

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEEDS ANALYSIS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR ESL/EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

West (1994) states that needs analysis (NA) is what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation, and how learners might best master the target language during the period of training. There are a lot of studies that proved that NA has important role in the development of a curriculum. This study will try to discuss the importance of NA in curriculum development for ESL/EFL classroom. The history of curriculum development and its emergence in language teaching will be discussed. Some syllabuses will be explained from which ELT practitioners can have some pictures of materials and the learning process in ELT classrooms.

Keywords: needs analysis, curriculum development, ESL/EFL classroom, and syllabus.

INTRODUCTION

The Beginnings of Language Curriculum Development

The definition of curriculum is complex because there are as many definitions as there are writers in the field. It can go anywhere along the range from a list of subjects for a course to the perception of the ultimate goal of education as a whole. Johnson (1989) defines curriculum as all the relevant decision making processes, which exist in concrete form and can be observed and described, such as policy documents, syllabuses, teacher-training programs, teaching materials and resources, and teaching and learning acts. In addition, curriculum can be defined also as the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes to be achieved (Richards, 2013).

From the definition above, it appears that the process of curriculum development has gone through long processes. The language curriculum

development itself, according to Richards (2001) is preceded by the notion of syllabus design, in which syllabus can be defined as a specification of content of course instructions and lists of what to be taught and tested. The focuses of curriculum development are on determining what knowledge, skills, and values students learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring about intended learning outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools can be planned, measured and evaluated. In other words, curriculum development represents an interrelated set of processes that focuses on designing, revising, implementing, and evaluating language program.

Curriculum development was started in 1960, as a result of the quest for better methods in language teaching. At that time, the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning was very powerful and widely used by teachers and applied linguists. The

following are some methods used, as Richards (2001) illustrate,

- Grammar Translation Method (1800-1900)
- Direct Method (1900-1930)
- Structural Method (1930-1960)
- Reading Method (1920-1950)
- Audiolingual Method (1950-1970)
- Situational Method (1950-1970)
- Communicative Approach (1970-present)

A prominent applied linguist from British, Harold Palmer summarized the principles of language teaching in 1920. He was the one who proposed the foundations of Structural Approach. The principles are as the following:

- Initial preparation—orienting the students towards language learning
- Habit-forming—establishing correct habits
- Accuracy—avoiding inaccurate language
- Gradation—each stage prepares the student for the next
- Proportion—each aspect of language given emphasis
- Concreteness—movement from the concrete to the abstract
- Interest—arousing the student’s interest at all times
- Order of progression—hearing before speaking, and both before writing
- Multiple line of approach—many different ways used to teach the language

After agreements among applied linguists in term of the underlying principles of Oral methodology were reached, their attention was on the syllabus design underlying the Structural method. At first, their focus was on approaches to determine the content of vocabulary and grammatical of a language course, which led to processes called *selection* and *gradation*.

Mackey (1965) defines selection as an inherent characteristic of all methods. Since it is impossible to teach the whole of a language, all methods must in some ways or other, whether intentionally or not, select the part of it they intent to teach. As a result, selection deals with the choice of appropriate units of the language for teaching purposes and with the development of techniques and procedures by which the language can be reduced to what is most useful to the learner. In the first decade of twentieth century, the main attention was given to the *vocabulary selection* and *grammar selection*, which later on became the foundations of language teaching.

Vocabulary Selection

Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the language learner. To teach vocabulary, it is necessary to recreate the contexts in which words are used, choosing situations which the learner is likely to encounter. What words should be taught in a language course? Words that should be taught to learners in a language course depend on the objectives or purposes and the time available for the course. Richards reports that educated native speaker of English have a 17000 repertoire words. How much should be taught to the second language learners? Do they have to learn 3000/1500/500/100 words? If there is a certain list of words that should be learned, which words?

To answer the questions, Li and Richards (1995, cited by Richards) analyzed five textbooks used to teach Cantonese, which contained 18000 different words. The result showed the distribution among the 5 books as the following:

Words occurring in one of the texts
1,141 words= 63%

Words occurring in two of the texts
313 words= 17.4%

Words occurring in three texts
155 words= 8.6%
Words occurring in four texts
114 words= 6.3 %
Words occurring in all of the texts
77 words= 4.3%

It means that learners will take a lot of time to understand every book, because there are very limited commonalities between those 5 books in term of vocabularies.

Due to these problems, applied linguists conducted several researches. The purposes of early selection as described by West are (1953),

A language is so complex that selection from it is always one of the first and most difficult problems of anyone who wishes to teach it systematically. It has come to be more and more generally realized that random selection is a wasteful approach, and that only a complete system capable of continuous enlargement can form a satisfactory objective for the first stage in any attempt to grasp as much as possible of the entire language as may ultimately be necessary. . . . Various criteria have been employed in choosing the words, but the dominant activity throughout the period among all those concerned with systematic teaching of English has been vocabulary selection.

A few approaches for vocabulary selection existed in the field of ELT. The earliest one was by counting large number of texts to determine the frequency of words. It was believed that words with highest frequency should be taught first. In fact, there are a few issues to be considered, where the texts should be taken from, journals/text-books/story books or any other sources.

The earliest word lists undertaken for language teaching were based on an analysis of popular reading materials, and a *word frequency list* was prepared. To make sure that the frequency of the occurrence of words in a corpus were appropriate for language learners; the corpus used must be relevant to the needs of the target learners

and used in different language samples. So, frequency and range were used in developing the word lists. In other words, the compilation of words with the highest frequency and have a wide range of different language samples that support the needs of the learners will be the most useful vocabularies for learners. In addition to that, there were also other criteria in determining word lists. They were as followings (Richards, 2001):

- Teachability : the words can be easily illustrated through pictures or demonstrations.
- Similarity : the words in target language have similarities with words in native language.
- Availability : group of words usually come to mind during certain topics, for example, Restaurant: menu, server, refill, check, and gratuity.
- Coverage : the words can cover meanings of other words, for example, Seat - stool, bench, and chair.
- Defining power : the words can be used to define other words, for example, Appliance- dishwasher, fridge, and toaster.

The procedures of vocabulary selection later on is called as *lexical syllabus* or target group of vocabularies for a language course that are graded into levels, such as the first 500 words, the second 500 words and so on. These lexical syllabuses are always improved and developed. One of the prominent lexical syllabuses that is still widely referred to is *A General Service List* of English words compiled by Michael West in 1953. It contains 2000 words.

Grammar Selection and Gradation

Grammar selection and gradation had emerged since 1920s, because applied linguists realized that the number of syntactic structures in a language was large. It was also supported by research found by Wilkins (1976) where he showed that some

different structures could perform one speech act, for example “*Asking permission*”, can be realized through any of these structures.

- Can/may I use your telephone, please?
- Please let me use your telephone.
- Is it all right with you, I'll use your telephone.
- Am I allowed to use your telephone?
- Do you mind if I use your telephone?
- Do you mind me using your telephone?
- Would you mind if I used your telephone?
- You don't mind if I use your telephone (do you)?
- I wonder if you have any objection to me using your telephone?
- Would you permit me to use your telephone?
- Would you be so kind as to allow me to use your telephone?
- Would it be possible for me to use your telephone?
- Do you think you could let me use your telephone?

From the lists of structures above, teachers or applied linguists should be able to determine what kind of sentence structures would be beneficial to be taught in a language course.

The need of grammar selection and gradation was encouraged by the findings of research done by Li and Richards (1995), in which they analyzed 5 grammatical books that covered 221 different grammatical items. The details of those 5 books were as follows:

- Textbook A 100 grammatical items
- Textbook B 148 grammatical items

- Textbook C 74 grammatical items
- Textbook D 91 grammatical items
- Textbook E 84 grammatical items

with the distribution of grammatical items were as follows:

Total grammatical items in the 5 textbooks 221

- Items occurring in one of the textbooks =92 41.6%
- Items occurring in two of the textbooks =54 24.4%
- Items occurring in three of the textbooks=36 16.3%
- Items occurring in four of the textbooks =17 7.7%
- Items occurring in five of the textbooks =22 10%

From the data, it was clear that the distribution of grammatical items in the textbooks was not widely spread out. It meant that the authors of the book had different perspectives regarding the grammatical items that should be included.

In relation to English language teaching, applied linguists had started to apply selection and gradation to create grammatical syllabuses in early 1930s. Selection here has very close relation with gradation. Gradation mainly focuses on the grouping and sequencing the grammatical items which will be used to teach in a language course or in syllabus. In other words, the list of grammatical items in a grammatical syllabus is graded aid to learning process. The system of gradation is developed from different principles based on intuitive criteria or simplicity and learnability. There are some principles suggested by Richards (2001) for developing grammatical syllabus:

- *Simplicity & Centrality* : it uses basic simple and central structure of language.

S + V : She runs.

S + V + Complement : He is a teacher.

S + V + Adverb : The boy plays outside

S + V + Object + Adverb : I put the book in the bag.

- *Frequency* : it uses frequency of occurrence in conversational language (not of grammatical items in texts)
- *Learnability* : order in which grammatical items are acquired in second language acquisition.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. nouns | 11. <i>wh</i> -questions |
| 2. verbs | 12. present continuous |
| 3. adjectives | 13. Directions |
| 4. verb <i>be</i> | 14. possessive adjectives |
| 5. possessive pronouns | 15. Comparatives |
| 6. personal pronouns | 16. Offers |
| 7. adverbs of time | 17. simple future |
| 8. requests | 18. simple past |
| 9. simple present | 19. infinitives/gerunds |
| 10. futures | 20. first conditional |

In addition to the principles suggested in previous paragraph, there are also some approaches by which gradation of grammatical structures in grammatical syllabuses can be formed. They are

- *linguistic distance* (structures similar to those in native language should be taught first),
- *intrinsic difficulty* (simple structures taught before complex one)
- *communicative need* (some structures that are needed early on in acquisition) and
- *frequency* (occurrence in the target language but if something easy to demonstrate and practice in a classroom context)

(Richards, 2001).

In term of sequencing the grammatical items, there are two ways of grading them. They are linear gradation (introduce one

item at a time and practiced intensively before moving on to the next items) and linear or cyclical gradation (Repetition, old to new, items reintroduce throughout course).

The emergence of curriculum development started in the early 1960s, as a consequence of the quest for better methods in language teaching. Curriculum development focuses on determining what knowledge, skills, and values students learn in schools, what experiences should be provided to bring about intended learning outcomes, and how teaching and learning in schools can be planned, measured and evaluated. *Vocabulary selection* and *Grammar gradation* are two approaches laid the foundations for syllabus design in language teaching.

Emergence of a Curriculum Approach in Language Teaching

Purposes of a Curriculum and a Syllabus

Before we discuss the purposes of a curriculum and a syllabus, we have to clearly define a curriculum and a syllabus. The terms are used differently. A syllabus can be defined as the subject matter of an individual subject, whereas curriculum is the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system (White, 1988).

Another distinction is that curriculum contains a broad description of general goals that indicate an overall educational-cultural philosophy which applies across subjects together with a theoretical orientation to language and language learning with respect to the subject matter at hand. It is usually a reflection of national and political trends. On the other hand, a syllabus is specification of teaching and learning elements which are derived from the philosophy of curriculum. In other words, curriculum is the broader aspects of syllabus, by which some syllabuses can be derived from a curriculum, based on target learners, their needs and their objectives.

After knowing the differences of curriculum and syllabus, we need to know how curriculum and syllabus are designed, by which we will know the purposes. According to Tyler (1949), there are four important points that should be kept in mind while developing a curriculum;

- What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How we can determine whether these purposes are being attained?

In other words, curriculum development should have aims or objectives to be achieved, content, organization and evaluation of the program itself at the end. Then, who is responsible to create a curriculum and make decision of the objectives and other things related to curriculum development? The framework of curriculum decision making that are consisted of three sets of constraints is the answer. The three sets are *policy, pragmatic consideration (time, resources, human and material), and the participants in the curriculum process.*

There are 4 stages in policy implementation (Johnson, 1989)

Stage s	Developmental Stages	Decision making roles	Products
1	Curriculum planning	Policy makers	Policy documents
2	Specification: Ends Means	Needs analyst	Syllabus
		Methodologist	
3	Program implementation	Material writers	Teaching materials
		Teacher trainers	Teacher-training program
4	Classroom implementation	Teacher	Teaching acts
		Learner	Learning acts

Curriculum planning is done by policy makers to create a policy document. These policy makers determine overall aims of the curriculum by considering socio-political factors. The decision made is affected by the view of language and the nature of language learning. As a result, sometimes there is mismatch between the objectives of a curriculum and the outcome of a learning process.

After policy documents have been created, ends specification will provide an exact characterization of the target proficiency (final product or what to be achieved), while means specification will prescribe the method by which those target proficiency in the ends specification will be achieved (process or how to achieve). Those who work and make a decision of these specifications are syllabus writers. Here, syllabus writers will be needs analyst to decide what is to be achieved, and methodologist decide how to achieve the target or objectives. So, the product will be in the form of syllabus. If there is mismatch between syllabus and curriculum, the curriculum will be less coherent and harder to be evaluated.

Program implementation is related to the development of teaching and learning processes and preparing the teachers to make sure that they use the resources effectively. Teaching materials exist in physical form or in printed form. So, they can be easily analyzed, evaluated, and revised.

From classroom implementation, curriculum outcomes can be derived. It can be decided whether a curriculum is successful or not. If the outcome is not as it is planned in curriculum, it means that the curriculum is not successful. So, evaluation of the whole program needs to be conducted.

From the explanation above, it can be summarized that the purpose of a curriculum and syllabus will be similar to some extent. It is because the purpose of a curriculum is very broad where a syllabus

is limited and focuses on specific details. There is a very strong relationship between curriculum and syllabus. Both are designed to develop the learning process.

Types of Syllabuses

A language teaching syllabus involves the combination of subject matter (what to teach) and linguistic matter (how to teach). It actually performs as a guide for both teacher and learner and provides some goals to be accomplished. Syllabus, in fact, deals with linguistic theory and theories of language learning and how they are utilized in the classroom.

The selection and organization of the components on a syllabus depends on the type of the syllabus itself. The following are some types of syllabuses:

a. Grammatical syllabus

Grammatical syllabus views language as a set of systems that can be learned as chunks or bits of information. So, this syllabus arranges grammatical items to be learned as a sequence. It focuses on language form that has structural selection and gradation such as structural complexity, difficulty, regularity, utility, and frequency. In this syllabus, the learners are expected to master each structure and add it to their grammar collection. Activities can be performed through highly controlled, tightly structured, and sequenced pattern practice drills. The content of syllabus will be list of grammatical items, such as *simple present tense, simple past tense, etc.*

b. Lexical syllabus:

The focus of this syllabus is on selected vocabulary; specific words and phrases that frequently appear in books and conversation. Learners learn from examining corpus of language or sentences by exposing them to carefully selected language, and enable learners to analyze the target language. The syllabus helps learners to achieve their goals.

c. Functional syllabus:

This is a syllabus that is organized around communicative functions such as *Requesting, Complaining, Suggesting, Agreeing* and so on. The main emphasis of the syllabus is on purpose of communication and meaning of language. To design this syllabus, learner needs analysis is needed.

d. Situational syllabus:

A situation is a setting in which particular communicative acts typically occur. So, situational syllabus is arranged based on real life situations, such as going to the dentist (*At dentist*), watching a movie (*At a cinema*), meeting a new student (*In a Class*), etc. Learners find meaning from relevant context by using the target language on such situations.

e. Topical or content-based syllabus:

It is organized around themes or topics. With a topical syllabus, content rather than grammar, functions or situations is the starting point in syllabus design. Content is taught using the target language where the subject matter is primary importance, but language learning occurs along with content. Some linguistic adjustments may need to be made to make content understandable.

f. Competency-based syllabus:

It is a syllabus that is formed based on specifications of the competencies learners are expected to master in relation to specific situations and activities. Competencies are a description of the essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for effective performance of particular tasks and activities.

g. Skills-syllabus:

Skills taught are the skills needed for language competency. Specific skills such as pronunciation, grammar and discourse are improved through activities such as listening to language

to find the main idea, writing well-formed paragraphs, giving lectures, and so on.

h. Task-based syllabus:

Tasks and activities are used to promote language learning, by which application and practice of the target language are done. Tasks are best defined as activities with a purpose other than language learning so as to develop second language ability. The most important point is that tasks must be relevant to the real world language needs of the learner. It should be a meaningful task so as to enhance learning.

i. Text-based syllabus:

It is built around texts and samples of extended discourse. This approach starts with the texts which are identified for a specific context or which have been identified by students. This approach is often used when an overall context for language learning has been defined, such as in a specific workplace or a university or other further study context. Units of work are then developed in relation to the texts.

j. An integrated syllabus:

It is a syllabus that is designed based on two or more syllabuses that are discussed above. For example, a syllabus combination of grammatical, functional and topic based.

As we realize that there is no single type of syllabus that is appropriate for all teaching settings. When choosing a syllabus design, take into account all the potential factors that may affect the teachability of a specific syllabus.

It is now clear that syllabus and curriculum are different. Syllabus is the extension of curriculum. It means that syllabus is designed based on an existing curriculum a country has. A curriculum can be used to design some syllabuses,

depending on the context and situation in which a course will be conducted.

Needs Analysis

Definition of Needs

The word *need* can be described as an item or an ability which is important to a person and which he does not have or not very good at. In a linguistic context, different authors define the term *needs* diversely, and thus different meanings are implied. If needs are ‘understood as specific requirements for the foreign language, then the vast majority of learners do not have any. They are deemed to require what the syllabus offers them, and the syllabus is likely to be closely related to the examination, which is a highly realistic “need” for the majority of learners’ (Dickinson, 1991).

The conceptions of *target needs* and *learning needs* have been widely used in the literature. *Target needs* are understood as what the learner needs to do in the target situation, and *learning needs* are what the learner needs to do in order to learn. The analysis of target needs involves identifying the linguistic features of the target situation or learners *necessities* (what is English needed for), *lacks* (what learner does not know), *wants* (what learner feels s/he needs). Obviously, analysis of target situation needs concerns with the important area of language *use*, while learning needs cover circumstances of language learning, i.e. why learners take a course – optional or compulsory, what they seek to achieve, what their attitude towards the course are. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1996).

According to Dickinson, it is essential to distinguish between needs, wants and lacks. *Needs* are those skills which a learner perceives as being relevant to him; *wants* are a subset of needs, those which a learner puts at a high priority given the time available; and the *lack* is the difference a learner perceives between his present competence in a

particular skill and the competence he wishes to achieve.

So, needs analysis must be interrelated with course design, materials, teaching/learning, assessment/evaluation, and is an on-going process. This is in line with the definition of needs analysis described by West (1994). He states that needs analysis is what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation, and how learners might best master the target language during the period of training. In simple words, it can be said that need analysis is the systematic collection and analysis of all information necessary for defining a defensible curriculum (Brown, 2009)

Importance of Needs Analysis in Curriculum Development

Curriculum development is viewed as a process which meets learners' needs and leads to learning. Therefore, curriculum developers should gather as much information as possible toward the learners' needs. The procedure used to collect information about the learners' needs is called needs analysis (Richards, 2002). Historically, needs analysis was introduced into language teaching through the ESP movement during 1960s. This needs analysis was not advocated only for ESP but also for second/foreign language students in general. In fact, needs analysis have been conducted informally for years by teachers who want to assess what language aspects their students need to learn.

In addition, it has generally been accepted that an initial pre-course needs analysis has an aim of establishing the structure and content of a language course. Needs analysis is a complex process which is usually followed by syllabus design, selection of course materials, teaching/learning a course, and evaluation. Learners often find it difficult to define what language needs they have

and cannot distinguish between *needs*, *wants* and *lacks*. Although these three concepts are interrelated, it is important for teachers to be aware of their impetus on successful learning. By conducting needs analysis, learning process will be better and the curriculum development will be successful.

Tools Used in Needs Analysis

There are some tools or methods that can be used in needs analysis, such as questionnaires, interviews, observation of classroom activities, data collection, and analysis of available information.

Questionnaires: Questionnaires are thought to be the least consuming ways of collecting information. That is why learners' needs are usually specified through questionnaires which enable researchers to determine long-term aims and short-term objectives. Questionnaire can generally be used for quantitative presentation of collected data. Small amount of data may be easily analyzed by a simple tally system, while large scale needs analysis requires statistical approach and use of computer software.

Interviews: They give more in-depth exploration of issues than questionnaire, even though interviews take longer time to administer and are applicable for smaller groups. An interview will be useful at the preliminary stage of designing a questionnaire, because it will give the designer of questionnaire get a sense of what topics and issues can be focused on questionnaire.

Observation: It can cover a range of activities from watching a particular task being performed to observing individuals at work. Observation for needs analysis include sitting in on subject lectures or practical sessions.

Data collection: It can be done through collecting data on how well learners perform on different language tasks and documenting the typical problems they have.

Analysis of available information: Generally, it is done in initial step in a needs analysis. The sources of information here can be books, journal articles, reports and surveys, and records/files.

Aims and Objectives of a Course

Establishing Goals

Goals or aims refer to the statements of general change that a program seeks to bring about in learners. They describe the overall purpose of the course - what an instructor wants the students to walk away with when the course is completed. Goals are generated by identifying the differences between a current state or capability and a desired state. As a result, Goals have a broad statement about the need, state or condition to be changed through instruction. Goals are determined by the general purpose of the course within the larger curriculum and the audience for which the course is delivered.

Establishing learning goals is a continual process that takes place through the duration of the course. Learners' needs and goals should be discussed on an ongoing basis, because they are connected to the dynamic lives of the students. Curriculum content and learning experiences should be negotiated between learners and instructor at the beginning and during the course. When the learners realize that their English class is designed to cater to their learning needs, they feel more motivated to attend these classes and make the effort to keep enrolled and attending.

In establishing goals of a course, there are some consideration should be taken into account. They are things related to why the course exists, where the course fits into curriculum, what the course should teach, when the students take the course, and who the course takers are. Having taken these into consideration, a clear definition of the

purposes of a course can be reached. These purposes will guide the teachers or instructors, learners, and material writers to cooperate together to make the course successful.

The Link Between Goals and Objectives

Goals are general statements of change a program or a course seeks to bring, while objectives refer to statements of specific changes a program seeks to bring about and results from an analysis of the goals into its different components. In other words, course objectives state specific student learning outcomes that should be achieved upon successful completion of a course. They answer the question what the students will be able to do after the instruction or the course. As a result, course objectives are stated behaviourally, in 'performance terms' with action verbs such as identify, define, solve, compare, describe, etc.

Course objectives specify any condition or criterion that qualifies the behaviour expected from the goals. They describe what the goals seek to achieve in terms of smaller units of learning and provide a basis for the organization of teaching activities.

Objectives break goals down into explicit, observable and measurable behaviours that demonstrate competency, and cumulatively ensure successful accomplishment of course goals. So, they have some advantages for a course, such as facilitate course planning, provide measurable outcomes and accountability of a course, and describe how planning should proceed and do away with subjective interpretations and personal opinions.

To make effective statements of objectives, there are some characteristics should be followed. They must describe a learning outcome, be consistent with the curriculum aim, precise, and feasible.

CONCLUSION

This study has tried to explain and discuss the history of curriculum development and the emergence of curriculum approach in language teaching. Then, the definition of needs analysis and the importance of it are also discussed here.

After understanding the study, it is expected that ELT practitioners will be able to create a curriculum that fulfils learners' needs and the institution in which they will apply the curriculum. So, the syllabus that is going to be used in the teaching and learning process will be the one that suits with the situation of the learners, and is in line with the aims and objectives of the course intended, from which the teaching and learning process will be effective.

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