

ROLE OF TEACHERS IN SYLLABUS DESIGNING IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The importance of teachers' role in the designing and implementation of syllabus of English is vital in the present age in order to have a direct connection between the syllabus designing and its implementation. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, people, other than teachers, such as governmental agencies, applied linguists, and the authorities, set the official curriculum. Teachers cannot exercise autonomy in syllabus designing. This paper is about the role of teachers in syllabus designing of English on the Intermediate level in Pakistan.

Keywords: Syllabus designing, curriculum development, needs analysis, teacher autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, teachers do not participate actively in syllabus designing of the subject English on the Intermediate (Sindh Board) level. The curriculum made by the policy makers is the "official curriculum" that cannot be amended and the teachers' role is to implement the guidelines provided in the official curriculum on teaching (Vazir, 2003). Bell (1983) claims that teachers are the main consumers of other people's syllabi. In other words, their role is to implement the plans of applied linguists, government agencies, and so on (Nunan, 1988).

The syllabus of the subject "English" on the Intermediate level (Sindh Board) has not been changed for years. The posterity still uses the same books that their ancestors once used. The same syllabus is repeated every year regardless of the fact that every coming generation has different requirements and needs as compared to their ancestors. Their mindsets and capabilities are different from their ancestors. Teachers are well-aware of the fact that the material that was once taught to their ancestors should not be taught to their students. They, being in a direct connection with the students, know what the students need to study English. Thus, the teacher is the only person who knows the weaknesses and the strengths of their students. The teacher knows the ways to make use of the strengths to overcome the weaknesses in order to make their students better learners. To overcome the weaknesses, the teacher needs to design a syllabus that caters the need and lackings of the students. Unfortunately, at the Intermediate level in Pakistan, the teachers are not sovereign enough to design syllabus on their own. Teachers do not have the authority to produce or design a syllabus. They are the consumers of the official curriculum made by the policy makers. The governmental bodies and bureaucrats design the syllabus of Intermediate (Sindh Board) level. They are not well-aware of the students' needs and the ways to fill the gaps in their English language skills.

There are two main practices related to teachers' participation in the process of curriculum development and syllabus designing as described by Al-Kathiri (2016). The first practice regards teachers as merely the "recipients" of the curriculum that is developed by specialists elsewhere. The teacher's curriculum function remains limited to the correct application of what has been developed by these specialists. This is called a "top down" approach which, he believes, is detrimental to the process of taking ownership of the curriculum. On the other hand, the second main practice regards teachers as partners in the process of curriculum change. In this practice the teacher's voice is heard before the actual implementation. They have been given the opportunity to make an input during the initial curriculum development processes. The educational system often determines which of these two interpretations or tendencies triumphs. The curriculum is intended to let the children have all the experiences "under the guidance of the teacher" (Caswell & Campbell, 1935). Vazir (2003) raised the argument that these "experiences" are usually vague and ill-defined for the teachers to implement, because they are not a part of the whole process. Since the teachers are not a part of the whole process of the curriculum and syllabus designing, they are unaware of the philosophy and rationale behind the creation of the set rules and guidelines. When a teacher is unaware of the rationale and philosophy of teaching, he will still be able to teach according to the rules but will not be having a clue "why" he is doing it. The inability to answer this question brings a gap between the teachers' teaching and the students' learning. Everyone would still be knowing what they are doing but would not be knowing the philosophy behind it.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many attempts have been made to incorporate teachers in the curriculum and syllabus designing process, but there hardly exists any notion of teachers' role in curriculum and syllabus planning and designing, who are in fact the main stakeholders of the educational activity. In Pakistan, top-down approach is followed at the Intermediate level in which the teachers are the "recipients" of the curriculum and syllabus; their job is to implement them correctly. They are implementers of the curriculum and the syllabus; they have no say in the processes related to them. This leads to a gap between the development of the curriculum and the syllabus, and their implementation.

Teachers should be given an equal role as the policy makers in the syllabus designing to implement the guidelines of the curriculum accordingly. If the teacher does not participate in the making of the curriculum or syllabus, he will not be able to make a logical connection between the given set of instructions that are present in the curriculum and the teaching.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This paper aims to explore the importance of teachers' input in the processes of syllabus designing.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the importance of teachers' input in the processes of syllabus designing?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data was collected through thematic analysis of the literature related to syllabus designing. Research studies from Pakistan and other countries were analyzed. All the papers undeniably agreed upon the importance of teachers' input in the processes of syllabus designing.

LIMITATION

Many authors and researchers argue that the teachers cannot participate in the syllabus designing and that they should be assigned a proper role in the syllabus designing, as they are one of the stakeholders of the education system. This paper is limited to the importance of teachers' role in the processes of syllabus designing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a common academic experience of teachers from different schools and colleges in Pakistan that they are not considered important stakeholders in designing and revising syllabus and curriculum at all levels. Tanner and Tanner (2007) mentioned in the book "Curriculum Development: Theory into Practice" that without intelligent participation of schoolteachers, meaningful curriculum development will not be achieved. They further argued that the teachers, who are involved in bringing out educational change, accept and adopt the new ideas more quickly than those teachers who are not involved in carrying out change. The involvement of teachers in syllabus designing is important and its significance is established in literature.

According to Cohn and Kottkamp (1993), any change in curriculum is not effective unless teachers are actively involved in it. The importance of involvement of teachers in syllabus designing was first addressed in 1928 (Handler, 2010). Since teachers are always in touch with the syllabus in classes, they know the ground reality of educational environment in classes; they can perceive and understand the things better than others can. Being close to syllabus and its place of implementation, they can better visualize and understand the strengths and weaknesses of syllabus which policymakers cannot. Banegas (2011) argued that whatever the plans policymakers make, if not be implemented by the teachers properly, may have negative effects on the syllabus and overall educational and learning process.

Klein (1999) argued that teachers have the real power to make or break decisions advocated at any level. Their decisions will ultimately determine the curriculum, regardless of all other levels of decision-making. Curriculum development as a concept is regarded as the encompassing and continual process during which any form of planning, designing, dissemination, implementation and assessment of curricula may take place (Carl, 2002). According to Fullan (2001), teachers should be actively involved at all the levels of syllabus designing. This involvement is more than the activities defined within the classroom walls. A general perception often held by teachers was that "the curriculum is developed elsewhere" so that they simply need some guidance for the "correct application" of a curriculum which is "handed down to them from the top". They believed that the policy of decision making is highly centralized and that their engagement in the syllabus designing is within their own classroom practices only (Al-Kathiri, 2016).

In Pakistan, there is a lack of educational tendency of accepting and welcoming teachers' participation in syllabus designing. The education system is controlled and regulated by the Ministry of Education. English language teachers have less autonomy and are teaching with certain boundaries (Al-Sadan, 2000). They are given an identical syllabus with guidelines and deadlines that they are required to apply and follow (Al-Kathiri, 2016). This discourages the development of teacher-made materials and provides no opportunities for teachers in the involvement of syllabus design (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Moreover, this practice makes teachers perceive that this is something that is beyond their abilities and capabilities.

Other work on teachers as curricular decision-makers focuses on the qualifications and the professional preparation needed for syllabus designing (Al-Kathiri, 2016). Most of the teachers when given the opportunity of designing a syllabus are found reluctant because they do not know how to do it. They do not have enough trainings and workshops to do the task. However, on the other hand, according to Palmer (1992), although teachers receive considerable amount of pre-service training and preparation related to structured educational programs, there is often a large gap between what happens in an in-service course and in the classroom. Once they become classroom teachers, they undergo annual evaluations and attend various in-service workshops for their continuous professional development. Unfortunately, however, all these things do not affect their teaching and the implementation of the lessons learnt in the workshops. These professional developmental trainings are only meaningful when the teachers have a voice in the development of the syllabus. Since teachers always remain intact with the students and are well-aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they are the only ones who can recognize and identify their needs.

Jorgenson (2006) is of the view that syllabus designers should not only have a sound knowledge and comprehensive understanding of syllabus designing practices but also a global understanding of education as a societal enterprise. According to Kumar (2000), they must possess more than ordinary or general understanding of psychology; they should consider developmental, cognitive, emotional, and communicative factors. Moreover, they must be well-versed and articulate in classical and contemporary educational research, theoretical, and practical expectations across all subcategories including learning and instructional methodologies (Al-Kathiri, 2016). Curriculum decision-making, as stated by Griffin (1990), is a complex task that requires substantial depth and breadth of understanding of the educational enterprise, including the relationships and influences that drive policy and practice.

Some policy makers have identified the importance and usefulness of teachers' involvement and participation in syllabus designing. Eastern European countries and several Asian countries give certain amount of freedom to teachers in decision-making. Troudi and Alwan (2010) argued that the more teachers are involved, the more effective will be the curriculum. Moreover, Benegas (2011) conducted a research in Argentina and collaborated with teachers to develop a new curriculum that they implemented in 2012. Benegas said that teachers themselves would be both, the reform-doers and the reform-implementers, which may also signal teachers' perception of their role in curriculum development and shortcomings of the top-down approach.

Zohrabi (2014) conducted a research in Iran that identified the role that teachers play in curriculum development. He discussed that teachers would play their role effectively if they are given a chance to participate in curriculum development. They can become more skillful and able after taking part in curriculum and syllabus designing. Their inclusion in the process of syllabus designing will make its implementation easier and faster. The teachers can become more than consumers of other designers' plans. If teachers are given choices and asked for their opinion on various educational setups, they will cooperate (Troudi, 2009).

Alsubaie (2016) discussed the importance of teachers' involvement in curriculum. She emphasized that an effective curriculum is something that is accepted by teachers, parents, and community at large. She also discussed that there should be an alignment between the content of curriculum and the students' needs in the classroom. The teachers having a direct contact with the students are better aware of their needs. Hence, it is important to empower teachers to come up with effective curriculum and its effective implementation. Teachers should be provided with appropriate knowledge and skills including trainings and workshops that can develop them professionally. She suggested that the teachers can contribute by working with curriculum development teams and specialists to arrange and compose material, textbooks, and content. The paper also discussed some challenges that teachers face and one of them were their having no voice in the curriculum development.

Rahimpour (2010) discussed the current trends of syllabus design in foreign language instruction along with the explanation of different types of syllabi. He also discussed the role of the classroom teacher in syllabus design. He supported the suggestion of Stern (1984:12) who emphasized on "flexibility and negotiation of the curriculum" among teachers, students, and curriculum designers. He also emphasized on the need of giving appropriate training to the teachers to be equipped with necessary skills and knowledge to design their syllabi, to "define parameters", and to "provide direction" for English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language.

Bano et al. (2019) emphasized that designing syllabus is the basic required skill when measuring the quality of an institute. They discussed the importance of syllabus for teachers and students. Syllabus provides a roadmap of organization to teachers and students. Hence, it should be clear and easily understood by others who are not familiar with the course. They also mentioned that Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives provides a good set of guidelines for setting objective of the course. Their study found that teachers had no training related to syllabus designing. They recommended to teach Syllabus designing in B.Ed. (Bachelor's in Education) and M.Ed. (Master's in Education). They also recommended that training sessions should be organized for the teachers to develop syllabus designing skills and focus on the essential components of a syllabus to bring uniformity among faculties and departments.

In the name of "one system of education for all", The National Curriculum Framework of Pakistan (2020) has put forth the notion of having a single national curriculum for everyone. The notion implies that Pakistanis cannot remain one nation without a single curriculum. This notion looks very appealing on the outset, but on the onset, it has got many loopholes. Every now and then, the curriculum claims to meet individual "needs of the students" and argues that a quality education is one that "satisfies learning needs and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living" (pg. 3). It also claims that needs assessment should not be limited to the "views of curriculum developers, textbook writers and teachers", but should also consult "other stakeholders and beneficiaries" of the education system. Moreover, they said that the "provinces may review the existing scheme to adjust it to their local requirements and needs of their students but keeping in view the national standards and uniformity as well as the global trends" (pg. 21). How ironic it is to constantly talk about the learners' needs, but not at all doing anything in this regard! Additionally, how paradoxical it is to say that amendments can be made in the scheme, but "uniformity" should also be kept in view! When learners in one classroom cannot have uniformed needs and a uniformed way of teaching cannot be implemented in one single classroom, then how can it be expected to implement one single curriculum for all the learners. Moreover, the curriculum focuses on some conditions to ensure that a syllabus is satisfactory. The first and foremost condition is that a syllabus should be based on the needs of the learners. Ironically, this is the main condition that is not taken into consideration while developing a syllabus. There is one syllabus that is staunchly followed by every teacher teaching the course, not keeping in mind that each learner is coming from a different background having a different set of skills and knowledge. They have different needs and to make all of them follow the same syllabus is not just. It is important for the teachers to do the needs analysis in the beginning of a course and the institutions should allow the teachers to make necessary changes in the syllabus according to the needs of the learners. The second condition is that the syllabus should take into account the existing knowledge an environmental experience of the learner. This condition, like the first one, is not followed since no head to learners' needs and experience is given. The third

condition focuses on the developmental level of the learner that is considered in the cognitive, effective, and psycho-motor domains. This condition is only followed in engineering courses since Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) requires Outcome Based Education (OBE) system / Bloom's Taxonomy Educational system to be implemented in all Engineering courses. Other than Engineering universities and departments, cognition, effectiveness, and environmental experience of the learner is not taken into consideration while designing a syllabus. Only the last condition that the contents should be focused on attaining the objectives is followed and that too, not very religiously. The notion of having a single curriculum will bring a sense of nationhood has many discrepancies. There are countless examples of "countries having diverse curricula – even ones that vary from school to school – and yet a strong sense of common nationhood" (Dawn, July, 2020).

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Designing syllabus is the prerequisite skill when the quality of an educational institution is measured. Thus, all teaching faculty (at all levels) is required to have ability in designing, maintaining, and updating curricula.
2. Results showed that presently, the teachers are scantily trained for syllabus designing.
3. As syllabus is an agreement between instructor, student, the department and the university, these connections should be strong from the inception of any course.
4. Course objectives are mirrored through a well-designed syllabus.
5. A competent teacher is ideally a coherent syllabus designer.
6. Serving teachers are excluded from the syllabus designing process.
7. In order to design a syllabus tailored according to the needs of a particular group of learners, the teacher should know each student as an individual in order to comprehend his/her unique needs, learning style, social and cultural background, interests and abilities. This information, in turn, will help him/her in syllabus designing and implementation with a particular group of learners.
8. Thus, a teacher should play various roles:
 - a) A need analyst
 - b) Syllabus designer
 - c) The one who implements and evaluates a syllabus.

CONCLUSION

The stakeholder who is the closest to the students is the teacher. Therefore, not giving weightage to the teacher's input means not to give weightage to the students. Teachers are the only medium for students to communicate their needs to the authorities since teachers are the ones who have direct link with students. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, syllabus is developed by the authorities and teachers are just the recipients of the syllabus. This top-down approach in syllabus designing takes away the voice of teachers in decision-making. Teachers' participation in the curriculum and syllabus designing is undeniably important. Their input should be included in the processes of syllabus designing. The more teachers are involved, the more effective will be the curriculum. Pakistani educational system should welcome the teachers on various educational setups to avoid absurdity in the classrooms. Teachers' role should not be limited to what is being implemented, but how it is formed and why it is formed. They should be actively involved at all levels of syllabus designing and implementation. They must be both reform-doers and reform-implementers to have positive effects on the syllabus and overall educational and learning process.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper has discussed the importance of teachers' input in syllabus designing. It will help not just teachers to teach in an effective manner but will also help learners get a voice in syllabus designing. Both teachers and students will be benefitted. The syllabus designers and curriculum developers will also realize the need to include teachers in the processes of syllabus designing and curriculum developing. If teachers' input is given weightage in the syllabus designing and curriculum developing, their implementation would be more meaningful rather than being an abstract idea which cannot be implemented.

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