Investigating English as a Foreign Language in Planning, Designing and Developing Curriculum at Kurdistan Universities

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Abstract

This is an extracted study from a PhD thesis which aims at investigating curriculum planning, designing, and developing at Kurdistan universities. This paper sheds light on the most common and important theoretical background and literature review in the field as well as applying one of the most well-known approaches in curriculum design by Nation and Macalister (2010). The data has been collected from 247 undergraduate students who filled in the questionnaire in the University of Sulaimani, Salahhadin and Duhok. The

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study's findings indicated some strengths and weaknesses of the program, and to some extent, it fulfills the needs of the students. Also, teachers as real practitioners inside classes, have complained about the current curricula regarding the academic level of students and devoted time for courses. In this regard, the learning environment is not productive as it should be based on the outcomes of the study, and there is no planning and designing procedure for the current program. Only the development process exists randomly. The changes in the program from its establishment have yet to be documented formally. Moreover, some workshops were held but were fruitless due to the lack of implementing the changes in the real classes.

<u>Keywords:</u> curriculum design, developing curricula, planning curriculum

دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في تخطيط وتصميم وتطوير المناهج في جامعات كوردستان

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المستخلص:

هذه دراسة مستخرجة من أطروحة دكتوراه تهدف إلى التحقيق في تخطيط المناهج وتصميمها وتطويرها في جامعات كردستان. تلقي هذه الورقة الضوء على الخلفية النظرية الأكثر شيوعًا والأكثر أهمية ومراجعة الأدبيات في هذا المجال بالإضافة إلى تطبيق أحد الأساليب الأكثر شهرة في تصميم المناهج الدراسية بواسطة Nation and Macalister (2010). تم جمع البيانات من 247 طالبًا جامعيًا ملأوا الاستبيان في جامعة السليمانية وصلاح الدين ودهوك. أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى بعض نقاط القوة والضعف في البرنامج ، وإلى حد ما يلبي احتياجات الطلاب. أيضًا ، اشتكى المعلمون كممارسين حقيقيين داخل الفصول الدراسية من المناهج الحالية فيما يتعلق بالمستوى الأكاديمي للطلاب وتخصيص وقت للدورات. في هذا الصدد ، فإن بيئة التعلم ليست منتجة حيث يجب أن تستند إلى نتائج الدراسة ، ولا يوجد إجراء تخطيط وتصميم للبرنامج الحالي. فقط عملية التطوير موجودة بشكل عشوائي. التغييرات في البرنامج منذ إنشائه لم يتم توثيقها رسميًا بعد. كما أقيمت بعض ورش العمل لكنها كانت غير مثمرة بسبب عدم تنفيذ التغييرات في الفصول الحقيقية.

الكلمات الدالة: تصميم المناهج ، تطوير المناهج ، تخطيط المناهج.

1. Introduction

The efficiency of teaching the English language at the university level has a substantial impact on the new generation, and it should be done systematically. For this purpose, it is crucial for all English language departments in the colleges of Basic Education, as they are the samples of this study, to have a clear mission statement. Their courses should reflect the mission and vision that they work for and claim for. In this regard, this chapter provides a short and essential insight into the overall work of this thesis, starting from the problem statement and then the aim of the study. This follows the research questions and thesis hypothesis, with a discussion of the significance of the study. Last but not least, the research's scope and limitations have been shedding light.

For this purpose, the aim of this paper is to discover the program's strong points and weaknesses. Also, it attempts to know if the current courses fulfill students' needs. In addition, it aims to consider teachers' perspectives if they are satisfied with the program. In order to achieve this aim, the researcher tries to find out these questions:

1-What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing curricula in English language departments at colleges of Basic Education?

2-To what extent do the current curricula courses fulfill the student's needs?

The answers of the mentioned questions provides a clear vision to stakeholders of the curriculum development section about the situation of English language departments in their university. It provides essential insight to heads of the departments and their scientific committee to work on the weakness and improve their strong points.

2. Curriculum in ELT Field

Curriculum is a practical guide to policy and decision-makers parallel to university authorities with teachers that should be artistically creative, as it has been explained by theory. In other words, the curriculum consists of the teacher and learner, the experiences these two parts are going through, the methodologies used and practiced in the learning and teaching process, and the outcome of their study. To provide the most valuable and desirable materials to students with available resources, Lovat and Smith (2003) mentioned that at the national level, the curriculum is just intention, but its implementation goes to the actual classes dealing with teachers and learners.

Moreover, developing curriculum tasks in English Language teaching are interrelated and can only be accomplished with each other. In this regard, course syllabi will determine what should be taught, when, how, and whether it needs any adaptation during the courses or not. The ongoing evaluation and implementation of systems are related to course piloting which involves the needs of students, the ability of teachers, and the institutional objectives and goals. In addition, syllabus design is considered a way to translate the objectives and goals of the content of courses, and the content of the syllabus goes toward the development and selection of materials. Also, formative and summative evaluation, the two effective assessment forms, are crucial to the ongoing curriculum development process. It refers to knowing how successful the course has been, the range of complexity, and how learners respond to it. Furthermore, the outcomes and the goals of education will not be attained if there are no clear instructions for teachers and a lack of information about beliefs and values in the implication of curriculum. So, they should be promoted, acknowledged, and identified. While curriculum development refers to the practical side to make the quality

of teaching languages better and improve it through organized planning, development, and reviewing all aspects of language programs in practice (Richard, 2001). According to Snyder and Stoller, 2003), curriculum development takes some tasks to make the process established and suitable that is good for students; the charges are; needs analysis, situation analysis, determining the goals, objectives, and outcomes, course planning, and syllabus design with development and selection of materials and the last thing is piloting courses with evaluating it.

3. Elements of Curriculum

According to Richards (1958), curriculum refers to the design or plan of a given course and how the content of that course becomes a significant part of the process of learning and teaching to achieve the desired goals. Wiggins and McTighe (2006) mentioned that range in a curriculum includes the local destinations and external standards and designs it as a plan for implementing effective learning and teaching. So, it is more than skills, key facts, and a list of topics. It works as a plot and acts to serve and achieve the intended outcomes of learners' performances in terms of suitable assessments. Learning activities will be submitted to attain desired goals.

In the teaching process, the linguistic content of a given course refers to as input. In other words, we must decide on the knowledge of linguistic content before teaching. When the selection of the content is made, the organization process starts. That should be done in some learnable and teachable units and also be organized in a logical order. The result of this process is called a syllabus. The language syllabus has various conceptions in the field. Diverse approaches reflect the nature of language, a different understanding of the process, and points of view on language proficiency like, text types, grammar, and vocabulary. When selecting specific units in a syllabus, the criteria that should be considered are usefulness, authenticity, simplicity, frequency, and learnability. So, the process includes how methodology constitutes teaching languages and how the process of education by itself takes place. (Richards, 1958)

 Furthermore, methodology refers to the techniques, procedures, and kinds of activities that should be done inside classes that are performed by teachers when they start teaching and includes the principles that cover the exercises and activities in their textbooks and resources that they have in their process of teaching and learning. These principles and procedures are related to theories and beliefs concerning second language learning, the nature of language, the role of learners and teachers, ideas about language, instructional materials, and how learning language changes over time. According to Stenhouse (1975), the last aspect is justifying the formulation of the objectives. Sharpes (1987) mentioned that CDD (Curriculum Design and Development) consists of an action plan. In other words, his point of view was contradicted by Tyler and Taba. He emphasizes the teacher's role because what the teacher does highly affects learners and their actions. He believed that in CDD teacher is the critical point because the teacher is the one who is responsible for understanding and knowing the curriculum and finding the best way to communicate with learners. Furthermore, Grundy (1987) argued that the curriculum should be shaped in a way that helps learners to construct functioning knowledge and negotiate to mean. He also said the prescribed curriculum should be interactive, emancipatory, and dynamic. Generally, there are four significant components of curriculum: Purpose, which includes goals and objectives; subject matter or content; learning experience or methods; and evaluation. These four elements are in continuous interaction.

4. Method
This descriptive study consists of a questionnaire for 247 students in Sulaimani, Salahhadin, and Duhok universities in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. They are the second, third, and fourth-year students. The rationale behind not taking first year students among them is they are not aware enough about the courses that they study and are not knowledgeable about the overall program in the ELT departments. To analyze the close-ended items in the students' questionnaire, SPSS 26th version is used.

5. Result Analysis
For analyzing the results of the study in the closed-ended items, the SPSS 26th version was used. It consists of five Likert-Scale, starting from strongly agree, agree, neutral, strongly disagree, and agree. Furthermore, to make the results more comprehensive, the options of strongly agree with agree were combined, and strongly disagree with disagree collected to complete the results. The items of the questionnaire that have the same idea concerning the nation and Macalister's' (2010) model was combined in one table to help academicians understand more and clearly. So, here are five tables for each of the students', Teachers', and Alumni's questionnaires. The procedure has been applied to all of them.

Table 1
Aim of the students in the English Language Departments\Colleges of Basic Education

No.	Item	A and SA	N	D and SD	Mean	SD
1	This basic education language teacher program will prepare English Language teachers.	70 %	22.7 %	7.3 %	3.80	.896
2	The learners of this program should be competent to accomplish it.	59.9 %	32 %	8.1 %	3.66	.849
3	The learners are taking this program for employment opportunities	61.2 %	29.1 %	9.7 %	3.72	.928
4	Learners will be able to control their English Language skills at the end	57.9 %	23.9 %	18.2 %	3.60	1.099
5	The learners want to improve their English Language.	72.9 %	17.4 %	9.7 %	4.00	1.004
6	The language will be used for communication only.	14.2%	22.7%	63.2%	2.44	1.022
7	The learners' ultimate goal is to learn the language and become teachers.	51%	26.7%	22.3%	3.39	1.113

A and SA= Agree and Strongly Agree, N= Neutral, D and SD= Disagree and Strongly Disagree, SD= Standard Deviation

To start with, the majority of students in all universities of Sulaimani Salahhadin and Duhok, 70%, believed that the goal of their department was to prepare them to become a

teacher. In comparison, the minority did not agree with that notion, and only 22% showed their biased idea regarding this goal. The mean of item no one also indicates that, on average, they agree and know they will prepare them to be teachers. Regarding item no two, which also deals with the aim of the program and its expectation for students to in their knowledge and competency, 59.9% of respondents showed their agreement about it and 323% of them did not declare their ideas, and only 8.1% who are the minority among them showed their disagreement about this aim. Concerning the third item, which deals with another goal program preparing students to get work opportunities in the future, the majority of them showed their agreement 61.2%, the minority of them showed their disagreement 9.7%, and only 29.1 % among them all did not declare their perspectives. In the same line with other previous items, its mean proves that most respondents agree with the notion of agreement.

The ability of the learners to control the skills of the English language at the end of their academic BA journey, which relates to item no 4, the standard answer among respondents is agreed on which is 57.9%, and the minority of them showed disagreement 18.2%, and about quarter among respondents did not share their ideas by 23.0%. Item no five, which relates to the program's goals concerning learners' desirability to improve their English, indicates that 72.9% of respondents agreed about this idea, the minority of them, 9.7% showed their disagreement, and 17.4 % of them did not mention anything. The 6th item concerns the use of the English language for communication purposes only; the majority of them, 63.2 %, showed their disagreement, and the minority showed their agreement, 14.2%, and 22.7% did not point out this statement. The last item related to the program's goals showed that half of the participants, 51% agreed that the ultimate goal is to learn the English language and become teachers simultaneously. A quarter of the answers did not reveal their perspectives, while the minority, 22.3%, showed their disagreement. Its mean and SD show some variation and differences among answering the items by participants.

Table 2

The methodology applied in classes

No.	Item	A and SA	N	D and SD	Mean	SD
8	The methodology that appeal to learners is teacher-centered.	28%	40.5%	31.6%	2.93	1.016
9	The Student-center approach is more alienating for the learners.	47.8%	32%	20.2%	3.34	.971
15	The language be used only inside classes	23.5%	19.4%	57.1%	2.50	1.179
16	Participating in lectures is a communicative activity that the learners take part in	71.3%	19.8%	8.9%	3.91	.980
19	The learners are already familiar with using language for communication	54.6%	24.3%	21%	3.40	1.023
21	The teachers get the learners involved and excited about language learning.	58.7 %	25.1 %	16.2 %	3.62	1.056

27	The instructional design (creation of instructional materials, like presentations, etc)and curricula are inadequately researched	38.4 %	44.1 %	17.5 %	3.26	.953

A and SA= Agree and Strongly Agree, N= Neutral, D and SD= Disagree and Strongly Disagree, SD= Standard Deviation

Moreover, the second set of items grouped relates to the methodology applied in the classes of English language departments at colleges of Basic Education that goes to formatting and presentation principles in the Nation and Macalister's (2010) model of curriculum design. The majority of participants did not provide their point of view on whether teacher-centered applied to current classes by 40.5%, and about a quarter of them believed that it is applied by 28%, and the rest thought that it is not used, while 31.6% of them showed their disagreement. In the 9th item, the participants believe that the student-center approach is more suitable for them as half of them showed their agreement 47.8% and 32% did not provide their perspectives, and only 20% disagreed. More than half of the participants believed that the language could be used inside classes only for item no 15, while 57.1% of them showed their disagreement and only 23.5% of them presented their agreement which indicates that not only inside classes but they can use the language outside of classes as well which leads to their participation inside classes that goes to no 16, as well.

The rate of participating in classes and considering it as a communication activity by students got the highest range by 71.3% of overall respondents, and the minimum goes to disagreement session by only 8.9%, and less than a quarter of them, 19.8%, did not provide their idea. Considering activities as a communicative task inside classes leads to finding out if the learners are familiarized with using language for that purpose which goes to item no 19. More than half of them, 54.6% are aware of using language for communicative purposes; less than a quarter of them, only 21%, were unaware of it, and about 24.3% did not say anything. Moreover, item no 21—more than half of the respondents, 58.7%. The last item related to the formatting and presentation principle is item 27, which deals with all the instructional designs used in classes. Most were biased; 38.4% agreed to use the instructional designs in classes, and less than a quarter, 17.5%, did not agree.

Table 3

Content and sequencing of courses

No.	Item	A and SA	N	D and SD	Mean	SD
10	The content areas in this program are linguistics, literature and teaching courses.	56.3%	31.6%	12.1%	3.56	.926
12	They read constantly to have knowledge about their subjects	57.1 %	27.5%	15.3%	3.53	.995
13	All learners' interest is to become teachers	25.5%	25.1%	49.4%	2.67	1.244
18	The learners are working with the content of the subjects.	42.1%	42.5%	15.4%	3.33	.880
20	The learners use the language with their schemata (the connection	45.4%	37.2 %	17.4%	3.38	.975

	between old information and new information that you learn)					
23	Each learner gets a large amount of meaningful contact in English	58.3 %	27.5 %	14.2 %	3.64	1.002
26	The knowledge context is organized from simple to complex	48.1 %	33.2 %	18.7 %	3.44	1.117

A and SA= Agree and Strongly Agree, N= Neutral, D and SD= Disagree and Strongly Disagree, SD= Standard Deviation

The third grouped items that relate to content and sequencing. The first item in this group, item no 10, asks students if the primary content area of courses is divided into linguistics, literature, and pedagogical. The majority of participants which is more than half of them 56.3%, believe that the content of courses related to those three areas, and the minority of them 16.2% did not agree about this statement, while more than a quarter of them, 29.6%, did not say anything. The following item in this principle asks students if they constantly read to be knowledgeable about the content of courses that they study; the majority of them, 57.1%, agree that they are continuous and extensive readers, while around a quarter of them, 27.5% were neutral and only 15.3% of them did not agree about they read continuously.

The majority of students by half of them 49.4%, did not agree with becoming teachers, and in a parallel range of 25.1% were not saying anything and 25.5% agreed. This leads to the fact that the admission system of the ministry of education does not consider students' interests, and due to their marks, the students study in the departments they will enroll in. The following item, no 18, deals with whether students work on the content of courses. The majority of them, 42.5%, did not show their perspective, while 42.1% of them agreed that they work with the content of courses, and the minority of them mentioned that they do not agree about that notion. Furthermore, the 20th item relates to the effectiveness of sequencing between courses and wants to find out if there is any relation between the content of courses they study. The highest majority of students, 45.4%, believe there is a connection between the content of courses that they have, 37.2% of them were neutral, and a minority of respondents, only 17.4%, did not agree about the relation between courses. This leads to the following item, which is no 23. This item announces that learners get many meaningful contacts in English. More than half of the participants 58.3% agreed about the valuable contact that they get in English and about a quarter of them 27.5% did not provide their points of view and the minority of them 14.2% were not agreed about the proper contact that they get in English in their courses.

The last item relates to the sequencing principle and wants to determine if the courses were arranged from simple to complex. The highest majority of the respondents, about 48.1%, agreed about the courses that they were arranged from simple to complex, 33% of them were unsure about this statement, and a minority of them, 18.7%, did not agree about this sequencing.

Table 4

Learning Environment of students

No.	Item	A and SA	N	D and SD	Mean	SD
11	Technological aid resources are available in applying this basic	56.3%	29.6%	16.2%	3.50	.991

	education language teacher program.					
14	The Facilitator teaching style is used in teaching process in the department	44.1%	35.6%	20.3%	3.28	.986
17	The learners use language only with their teachers and their classmates	31.1%	19.8%	49%	2.76	1.284

A and SA= Agree and Strongly Agree, N= Neutral, D and SD= Disagree and Strongly Disagree, SD= Standard Deviation

The fourth group among the items is related to the learning environment. The majority of respondents believe that there are enough technological aids to apply the current curriculum when 56.3% of respondents showed their agreement with this statement, and more than a quarter of them, 29.6%, did not reveal their beliefs regarding having enough technological aids in teaching while only 16.2% of them were saying there are not enough technological aids. This leads to the following related item, which is no 14, and asks students if teaching facilities are used; the highest range of respondents, 44.1%, mentioned that there are teaching facilities that teachers use, while 35.6% of them did not mention anything and 20.3% did not agree of having enough teaching facilities in their classes. The highest number in item no 17 among students, 49%, mentioned that they don't use language only with their teachers or classmates while 31.1% of them agreed, and 19.8% did not provide their idea.

Table 5

Monitoring and Assessment

No.	Item	A and SA	N	D and SD	Mean	SD
22	The learners need to use English inside classes	76.1 %	13.8 %	10.1 %	4.11	1.087
24	The teachers monitor the learners' understanding and providing useful feedback for them	61.5 %	24.3 %	14.1 %	3.64	1.042
25	The learners are aware of the goals of the lectures	47.8 %	33.6 %	18.6 %	3.40	1.027
28	The renewal of the program is made in in nation-wide.	34 %	51.4 %	14.5 %	3.22	.812
29	Teachers' provide useful feedback to students	54.7 %	27.1 %	18.3 %	3.47	1.062

A and SA= Agree and Strongly Agree, N= Neutral, D and SD= Disagree and Strongly Disagree, SD= Standard Deviation

Furthermore, the fifth linked group of items relates to the monitoring and assessment principle. Using English inside classes reveals the reality that they have good English, and they improved, so there is a checking assessment of their improvement when students by 76.1% showed their agreement with using English, and only 13.8% did not provide their answers, and a minority of them did not agree about using English inside classes.

This leads to the following item, which is no 24, and asks students if teachers monitor students' progress and if they provide timely feedback. More than half of the participants, 61.5%, agreed with the monitoring and assessment procedure; about a quarter of them, 24.3%, did not provide their idea, and only 14.1% believed that teachers were not monitoring their progress. In addition, the student's awareness of each course's goals leads them to know how the assessment procedure goes. Less than half of the participants, 47.8%, which is still the highest, showed that they are aware of it and 33.6% among them did not provide any answer, and the minority of them, 14.1%, did not agree about this statement. Furthermore, item no 28 asks students if they are aware of the changes in the curricula nationwide because the courses in the ELT curricula change now and then. The majority of the participants had no idea, 51.4%, and 34% of them agreed that they had information about it, and the minority were not aware of that renewal by 14.5%. Because based on the highlights of the research and results of the assessment process, they should decide. The last item, no 29, deals with teachers' feedback. Around half of the participants, 54.7%, agree that teachers provide helpful feedback for them, while more than a quarter of them, 27.1%, did not provide any answer, and the minority, 18.3% of them, showed that the teachers do not provide helpful feedback for them.

5. Conclusions

The quantitative research design of this study includes 29 close-ended item questionnaires for students. The questionnaire results indicated that most participants were knowledgeable about the program's goals, including preparing students to become teachers, being competent enough about the subjects when they graduate, and encouraging learners to learn the language skills and subjects. In addition, all participants agreed that not all students are interested in becoming teachers, although the program's main aim is to prepare them to become teachers.

All participants agreed that the teacher-centered approach needs to be appealed in the teaching and learning process and suggested applying a student-centered approach instead. They also agreed that the content areas in the department are linguistics, literature, and pedagogical courses. Also, the language that students used was only with their teachers and classmates, and they used it only inside classes, while students mentioned it was used outside of classes, but other study results indicated that English is not the medium of instruction in the departments yet. In addition, all participants in the close-ended items agreed that schemata between courses show an excellent connection between them. To sum up, although the program has various positives and strengths, there are some weaknesses, and to some extent, it fulfills students' needs.

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