

A Reflection of the Revised Syllabus Translated in Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

To meet the demands of the challenging world and the era of globalisation, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Malaysia has revised the English language syllabus for primary and secondary schools in 2002. To fulfil the aims of the syllabus, the Textbook Division was given the responsibility to come out with new textbooks in 2003. The purpose of this paper is to review the previous syllabus and the revised syllabus. It also aims to examine how the syllabuses are translated in the Form Four textbooks. Three instruments were employed in this study. They were the curriculum review checklist, the evaluation checklist and two KBSM Form Four textbooks. Results of the curriculum review show that the revised syllabus has a higher mean value compared to the previous syllabus. The findings provide evidence that the revised syllabus has achieved the overall goal and objectives in the KBSM. Overall, the new textbook reflected the three components (language use, language content and educational emphases) as highlighted in the revised syllabus. The exercises for the language content catered to the three different levels of students as demanded by the syllabus. As for the aesthetic component, all literary elements for the suggested text for Form Four were well discussed and the tasks given were appropriate. Thinking skills, one of the elements of Educational Emphases has quite an even distribution of activities. In conclusion, the implications of this paper indicate that the revised syllabus for Form Four was well translated into the new textbook.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, The English Language Programme is planned to be taught in accordance with the National Education Philosophy which is based on the concept of lifelong education geared towards the development of a morally upright person who is intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically integrated. The English language in the primary school and the secondary school is taught using the Integrated Primary School Curriculum or the Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) and Integrated Secondary School Curriculum or better known as Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (KBSM). The integrated curriculum was introduced in 1988.

Under the integrated curriculum, the English language syllabus is topic and language skills based. This means the topics provide the context, in which different language skills are developed. Besides the integration of the language components (grammar, vocabulary and sound system), the curriculum also integrate positive moral values and literary elements. Teachers are also encouraged to provide opportunities for thinking operations to take place (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1991).

To meet the demands of the challenging world and the era of globalisation, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has revised the English language syllabus for primary and secondary schools in 2002. Why do we need a new syllabus for English? There are three rationales for revising the English language syllabus. Firstly, it was found that Form Five school leavers are not prepared to undertake employment as they are found to be poor in their oral and written communication. Based on feedback from the working sectors, it was found that during job interviews, candidates are only able to respond to direct questions but are unable to discuss issues or make inferences. Apart from lacking of logical and strategic thinking ability, those who are already employed are also weak in writing letters and reports.

The second rationale is to help students of differing levels of ability by allowing for mastery of structures and vocabulary. This is done by reducing the content specifically the topics and wordlist found in the curriculum specification.

Thirdly, the new syllabus is developed to depict the natural use of language in the real world so that students can use the language to make friends and keep friendships; to get information and to give information and to enjoy a good book (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2002).

To fulfill the aims of the syllabus, the Textbook Division under the Ministry of Education was given the responsibility to come out with new textbooks for English language learners in 2003. Textbooks play a crucial role in curriculum innovation as they are the first conceptualization of the syllabus that the teacher encounters. The period of curriculum change is often marked by uncertainty and insecurity for teachers because it disturbs the routines that they have built over the years (Hutchinson and Torres ,1994). Textbooks can give teachers a sense of security and confidence as they steer their way through the innovation. Hence, textbooks can be an important agent of change.

Pillay (1995), carried out a study on the implementation of English Language curriculum in Malaysian secondary schools. Amongst the findings, the results of the study showed that with the exception of teachers from urban schools, most Malaysian teachers depend to a large extent on textbooks, as the nature of their jobs does not allow them the luxury of developing their own materials.

In the Malaysian education system, the materials written by textbooks writers are vetted a number of times by committees selected by the Textbook Division. During the vetting, selected textbooks publishers are called by the committee to upgrade their writing in order to meet the needs of the syllabus. However, due to time constraint, some of the materials may have not followed exactly the elements outlined in the syllabus. Furthermore, previous studies have provided evidences that there are still some weaknesses (Pillay and North, 1997; M. Sc TESL students, 2000).

The purpose of this paper is to review the previous syllabus and the revised syllabus. It also aims to examine how the syllabuses are translated in the Form Four textbooks. The objectives are to find out

- i) if the previous and revised syllabuses meet the goals and objectives as stated in the curriculum
- ii) if the aims and objectives, content, vocabulary, structure and activities in the new textbook meets the requirements of the revised syllabus
- iii) how much of the aesthetic language use and the thinking skills are translated in the new textbook

REVISED SYLLABUS

The revised syllabus aims to extend the students' English language proficiency in order to meet their needs for English in every life; for knowledge acquisition, and for future workplace requirements (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2002). The English Language syllabus is detailed out in the curriculum specifications. The curriculum specification contains three sections. They are Learning Outcomes and Specifications; Language Content and Educational Emphases.

The learning outcome is the main focus which is related to skills to be achieved by learners by the end of the year. The curriculum is based on three areas of language use. They are the Interpersonal, the Informational and the Aesthetic. Language for interpersonal purposes enables learners to establish and make friends and keep friendships and to collaborate with people in undertaking certain things. Language for informational purposes enables learners to use the English language to obtain, process and give information for a variety of purposes. Language for aesthetic purposes enables learners to enjoy literary texts at a level suited to their language proficiency and develops in them the ability to express themselves creatively. Hence, the literature component has been made compulsory.

The three language areas are integrated with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The skills are further divided into three differing levels of ability – Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. The learning content is based on themes and topics. The suggested themes for Form Four are people, environment, social issues, health, science and technology and values. The topics serve as the subject matter through which the three areas of language use are taught.

Grammar items, word list and sound system are found in the language content section and they are to be taught within the context of the three areas of language use. Teachers are advised to limit the number of structures used and to ensure that learners master these structures well (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2002).

The educational emphases outline current developments in education that will help learners prepare for the world of work as well as social life. It consists of seven aspects that is, Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills,

multiple intelligences, thinking skills, values and citizenship, knowledge acquisition, preparation for the real world and learning how to learn. The incorporation of moral education, citizenship education, patriotism and thinking skills will contribute towards the building of a modern and progressive Malaysian society (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2002).

Table 1: Differences between the Previous Syllabus and the Revised Syllabus

Previous syllabus (1987)	Revised syllabus (2003)
<p>Language skills: Listening, speaking, reading and writing.</p> <p>Levels are not explicit.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes:- 3 areas of language use: interpersonal, informational, aesthetic.</p> <p>Language skills: Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3</p>
No compulsory literature component	Compulsory Literature component
Thinking skills; moral values	<p>Educational Emphases ICT skills, multiple intelligences, thinking skills, values and citizenship, knowledge acquisition, preparation for the real world and learning how to learn.</p>

The differences between the elements in the previous syllabus and the revised syllabus are illustrated in Table 1. The major differences are on the three language use, three levels of skills, Educational emphases and literature component.

TEXTBOOK EVALUATION

Since teachers rely heavily on textbooks in their teaching, there is a need for textbooks to be evaluated. One of the reasons for textbook evaluation is the intention to adopt a new textbook. Another reason is to identify particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks already in use, so that optimum use can be made of the strong points, whilst their weaker areas can be adapted or substituted from other books (Cunningsworth, 1984). Textbook analysis and evaluation can help teachers to gain good and useful insights into the nature of the material.

One of the common ways to evaluate a textbook is to use checklist based on supposedly generalizable criteria (Tucker, 1975; Cunningsworth, 1984; Skierso, 1991; Dougill, 1991; Ur, 1996). Ansari and Babaii (2002), carried out a study to explore what makes a good textbook by locating some theory-neutral, universal and broad characteristics of ESL textbooks. Their findings illustrate a set of universal features which include approach, content presentation, physical make-up and administrative concerns. Besides checklists, Jayakaran (2003) suggested using teacher reflective journal and the concordance software as additional instruments for textbook evaluation.

A number of studies have been carried out on textbook evaluation (Pillay and North, 1997; Kitao et al 1982; 1985). Kitao et al. (1985), did an analysis of college English reading textbooks in Japan. The textbooks were reviewed and problems were found with the language and content of many of the textbooks (Kitao et al. 1995). The findings also illustrates that many textbooks use narratives and essays as the reading text.

Pillay and North (1997), examined the textbooks for Form Four in Malaysian schools to look into how grammar and skills are integrated into each topic. The study was based on the KBSM syllabus. The findings showed that grammar is often treated in isolation and not developed from any of the texts used, a pattern which is repeated throughout the four textbooks that were analyzed. A group of Master of Science TESL students (2000), from Universiti Putra Malaysia did a textbook analysis on Form Four and Form Five reading comprehension passages by ten publishers. It was found that 75% of the text materials are of foreign-based.

As textbooks are used widely by teachers, it is important to produce a good textbook. Although the vetting has already been done by the Textbook Division before the textbooks are printed, it is still necessary to carry out an analysis

to examine if the textbooks meet the demand of the syllabus. Furthermore, textbook analysis and evaluation is also useful for teacher development.

THE STUDY

Method of Data Collection

Three instruments were employed in this study. They were the curriculum review checklist, the evaluation checklist and two textbooks. The curriculum review checklist was adapted from key questions used for reviewing curriculum by Diamond (1998). The curriculum review checklist used the Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The evaluation checklist used for the textbook analysis is based on Skierso's (1991) list of guidelines. The criteria for evaluation are aims and goals, subject matter, vocabulary and structures and exercises and activities. The checklist use the rating scale ranging from 1 (Totally Lacking) to 5 (Excellent).

The textbooks selected for the analysis were two KBSM Form Four texts. The current textbook is "English Form 4" written by Matishwar Kaur, Kan Yuet Yee, Manjin Gill and Sim Mui Kheng, published in 2003. The textbook "English Form 4" written by Noor Azlina Yunus and Angeline Spykerman, published in 1990 is the text from the previous syllabus.

Method of data analysis

The data were analysed quantitatively. Using the descriptive statistics, the responses to the curriculum review checklist and textbook evaluation checklist were analysed by using mean value and standard deviation. In terms of reliability of the analysis, the writer had measured the inter-rater estimation. The inter-rater reliability is 83.33%. The discrepancies were compared and discussed before coming to a shared agreement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results will be discussed under two sections: curriculum review and textbook analysis. Curriculum review presents findings of analysis of both the previous and revised syllabus while textbook analysis will discuss how much of the revised syllabus is translated in the new textbook.

The results showed that the revised syllabus has a higher mean value (3.88) compared to the previous syllabus (3.55). The curriculum was analysed under nine items. Items that will be discussed are items with differences in scores. Item 3 had a higher score for the revised syllabus because in the revised syllabus, the four aspects that is; knowledge, skills, attitudes and value were given more emphasis. Item 6 also showed that the previous syllabus has a higher score. This happens because in the revised syllabus the exercises are catered to the three different levels of students.

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Textbook

	NEW		OLD	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
AIMS	3.667	.57735	3.6667	.57735
SUBJECT	4.000	.70711	3.4000	.54772
VOCAB	3.667	.49237	3.5833	.66856
EXERCISE	4.000	.54722	3.4000	.54772

Table 2 presents the summary of the findings for textbook analysis. For the new textbook, the content and activities have the same values (4.00). The components on aims and objectives (3.66) and vocabulary and structure have the same values of 3.66. For the old textbook, the two highest mean values were the aims and objectives (3.66) and vocabulary and structure (3.58). This is followed by content and activities which have the same values of 3.40.

On the whole, the mean values for the new textbook is higher compared to the old textbook. Overall, the results showed that the new textbook has followed the guidelines as stipulated in the syllabus.

Analysis of the new textbook will be further discussed under language use, language content and educational emphases. The three language use, the Interpersonal, the Informational and the Aesthetic were found to be evenly spread over the 16 chapters. The Aesthetic aspect or the literature component which had been made compulsory was given a lot of emphasis in the textbook. The task for the literature component is listed under the heading Explore Literature found at the end of each chapter. The tasks given throughout the textbook seemed to show that the different literary elements for both poem and short story were discussed in detail. The literature texts used also complied to the list as suggested in the syllabus.

In terms of language content, all the grammatical structures, vocabulary and sound system listed in the Form Four syllabus were found to be in the textbook. The exercises within each chapter were also found to pitch at the three levels to cater to students of differing abilities.

The results of the analysis also showed that the seven educational emphases were included in the textbook. Thinking skills had the most number of entries (10), followed by ICT (7). Multiple Intelligence and Learning How To Learn have six entries each. Knowledge Acquisition and Preparation for the Real World had four and three entries respectively. Only one entry was found for Values and Citizenship.

The textbook seems to employ more thinking skills than the other Educational Emphases because it was already included in the previous syllabus. Further analysis of the thinking skills showed that 12 thinking skills were employed. The skills 'identifying causes, evaluating, making associations, making interpretations, comparing and contrasting, identifying true and false statements and sequencing' were employed more than once. In terms of activities, most of the thinking skills were well translated into the textbook. The task clearly showed the thinking skills it incorporated. For example for the skill "comparing and contrasting", students are asked to compare the setting and background of 'The Necklace' and 'Si Tenggang's homecoming' and complete the statements of comparison given.

CONCLUSION

The results of the curriculum review show that the revised syllabus has a higher mean value compared to the previous syllabus. The findings provide evidence that the revised syllabus has achieved the overall goal and objectives in the KBSM.

Overall, the new textbook reflected the three components (language use, language content and educational emphases) as highlighted in the revised syllabus. All components followed the guidelines as outlined in the syllabus. The exercises for the language content catered to the three different levels of students as demanded by the syllabus. As for the Aesthetic component, all literary elements for the suggested text for Form Four were well discussed and the tasks given were appropriate.

Thinking skills, one of the elements of Educational Emphases has quite an even distribution of activities. The activities clearly reflect the thinking skills. However, some skills such as problem solving, making decision, making inferences and giving causal explanation need to be given more emphasis. This is to ensure that we are able to produce thinking students as specified in the curriculum and national educational philosophy and also to meet the demands of the challenging world in the era of globalization.

In conclusion, the implications of this paper indicate that the revised syllabus for Form Four was well translated into the new textbook, in particular the textbook "English Form 4" written by Matishwar Kaur, Kan Yuet Yee, Manjin Gill and Sim Mui Kheng, published in 2003.

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APPENDIX A
Curriculum Review Checklist

- 5 - Strong Agree (SA)
 4 - Agree (A)
 3 - Undecided (U)
 2 - Disagree (A)
 1 - Strongly Disagree (SD)

	Revised					Previous				
	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
A. Goals And Objectives										
1. The curriculum is planned in accordance with the NEP.										
2. The suggested activities are geared to achieve the learning outcomes.										
3. The curriculum have a formal set of intended learning outcomes that articulate the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values it proposes to introduce.										
4. These intended outcomes are written in specific language that is understandable in the same way to students, teachers and education officers.										
5. The intended outcomes are stated in terms of effective goals and objectives that permit assessment of students' success in achieving them.										
6. The intended outcomes are developed according to the students' ability.										
7. The goals and objectives which include higher-order cognitive and other complex behaviours are appropriate.										
8. The curriculum gives every student the opportunity to achieve each of the specific intended outcomes.										
9. The intended outcomes are sequenced from easy to difficult.										

APPENDIX B
Textbook evaluation checklist

- 5 - Excellent
 4 - Good
 3 - Adequate
 2 - Weak
 1 - Totally lacking

	Revised Rating	Previous Rating
A. Aims and objectives		
1. To what extent do the aims and objectives of the text correspond to those delineated in the to syllabus requirements?		
2. To what extent does the text seem to be in tune with NEP		
3. To what extent are the amount and type of material to be covered realistic and adaptable toward time allotted for the course		

B. Subject matter		
1. To what extent does the subject matter cover a variety of topics suitable to the interest of the students		
2. To what extent is the ordering of materials by topics or themes arranged in a logical manner?		
3. To what extent does the textbook an assortment of suitable text types?		
4. To what extent is the content graded according to the requirements of the syllabus?		
5. To what extent is the material accurate, authentic, and current?		
6. To what extent does the content cover the three Language use?		
C. Vocabulary and structure		
1. To what extent is the number of grammatical points appropriate and how appropriate is the sequence?		
2. To what extent are the linguistic data accurate?		
3. To what extent are the presentations clear and complete enough for the students to have available concise review outside the classroom?		
4. To what extent are the linguistic items introduced in meaningful contexts?		
5. To what extent does the vocabulary load seem to be reasonable for students of that level?		
6. To what extent is vocabulary introduced in appropriate contexts?		

	Revised Rating	Previous Rating
7. To what extent does the text's level of readability match that of the class?		
8. To what extent does the text include the basic patterns and vocabulary necessary for using the language up to the level of mastery required by the syllabus?		
9. To what extent does the presentation of vocabulary and structures move gradually from the simple to the more complex?		
10. To what extent is there an even distribution of grammatical and vocabulary material among the chapters?		
11. To what extent does the presentation, practice and recycling of new linguistic items seem to be appropriate for the level of language mastery of the students?		
12. To what extent are new vocabulary and structures recycled in subsequent lessons for reinforcement?		
D. Exercises and activities		
1. To what extent do the activities meet the behavioural objectives delineated in the syllabus?		
2. To what extent do the activities meet the behavioural objectives of the students?		
3. To what extent does the text develop a progression from manipulative to communicative exercises?		
4. To what extent do the exercises promote meaningful communication by referring to realistic activities and situations?		
5. To what extent do the exercises and activities promote critical thinking?		
6. To what extent are the instructions to the exercises and activities clear and appropriate?		
7. To what extent do the exercises cater to students' of differing abilities (pitched at the 3 levels)?		