
**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ELT SYLLABUS AT SECONDARY
LEVEL IN PAKISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

Language teaching and learning is highly significant for comprehensible human social interaction. The concept of global village has increased its importance manifold. Language teaching becomes more critical when it is the case of a foreign language. English is taught as a foreign language in the formal education systems of Pakistan from class-I to XII in general. Syllabus designing and incorporating of the suitable material in textbooks/teaching material is equally important for successful and object-oriented learning. Present study has critically analyzed the ELT syllabus at secondary level in multiple dimensions. A special focus has been placed on syllabus designed by Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) Islamabad, education policies, textbooks and inter-provincial understanding on the syllabus in the perspective of ELT at secondary level. The study has identified certain grey areas in this regard for a serious consideration by the educationists and education policy makers.

Keywords: Syllabus, Secondary, Critical, Analysis, Level.

INTRODUCTION

In the sector of education all over the world, secondary level education is critically significant. It is a point in education where a student enters adolescence. This is a crucial stage of life. In the past, secondary education could not attract much attention in terms of efforts and investment. It is a terminal stage when a child advances in his educational career, and it is the prime period for his emotional and physical growth. In accordance with a common perception, after passing the secondary level, most of the students can communicate and understand in Urdu and English. It is also considered that a matriculate knows the norms and values of the society that he must take care of. In the context of Pakistan, students' performance in the matriculation examination decides his future course of study. In the present study, the syllabus of ELT at secondary level has been analyzed with a critical approach. The syllabus designed by FBISE Islamabad has been focused

in particular. In addition to this, education policies, textbooks and inter-provincial understanding on the syllabus in the perspective of ELT at secondary level have also been examined critically for comprehensive understanding of the factors involved in the consideration of syllabus designing. Efforts have been made by the researchers to highlight certain weak areas in the ELT syllabus being taught in Pakistan under Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) Islamabad for further improvement of the syllabus.

CONCEPT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Currently, the number of students has increased at this level. The awareness of people can be seen from the fact that the participation level in 1996-7 was only 32% and it is now almost 50% (Education Policy 1992). It is affirmed that in the process of deciding the effectiveness of a national system of education, secondary education is universally recognized as the fundamental stage.

Saiyidan observes that: "The total development of the child was not taken into consideration in the instructional programme. Formal examination is just nothing and the priority is given to the testing of knowledge. He, therefore, suggested that secondary education should not be envisaged in the context of books, classes, academic courses, marks and diplomas" (Satija, 1996:41).

The importance of secondary education is not only stated in our country but also by developed countries where the level and system are already controlled. They also consider it as an important period for a child to develop and progress in educational life and career. Moon, Mayes, & Hutchinson (2002) argue that secondary level education plays a double role in developing the social and academic competence of the learners. At this age the acquisition of language may still be reasonably fast.

Another view about the age and the learning abilities of students at the Secondary Education level is stated by Bent and Kronenberg (1961). They say that secondary education is between the chronological ages of twelve and twenty or it can be defined as the schooling of adolescence when the conceptual abilities are sharp. The syllabus and curriculum at this level has to be developed proportionately. They further say that it can 'best be defined in terms of its aims and functions. Therefore, the aims and functions should be known and some considerable and constant effort should be made to achieve them' (Bent and Kronenberg, 1961:2-19).

Quddus (1986) describes the different problems of education that Pakistan faces in education sector, especially at the secondary level and also states that this level is a source to provide positive development to a

child. Secondary Education should have some specified aims and objectives and that the central point should be the development of personality.

Some of them are as under:

- (a) Development of the individual
 - i) To foster in the children the spirit of enquiry and independent thought and the ability to apply their knowledge to real life situations;
 - ii) To relate all teaching to the needs and interests of the adolescent;
 - iii) To design teaching and organization of school activities so as to develop the qualities of leadership.
- (b) Development of the citizen i, ii, iii,
- (c) Development of the worker i, ii, iii,
- (d) Development of the patriot. i, ii, iii, (p.187-189)

It can be inferred by the above that the students' learning abilities are quite sharp at this level as compared to succeeding levels after continuous education of at least 10 years. The educational features that the students learn at this level are usually a part of his academic abilities throughout his educational career and also in his practical life. The target language that they acquire at this level has to be appropriate so as to reduce any incidence of ambiguity and inconvenience thereafter.

UNICEF also prepared a report on the same issue in 1986 on how the secondary level helps students and what importance it has in learning through textbooks. It is affirmed in this report that secondary education helps students in their intellectual growth. The report also talks about the role of schools in the development of students' abilities. In this regard, the responsibility goes to schools and administrative institutions to develop a syllabus that helps students mentally, socially and academically. An adequate syllabus and good textbooks can play a vital role in achieving the targets and minimizing past impediments. If the content selection is not according to linguistic competence of the students, it may be difficult for them to realign what they know and prepare themselves for new learning afterwards.

FEDERAL BOARD OF INTERMEDIATE AND SECONDARY EDUCATION (FBISE) ISLAMABAD

The Board is responsible for providing quality education to the students of the capital city of the country, Federal and tribal areas, and for the Pakistani abroad according to the objectives of the curriculum prescribed by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education. It is an administrative body to control and regularize the system for the secondary and higher secondary level. It is also responsible for good quality

education for the students to be at par with the students anywhere in the world.

The mission of the Board is to ‘contribute towards the progressive attainment of national aims and objectives of education at the Secondary and Higher Secondary levels within the country and abroad through a fair, transparent and efficient examination system, with a futuristic vision, under overall control of the Federal Ministry of Education and in close collaboration with other Boards of Education.’ The FBISE Islamabad established under FBISE ACT 1975 is an autonomous body of the Ministry of Education. This act may be called the FBISE Act, 1975. It is empowered with administrative and financial authority to organize, regulate, develop and control Intermediate and Secondary Education in general and conduct examinations in the institutions affiliated with it.

From the above we can infer that the FBISE Islamabad is striving for better education for Pakistanis, in the country or abroad. According to their mission statement it is clear that the Board would be contributing towards the attainment of the objectives and curriculum of education at the secondary level. The board, in fact, is an autonomous body dealing primarily with the examination system at the secondary level. However, the modalities for this are provided by the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education in the form of textbooks or other guidelines for the attainment of the objectives and aims. The significant aspects in the perspective of English language textbooks outlined by the curriculum wing for FBISE are appended below:

Recommended Reference Books for Class X: The following textbooks for English have been recommended by the Curriculum Wing for the FBISE Islamabad. And the same has been analyzed as subject of the research.

English 9-10

1. New English Grammar and Composition, Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore.
2. High School English Grammar and Composition Written By PC Wren and H.Martin.

Scheme of Studies for SSC (Class X)

Subjects	Marks			Number of Periods
	Theory	Practical	Total	
English –II	75	-	75	6
Urdu-II	75	-	75	6
Pakistan Studies	75	-	75	5
Physics-II	65	10	75	4+3
Mathematics-II	75	-	75	7
Chemistry-II	65	10	75	4+3
Biology-II/	65	10	75/	4+3/
Computer Science-II/ One	55	20	75/	4+3/
Technical Subject	40	35	75	4+3
Total			525	45

From the chart above, it will be seen that English occupies an important position in the implementation design of the curriculum at this level. English is dealt at par with other subjects with the maximum number of classes in the timetable. It is obvious that the more time is spared the more learning may take place provided it is carried out in the light of objectives of the curriculum and the linguistic principles. According to the Scheme of Studies provided by the Curriculum Wing the medium of instructions for the Board is also English except Islamic Studies and Urdu.

The examination system plays an important role in evaluating the delivery of the curriculum. Mostly students prepare themselves on how they will be assessed in the examinations. If, for example, the examination system does not include the assessment of four skills, neither teachers nor students will bother about them. The system of preparing examination paper for assessing students' abilities has also been mentioned in the curriculum 2002 as under:

Assessment Table

Listening	10%
Speaking	10%
Reading	30%
Writing	50%
Total	100% (English Curriculum, 2002:19)

It is important to point out that the examination system has recommended including the assessment of language through four skills; however, as a matter of fact, it is not included in the prevalent assessment

system. The Board in collaboration with the Curriculum Wing has to consider this aspect to achieve the given targets by addressing this problem. This is a long list of the objectives of English to be implemented at the secondary level. If all these objectives are included through the language textbooks, the students may be expected to improve the functional use of language.

Suggested Activities

Some activities have also been proposed for the effective teaching of English language at the level. The suggested activities are quite enough in the attainment of the objectives of the curriculum. It is also pertinent to indicate that the textbooks must be prepared and selected in accordance with the objectives and the suggested activities.

It is however, concluded that FBlSE should abide by the guidelines provided by the curriculum wing. In case of any mismatch in terms of instructions and their implementation, process of consultation must be initiated to address the issues. The experience of the teachers in the field and expert educationists may sit together under rubric of curriculum wing to find the solution of the problems if any.

ELT THROUGH TEXTBOOKS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

Here are some excerpts taken from the English curriculum of the curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education which carry proposals and recommendations for the development and selection of English language textbooks at the secondary level. It is a brief portrayal of the efforts made by the department mentioned in this regard. The curriculum has been revised four times since 1976, in 1986, 1994, 2002, and finally in 2006. It is meant to address the emerging issues periodically.

English Curriculum 1976

The curriculum 1976 states that textbooks are a source of achieving the targets mentioned in the Education Policy. Therefore, the selection has to be made very carefully. The first curriculum of English was prepared and published in 1976 that seemed quite practical in terms of its implementation in the class and linguistic achievements of the students. It recommended that the textbooks be prepared by the 'competent' educationists. It reflected: "Textbooks should be specially prepared and for this task the services of the most competent and experienced educationalists should be acquired. The production of suitable textbooks will depend on the successful implementation of the Education Policy" (p.10).

Again it was recommended in the Education Policy 1970-72 that 'the compilation and writing of the textbooks should be entrusted to a panel of writers.' This panel would be chosen from people of a linguistically high caliber. They would be responsible for the selection of text for all levels. It was also recommended that 'working teachers should be on the panel of writers and should be intimately associated with other aspects of the preparation of textbooks' (1976:10).

In the recommended guidelines both subject matter and selection criterion were addressed. It was recommended that the textbooks should be according to linguistic principles and the objectives of learning English. It was further decided that the recommendations in the Education Policy of 1972 would be carried out.

The curriculum also highlighted the importance of the method that would be applied for the teaching of language textbooks. It is mentioned that the textbooks should be in line with the methodology used for them, since language is learned through conceptual understanding through literature. The acquisition of relevant concepts should be the central point of the language textbooks. It recommended that 'the relationship between words of a second language and the concepts underlying them' must be established. This approach will 'preclude the use of traditional grammar-translation method which has been predominant in the past and has now been discharged almost everywhere except perhaps in Pakistan, where it still continues to be universally practiced.'

Owing to the prevalent situation in the country these recommendations could not be utilized and the planning for the implementation could not be determined. The textbooks could not include these recommendations and the audio-lingual method could not be introduced in the language class, at least not in the language textbooks.

English Curriculum 1986

The curriculum of English was almost the same as the preceding one. It said that 'textbook writing in the modern time is both Science and Art. The textbooks have invariably to be based on scientific research on socio-psycholinguistic background of the target population.' It also recommended that textbooks should be integrated properly with all four language skills so as to provide opportunities to learn language in a composite manner (1986:7).

The curriculum gave some recommendations and guidelines for preparing textbooks which are almost the same as those of the preceding one. The curriculum reiterated the need of integrating the language skills

in order to make the learning purposeful and result-oriented. However, it is a fact that the guidelines were not followed. The implementation of the ideas presented in the objectives was faulty and half hearted. Most of the recommendations are the same as mentioned in the previous one (1976); therefore the researcher will not comment on it anymore.

National Textbook Conference 1994

In Pakistan a conference about the textbook development and formation was held under the supervision of the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education to meet the requirements of the syllabus in the textbooks. It was organized by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Provincial Education Department, Government of Sindh & MSU, World Bank, UNICEF, and British Council. At the end of the conference a report about the proceedings was issued containing details of the conference that is available with the Curriculum Wing of the Ministry of Education.

More than 70 experts from different agencies (National and International) participated in this conference. These experts were specialists in different areas such as textbook development, production, selection, methodology, evaluation and distribution/ sales of textbooks and carried with them wealth of experience in their relevant field based on their contribution in various countries. The importance of textbooks is described in the introduction as ‘The quality of textbooks leaves much to be desired. The supplementary reading materials are also scarce. This situation needs urgent action’. The standards of education depend on the subject-based quality of textbooks. It also endorsed the recommendation of the National education Policy that ‘to produce better textbooks the involvement of the private sector is necessary’ (p.1).

Mr.Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Minister for Planning and Management showed his concern about ‘the deteriorating standard of education and the dependence of students’ achievement on the quality of textbooks.’ He said that curriculum was delivered through the textbooks to about 20 million students in the system in which 100 million books were being produced every year. He further said that it was not possible to provide equally good teachers to all the institutions throughout the country but certainly possible to provide quality textbooks in the education system (p: 02-03). This argument seems true in the context of Pakistan because the strength of trained teachers especially for English language has always been a problem.

Mr.Mushtaq Ahmed Sundrani the Chairman Sindh Textbook stressed good quality textbooks for students. Mr.M.H.Abbasi, the Joint Education Advisor also acknowledged that the curriculum prepared is of international standards and of high quality whereas the textbooks do not reflect it properly. He said that it was imperative to have quality textbooks. In his address he commented on the accessible textbooks that ‘they obstructed creativity because they are generally dreary, insipid.’ As a result the standards of the textbooks were declining. He further highlighted that: “The main source of the delivery of the curriculum is the textbook...our curriculum tends to be of high quality and addresses the issues of 21st century, the textbook was unable to reflect the purpose ...wherever quality of education was concerned the question of textbooks could not be ignored” (p.3).

The first presentation was given by Mr. Tony Read. He indicated that textbooks were the only source available with the students, and that only high quality textbooks could impart knowledge well to the students. The textbook is the main resource which provides information to the child, is available all the time and can be utilized as and when he likes. Teaching is mainly textbook-based and examination questions rely heavily on textbooks. He said: “Several studies in different parts of the world established the inter-relationship of quality textbooks and students’ achievement and there was considerable evidence that availability of textbooks directly correlated with improvement of students’ achievement” (p.5).

While describing the importance of the textbooks for class work and homework, he produced several examples. He also underscored that ‘the textbooks in most-developing countries are inexpensive and cost-effective inputs to improve the students’ achievement and additionally they help pupils to learn independently’ (p.5).

Dr.Manglori discussed the crisis areas. He pointed out that:

- a) Non-availability of trained personnel in most technologies required for textbook development.
- b) Non-availability of reference material.
- c) Scarcity of reference material.
- d) Time constraints.
- e) Inadequate expertise (p.6).

There were four groups altogether to suggest recommendations for textbook development. Group one made recommendations about the physical standards of textbooks, whereas group two (02) finalized recommendations about the content selection of the textbooks, as the

achievement of the pupils of any standard is directly related to the quality and level of content of the textbooks. Group three after considerable deliberations submitted some recommendations to improve the quality of locally manufactured textbooks, and group four gave some multiple recommendations.

Assistant/Deputy Education Advisor in the Curriculum Wing, who was also the coordinator of the conference mentioned above commented that it was not a continuous practice. 'In 1996 it (the publishing of textbooks) was de-regularized, and then it was started again. The decision of giving this responsibility to the private sector was also not implemented.

English Curriculum 2002

The preamble states that the textbooks should include the integration of four language skills so that the students/learners are proficient in language use. It is strongly recommended that listening, speaking, reading and writing be included in the language textbooks as this approach can help students learn the language from different angles such as: pronunciation, vocabulary, and correct structures, etc. It also recommends that students at the secondary level acquire proficiency in language and that the learning process be made functional. For the development of language textbooks it states: "While developing the textbooks for class IX-X, it should be kept in mind that the students should be able to use language for functional purposes. Keeping in view this aspect, the functional, use of the language should be emphasized (1976:22).

It is clear that language textbooks should be organized linguistically so that they help students understand the language. It also offers some guidelines for the preparation and selection of language textbooks, some of them are as under:

- Poetry should be modern, helpful in teaching the modern syntax of the language.
- Exercises should be given at the end of every lesson to check the comprehension of the text by the students.
- Exercises should encourage creative writing.
- Dialogue and letter writing should be included in the grammar work.
- Proper use of prepositions, pronouns, etc. be included.
- Idiomatic translations from English into Urdu and vice-versa should be stressed upon (p.22).

If these guidelines are properly incorporated into language textbooks while keeping in mind the functional aspect of language, they can enhance the language abilities of learners if properly taught by the language teachers in the class as mentioned in the aims and objectives of the curriculum.

It can be concluded that all the curriculum proposals have recommended that the selection and preparation of the language textbooks be in line with the objectives and recommendations of the Education Policies. On the other hand, it is clear that our textbooks are not commensurate with the guidelines presented. There have been some derelictions and weaknesses in the past in terms of mismatch between the instructions of the curriculum wing and selected/produced textbooks which are still continuing. If drastic changes are not made in practice, the system will remain the same as before.

INTER-PROVINCIAL MINISTERS MEETINGS

A conference of the inter-provincial Ministers is held every year. The ninth conference of the inter-provincial ministers was held in December, 2005 at Karachi, in which: “A committee was constituted to design and recommend a textbook policy for improvement in textbooks and learning materials the composition of the committee are lying with the Ministry of Education” (Notification No. F.8-16/2005 SSG).

The tenth meeting ended without any decisions on textbook policy, but it was, then discussed in the 11th meeting that was held on 22nd January, 2007 in Islamabad. In that meeting once again a very comprehensive policy was recommended but unfortunately it could not be implemented. An important point that it addressed was to have competitive textbooks. It was recommended that: “A regulated system of competitive publishing of textbooks and learning material shall be introduced as part of an enhanced public-private partnership in the development of education in Pakistan...Textbook Boards shall be transformed into competent facilitating, regulating, and monitoring authorities”.

In the meeting some important points were recommended for the development of Textbook Boards under the heading Reforms and Capacity Development of Textbook Boards ‘for their modified facilitating, regulating, controlling and monitoring functions.’ Some of them are as under:

- 1) Review panels to be set up.

- 2) Familiarization and exposure for Textbook Board professional personnel in the functioning of textbook system in public and private sector.
- 3) Setting up of textbook and learning materials resource centers.
- 4) Provision of training facilities for textbook development.

The President of the country and the Chief Minister of the Punjab (2008) also laid emphasis on the fact that the syllabus, curriculum and textbooks were not unified and the implementation was inadequate and improper. They were committed to changing it accordingly. The then President acknowledged that ‘the curriculum in the past has not been in accordance with the requirements of modern times.’ Keeping in view these requirements, the textbooks have been developed, revised and updated. However, the then Chief Minister of the Punjab Pervez Elahi also spoke about the curriculum and textbooks in his message and said that the textbooks and curriculum play the fundamental role of achieving excellence in education. Indubitably, curriculum and textbooks require special concentration and attention to be paid, and the government should give top priority to the education sector. For the development of textbooks he assured that ‘a team of professional experts was assembled for writing textbooks, which will prove helpful in achieving the quality of education.’

CONCLUSION

English has become the most important language in the public and private sector education systems in Pakistan. It is one of the major languages of medium of instruction. In the present educational scenario, it is being taught from the primary level to intermediate level as a compulsory subject. Being a foreign language for the majority population and second language for the elite class, English language learning and teaching is still not a comfortable zone for the students and teachers respectively. The critical analysis of the ELT syllabus designed by FBISE Islamabad for secondary level reveals that the teaching of language is crucial at this level. In this regard, the responsibility goes to schools and administrative institutions to coordinate with the curriculum wing for designing the syllabus that helps students mentally, socially and academically. An adequate syllabus and good textbooks can play a vital role in achieving the targets and minimizing past impediments. If the content selection is not according to level of the students, it may be difficult for them to realign what they know and prepare themselves for new learning afterwards. The analysis of the education policy and English curriculum based meeting reveals that our textbooks are not

commensurate with the guidelines of the education policies and recommendations of the curriculum disseminated time to time. After thorough analysis of ELT syllabus in multiple dimensions, it is finally concluded that ELT programmes require consistent/periodical review of ELT syllabus based on the feedback of the teachers for effective and proficient teaching and learning of English language in Pakistan especially at secondary level. There is also a need to sort out a system of check and balance which can ensure the implementation of the recommendations made in education policy or by the curriculum wing at the institution level through on-site visits as well as interaction with the students, teachers and administration by the team of experts for contextual adjustment if needed.

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