers' effectiveness in handling their learning. Then, the teachers tended to be not only less concerned about the effectiveness of text book based instruction has an effect on student-teachers' success.

14. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the teacher conceptions of language syllabus and roles of textbooks in ELT context was the primary objective of the study. The teachers reflected their views in the form of group discussion. Thus, based on their responses, two major conclusions are drawn. First, the teachers do not seem to a develop understanding of what really involves in designing a language syllabus and how it is going to be used in a particular language education program. That is, the characterizations of language syllabus by the participant teachers lack some form of clarity. For example, they considered language syllabus as a 'treaty between teachers and student-teachers', framework of teaching and learning, and guide for lesson planning. The student teachers do not seem to have a conception of language syllabus and its roles in the practical classroom teaching and learning process. Secondly, the student teachers' perception of textbook based or non-textbook based lessons seems to be ambiguous. On the one hand, they tend to acknowledge the use of prescribed textbook in teaching and learning process. On the other, the student teachers seem to suggest the importance of adapting the textbook and supplementing it with other additional materials. Thus, they do not seem to have a firm stand on the use or non-use of textbooks in classroom teaching. Base on the findings, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- The student teachers should invest much more time and effort in conceptualizing the essence of language syllabus and the basic rationales behind developing and implementing a syllabus based language education program.
- The student teachers must try to contextualize the theoretical principles of syllabus and materials development to their own day-to-day professional practices or teaching. That is, having a sheer memory of theories about materials design and preparation could not help them produce a workable curriculum for language education program.
- The teachers’ awareness about materials design and development should go beyond understanding a mere principle of selecting and producing teaching resources. They need to have a good sense of criticality and reasoning power for adapting the textbook according to their teaching contexts.
- It is, ultimately, a significant task to create an environment for developing aural and oral skills among the students who is emerging as professional teachers and moulding future generation.
- The present environment on both material and mechanical, the envisaged output relentlessly produced without any benchmark activities, due to this hardship truth evidently drawn the pathetic condition of educational program which furnished the future professionals who craft potential wealth of young India.
- The study precisely explores some key factors related to mode of testing; the evaluation method strongly deviates from the objectives of the existing English curriculum and syllabus. It provides monotonous among the student-teachers with respect to communicative skills and tangible circumstances enforce the examination as a ritual exercises.
- These recommendations can be implemented in the form of process based; the process to be in associated with package of communicative skills components, ensure to refer the LSRW exercises is highly suggestive.

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