An Evaluation of English Language Teaching Syllabuses

DR. Florence Mokeira Okari
Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Eldoret

Type of the Paper: Research Paper.
Type of Review: Peer Reviewed.
Indexed in: worldwide web.
Google Scholar Citation: AIJMEG

How to Cite this Paper:


Africa International Journal of Management Education and Governance (AIJMEG)
A Refereed International Journal of OIRC JOURNALS.

© Oirc Journals.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License subject to proper citation to the publication source of the work.

Disclaimer: The scholarly papers as reviewed and published by the OIRC JOURNALS, are the views and opinions of their respective authors and are not the views or opinions of the OIRC JOURNALS. The OIRC JOURNALS disclaims of any harm or loss caused due to the published content to any party.
An Evaluation of English Language Teaching Syllabuses

DR. Florence Mokeira Okari
Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Eldoret

ARTICLE INFO
Received 13th July, 2018
Received in Revised Form 10th September, 2018
Accepted 29th October, 2018
Published online 12th October, 2018

Keywords: Evaluation, Syllabus, Communicate, ELT

Abstract
One of the current debate issues in ELT fora is the production of poor communicators of English language. Most students on graduating from University remain unable to communicate at even a basic level. This review paper starts with an introduction that highlights the importance of ELT evaluation, it proceeds to defining the terms evaluation and syllabus, various models of evaluation are discussed, and types of ELT syllabuses are critically analyzed based on the models of evaluation. Finally, the impact of evaluation on ELT syllabuses is discussed.

Introduction
It has been observed from literature read that most students on graduating from either high school or university remain unable to communicate at even a basic level. A. study carried out in Japan by Long and Russell (1999:27) observe: It seems reasonable after years of English classes focused on grammar, Japanese students would want more conversational practice, want to have more confidence and better speaking skills. This implies that a syllabus focusing on the communicative aspect of language would satisfy the needs and desires of young Japanese adult learners.

Evaluation of English Language Teaching (ELT) syllabuses is essential. It is very crucial to be understood whether the ELT syllabus objectives are met or not so that informed decisions can be made. Evaluation of ELT syllabuses is necessary so as to give feedback to stakeholders, to improve the language learning process, certification of learner competence, data to meet accreditation requirements and assessment of the cost of delivery. There are many types of ELT syllabuses; pre-determined syllabus emergent syllabus and task based syllabus. The curriculum evaluation models will be adopted in this review. It is believed, at least in this paper that a syllabus is a component of a curriculum, therefore curriculum evaluation models can also apply to syllabus evaluation.

In Kenya, Evaluation of Syllabuses is done at the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) by relevant teachers who are selected from various schools and other stakeholders under the leadership of the subject specialist and curriculum specialist.

Evaluation
Evaluation is the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are actually being realized (Tyler, 1949). Evaluation has been conceived either as the assessment of the merit and worth of educational programmes (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Glatthorn 1987; and Scriven, 1991), or as the acquisition and analysis of information on a given educational programme for the purpose of decision making, (Nero, 1986; Shiundu and Omulando, 1992; and Teacher proficiency course manual, 2007).

Evaluation is a vital concept in any education system. In fact the success or failure of any programme in education may be attributed nearly entirely to the quality and quantity of evaluation done at the beginning of and during the implementation of the programme.

Syllabus
A syllabus on the other hand is an expression of opinion on the nature of language and learning; it acts as a guide for both teacher and learner by
providing some goals to be attained (Rabbin 2002).
Widdowson (1984), defines a syllabus as a general plan of activities that can be applied in a class to facilitate the learning process. In general, a syllabus can be defined as a part of the curriculum that concerns the selection and sequencing of content to be taught in a language programme. It is a summary of the content to which learners will be exposed (Yalden, 1987). It is an outline and summary of topics to be covered in an education or training course.

Models of Curriculum Evaluation
These models were found necessary to be adopted in discussing the ELT syllabuses evaluation, since a syllabus is a part of a curriculum. Over the years, a number of curriculum evaluation models have been proposed by various authorities in curriculum and evaluation. These models essentially deal with the 'what' and the 'how' of curriculum evaluation; that is, what should be the focus of curriculum evaluation, and how course curriculum evaluation should proceed.

1. Tyler's objectives—centered model
Ralph Tyler (1949) proposed a model in which evaluation is seen as a process of determining the extent to which educational objectives have been or are being attained. According to Glatthorn (1987), Tyler's Model moves rationally and systematically through seven related steps:

i) Begin with the behavioural objectives which have been previously determined. These objectives should specify both the content of learning and the expected learner behaviour.

ii) Identify the situations which will give the learner the opportunity to express the behaviour embodied in the objective and which evoke or encourage this behaviour.

iii) Select, modify, or construct suitable evaluation instruments, and check the instruments for objectivity, reliability and validity

iv) Use the instruments to obtain summarized or appraised results.

v) Compare the results obtained from several instruments before and after given periods in order to estimate the amount of change taking place.

vi) Analyze the results in order to determine strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and to identify possible explanations for this particular pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

vii) Use the results to make the necessary modifications in the curriculum.

The Tyler model has a number of advantages: it is easy to apply; it is rational and systematic; and it is concerned with curriculum improvement. However, the model also has some drawbacks. It does not allow for unintended outcomes; does not suggest how the objectives themselves should be evaluated; takes no account of students as individuals with varying abilities; and is essentially summative. In ELT, learners are better of evaluated in every lesson depending on the skill taught.

2. Stufflebeam's Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) Model
Daniel Stufflebeam's 1971 model is a decision making based approach to curriculum evaluation. It is comprehensive model which considers evaluation to be a continuous process. The model evaluates a programme at four levels: the context, the inputs, the process, and the product.

Context evaluation.
Context refers to the education environment in which schools operate. In evaluating Context, the objective is to define the educational setting, to identify the target population and assess their needs, to identify opportunities for addressing the needs, diagnose problems underlying the needs, and to judge whether proposed objectives are sufficiently responsive to the assessed needs. This is done using methods such as situational analysis, survey research, document review, interviews, and diagnostic tests among others. Context evaluation is essential because it provides information from which decision makers determine goals and objectives, and it provides a basis for judging the outcomes of the programme (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985; Glatthorn, 1987).

Input Evaluation
Inputs in the school system may include teachers, learners, teaching/learning resources, school
infrastructure, and administrative decisions or policies. The objective of evaluating inputs is to identify and assess system capabilities, alternative strategies for attaining the stated goals, and procedural designs for implementing the strategies, budgets, and schedules. This is done by analyzing the available human and material resources, by literature searches, visits to exemplary programs, and piloting. Information from input evaluation is used to help strengthen programme support, and to provide a basis for judging programme implementation (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985). In the modern society, we need to look at the competencies of those who teach the learners, the effectiveness of the learning resources used to teach, among others.

**Process evaluation**
The concept of process in schooling covers such aspects as curriculum design and delivery procedures, opportunities to learn, time management, school organization, and quality assurance/control procedures. At this level, the implementation of the programme is addressed. Three strategies are employed here: "the first is to detect or predict defects in the procedural design or its implementation stage, the second is to provide information for decisions, and the third is to maintain a record of procedures as they occur"(Stufflebeam, 1971, p. 229). Evaluating the process is important for implementing and refining the programme procedure, hence ensuring quality control over the process. It also provides the basis for interpreting the outcomes of the programme (Stufflebeam, 1971; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985).

**Product evaluation**
In product evaluation, the evaluator compares the actual programme outcomes with the intended outcomes. In other words, it seeks to answer the question: to what extent are the objectives being attained? The objective of evaluating the product component is to collect descriptions and judgments of outcomes and to relate them to the stated objectives of the programme and to the context, input and process information and to interpret their worth and merit. Data obtained at this level leads to decisions on whether to retain, reject or revise the programme. This is achieved by accurately defining outcome criteria, collecting judgments of outcomes from stakeholders, and performing both qualitative and quantitative analyses to determine the relationship between the intended and actual outcomes. This is critical in making decisions on whether to retain, reject, or revise the programme. Product evaluation is also important as it shows the impact of a programme (Stufflebeam, 1971; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985).

The CIPP model's strengths include its focus on the context, and its concern for formative evaluation. However, it has been criticized for not taking into account the very political nature of decision-making, and it is considered difficult to implement and expensive to maintain (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Glatthorn, 1987). However, in ELT, product evaluation is seen as crucial, for as the case now, the products cannot express themselves, hence, a call for ELT syllabus evaluation.

3. Partlett and Hamilton’s illuminative model
Partlett and Hamilton (1972) proposed a model of curriculum evaluation that departed from the conventional approaches. Their model is more of a research strategy that employs informal, observational means of data collection. The model's focus is on how the curriculum actually works in practice rather than how well it relates to the stated objectives.

In this model, two concepts are particularly important: the instructional system and the learning milieu. However, it is the learning milieu that should be given special attention. This is because a curriculum is never implemented exactly as planned due to the complex pattern of the interactions between teachers, students, materials, policies, parents, and other factors that make up that particular milieu. Consequently, "the evaluator must examine this pattern closely to understand what the curriculum really is" (Marsh & Willis, 2007, p. 291). There are three overlapping stages in the illuminative model: observing, inquiring, and seeking general principles.

**Observing**
In observing, the evaluator simply observes the interactions and activities in the milieu without any attempt at controlling or manipulating them. The evaluator familiarizes him/herself with the day-to-day reality of the setting, maintains a continuous record of on-going events, and isolates significant features. The method of data collection used is mainly social anthropological observation (Marsh & Willis, 2007).
Inquiring
In inquiring, the evaluator focuses on selected significant features and occurrences for more sustained and intensive inquiry. The methods used are observation of specific features, interviews with teachers and students, and the use of questionnaires and attitude tests (Marsh & Willis, 2007).

Seeking general principles
In seeking general principles, the evaluator seeks to delineate the patterns of causes and effects, which will lead to explanations of how the curriculum is working out in practice. This requires an intensive sifting through the available data to find corroborating evidence from multiple sources. The methods used here are observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

Data emanating from this comprehensive and intensive study of the entire milieu gradually illuminates evaluator's understanding of the curriculum, and it then becomes his/her duty to similarly illuminate the understandings of other persons (Partlett & Hamilton, 1972 and Marsh & Willis, 2007). One of most significant advantages of the illuminative model is its scope. It examines curriculum phenomena from a wide perspective and using in-depth analysis. Another advantage is that it is more realistic than most traditional evaluation models because it focuses on what actually happens in practice, rather than what should happen.

However, the model is vulnerable to being entirely subjective and it is very demanding on the evaluators, especially on their interpersonal skills (Partlett & Hamilton, 1972; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004 and Marsh & Willis, 2007).

4. Stake’s Responsive Evaluation Model
Robert Stake (1975) was more concerned with evaluating curriculum processes than outcomes. Stake’s model advocates for qualitative description rather than quantitative data. According to Glatthorn (1987, pp. 275-276), an interactive and recursive evaluation process embodies the following steps:

i) The evaluator meets clients, staff and audiences to gain a sense of their perspectives on and intentions regarding evaluation.

ii) The evaluator draws upon such discussions and the analysis of any documents to determine the scope of the evaluation project.

iii) The evaluator observes the programme closely to get a sense of its operation and to note any intended deviations from announced intents.

iv) The evaluator discovers the stated and real purposes of the project and the concerns that various audiences have about it and the evaluation.

v) The evaluator identifies the issues and problems that the evaluation should be concerned with. For each issue and problem, the evaluator develops an evaluation design, specifying the kinds of data needed.

vi) The evaluator selects the means needed to acquire the data desired. Most often, the means will be human observers or judges.

vii) The evaluator implements the data collection procedures.

viii) The evaluator organizes the information into themes and prepares "portrayals" which communicate in natural ways the thematic reports. The portrayals may involve video, tapes, artifacts, case studies or other 'faithful' representations.

ix) By again being sensitive to the concerns of the stakeholders, the evaluator decides which audience requires which reports and chooses formats most appropriate for given audiences.

The major strength of the responsive model is its sensitivity to clients and its flexibility. Its major weakness, however, is that it is quite susceptible to manipulation by clients (Glatthorn, 1987)

6. An Eclectic Evaluation Model
Educational practitioners wish to have a model that best serves their purposes with minimum or no weaknesses. It has been observed that each of the models have strengths and weaknesses in their use. As the educational practitioner selects any of the models, should be remembered that there are advantages and also drawbacks to contend with. Consequently, an eclectic model is here proposed. This is a model that takes advantage of the positive attributes of various evaluation models.
while at the same time countering their disadvantages. In this way, evaluation will proceed maximizing in the strengths while at the same time monitoring their expected drawbacks. Eventually therefore, there is an evaluation model that will best serve the educational purposes.

**Syllabuses for Elt**

1. **Pre- Determine syllabus:**
The term pre- determine syllabus, is a syllabus where the content is planned first before the classroom interaction takes place. There are main four type of pre-determine syllabus, a) **The structural or grammatical syllabus:** It is also known as a grammatical or linguistic type of syllabus because in the central there is a grammatical item, the basic of English language such as articles, verbs, tenses, vocabulary etc. In the structural syllabus language content is defined in manifesting the system of English. It was developed at a time when linguists conceived of language in terms of the distribution properties of surface form. The learner is expected to master each structural step and add it to her grammar collection. As such the focus is on the outcomes or the product. For this syllabus the models Stufflebeam's Context, Input Process, Product and Tyler's model which look at what extent the objectives are achieved can be used.

One problem facing the syllabus designer pursuing a grammatical order to sequencing input is that the ties connecting the structural items maybe rather feeble. A more fundamental criticism is that the grammatical syllabus focuses on only one aspect of language, namely grammar, whereas in truth there exist many more aspects to language. Finally, recent corpus based research suggests there is a divergence between the grammar of the spoken and of the written language; raising implications for the grading of content in grammar based syllabuses.

b) **The Situational syllabus:** The Syllabus identifies such situation where the learners are likely to use the language and give them the language, they need. For example, Situational of A Shopping', Daily many people go for shopping and interact with shopkeeper on many items which are necessary to perform those functions. This type of syllabus is especially useful for those students, who use language in limited situations and for specific purposes.

The limitations in structural syllabus led to an alternative approach where the point of departure became situational needs rather than grammatical units. Here, the principal organizing characteristic is a list of situations which reflects the way language and behavior are used everyday outside the classroom. Thus, by linking structural theory to situations the learner is able to induce the meaning from a relevant context. One advantage of the situational approach is that motivation will be heightened since it is "learner- rather than subject-centered" (Wilkins.1976: 16). However, a situational syllabus will be limited for students whose needs were not encompassed by the situations in the syllabus. This dissatisfaction led Wilkins to describe notional and communicative categories which had a significant impact on syllabus design. Partlett and Hamilton's illuminative model which focuses on how the syllabus actually works in practice rather than how well it relates to the stated objectives can be used for evaluation.

c) **The Functional syllabus:** A list of functions is made and graded in terms of its usefulness to the learners and the language necessary for performing these functions is then provided to learners such examples are: agreeing and disagreeing, expressing likes and dislike, giving and refusing permissions, responding to compliment and introducing oneself. Wilkins' criticism of structural and situational approaches lies in the fact that they answer only the 'how' or 'when' and 'where' of language (Brumfit and Johnson. 1979:84). Instead, he enquires "what it is they communicate through language" (Op.Cit.:18). Thus, the starting point for a syllabus is the communicative purpose and conceptual meaning of language i.e. notions and functions, as opposed to grammatical items and situational elements which remain but are relegated to a subsidiary role, in order to establish objectives, the needs of the learners will have to be analyzed by the various types of communication in which the learner has to confront. Consequently, needs analysis has an association with notional-functional syllabuses. Although needs analysis implies a focus on the learner, critics of this approach suggest that a new list has replaced the old one. Where once structural/situational items were used a new list consisting of notions and functions has become the main focus in a syllabus. White (1988:77) claims that "language functions do not usually occur in isolation" and there are also difficulties...
of selecting and grading function and form. Clearly, the task of deciding whether a given function (i.e. persuading), is easier or more difficult than another (i.e. approving), makes the task harder to approach. In this case evaluation can be done using Tyler's objectives centered model which determines the extent to which stated objectives have been or are being attained.

d) The Lexical syllabus: In this type of syllabus the word frequency determines the contents. Sample of natural language is analyzed on a large scale by using computers and the comment words in the language along with the commonest patterns are identified. The learners are exposed to the different ways in which these words are used in their most natural environment. The above discussed syllabuses belong to product oriented syllabus category.

2. Emergent syllabus
The emergent syllabus is concerned with issues and decisions made while teaching. The emphasis is on the process of learning. The emergence syllabus is not product oriented but process oriented. It means according the student's level a teacher can change his/her syllabus. This is called flexible syllabus and a teacher can produce effective result. The use of Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) model is seen as appropriate for use in evaluating this kind of syllabuses because the model considers evaluation as a continuous process.

Task-Based Syllabus
Tasks are deemed to be tools providing learners with the data they need for learning (Ellis 2000). According to Gholami and Moghaddam (2013), "the tasks have a strong motivational power since they make the language learning process meaningful". Tasks is defined by Ellis (2003) as a work plan that requires learners to process pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes.

Long (1985) sees need analysis as the starting point in a task-based syllabus since task-based syllabus is built on "an analysis of human learning in general and/or second language in particular" (Nunan, 1989, p. 55). Furthermore, Skehan and Foster (2001) look at the following issues in designing task-based syllabus: task difficulty, impacts of task difficulty and task conditions, the sequencing of tasks, the measures of three dimensions of task performance, and the measures of task difficulty. Among the three elements - task complexity, task conditions, and task difficulty - according to Robinson (2003), complexity differentials should be the crucial premise for task sequencing in task-based syllabus. The models to be used in evaluating task based include: Stufflebam's Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) Model and Partlett and Hamilton's illuminative model which focus on how the syllabus actually works in practice rather than how well it relates to the stated objectives.

If the assumptions about the nature of linguistics and language learning is one of "language as communication" (Richards and Rodgers 1986:69) then a syllabus based around activities and tasks which promote real and meaningful communication will seem advantageous. It has been shown that the false beginner in Japan will have learned structural rules to a surprisingly complex degree, yet may find it difficult to use, or indeed, may never have had an opportunity to use the language learned. Consequently, the belief that learning is facilitated by activities that include real communication, may be the most suitable belief to adopt in the Japanese classroom.

Further points to consider when critically reviewing a syllabus are the objectives of the course as well as the needs of the learners. Ultimately, and perhaps ideally, a hybrid syllabus will result purely due to pragmatic reasons. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987:51) suggest: It is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful from each theory and trusting also in the evidence of your own experience as a teacher. Thus, to what extent has an integration of the various approaches taken place? Does the syllabus specification include all aspects? If yes, how is priority established? These questions must also
form part of the criteria when designing or assessing our own syllabus. English has been integrated into the curriculum at all educational levels from primary to tertiary as a focal foreign language for globalization. In satisfying students’ needs for English study, countless course books, textbooks, and reference books for English learning have been launched, which engenders confusion for teachers as well as students to make a choice.

The Impact of Evaluation on the Syllabus
Evaluation is ideally meant to be a platform for syllabus improvement. This is positive. However, reality is different because as Scriven (1991, p. 8) puts it, the credibility of evaluation brings in psychological factors that go beyond rational estimation. Many people think that the use of evaluation as a data reduction process summarizing a year’s work into a grade, for example, is a kind of crime. In some circumstances, indeed, such a radically reductive kind of evaluation should be completely inappropriate circumstances that demand a much richer and fuller evaluation account, as for example, when the need is to help the student or a counselor plan changes of programme or study approach. But in other circumstances and far other purposes such as selection for admission to advanced courses, jobs or graduate school, there is probably no better general approach than the letter grade.

Important as the letter grade, which is the culmination of standardized testing may be, it has a largely debilitating influence on the curriculum. This negative effect of instructional evaluation or, specifically testing on the curriculum, is what Shiundu & Omulando (1992) say have backwash effects. Madaus (1998) has outlined seven principles that explain this backwash effect.

1. The power of tests and examinations to affect teachers, institutions, curriculum or instruction is a perceptual phenomenon. If individuals perceive the test as important, it will influence their actions, whether the test is important or not.

2. The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more likely it will distort and negatively impact on the social processes it is intended to monitor.

3. If important decisions are presumed to be related to test results, then teachers will teach to the test. The practices of schools publishing test results to compare students and schools often makes the stakes so high for educators that they forego a well-founded educational experience for students in lieu of having their students do well on the test.

4. In every setting where a high-stakes test operates, a tradition of past examinations develops, which eventually de facto defines the curriculum.

5. Teachers pay particular attention to the form of the questions on a high stakes test (for example, short answer, multiple choices, essay) and adjust their instruction accordingly. In ether words, the name of the ‘education game’ is ‘pass the test, not become educated’.

6. When test results are the sole or even partial arbiter of future educational or life choices, society tends to treat test results as a major goal of schooling rather than as a useful, but fallible indicator of achievement.

7. A high -stakes test transfers control over the curriculum to the agency which sets or controls the examination.

These principles aptly capture the current scenario in Kenya. They describe a examination-oriented culture in which there is only one route to success: passing the examination. Failure is not an option. Because of this morbid fear of failure of examination, students and even teachers often go to extremes, some blatantly unethical to ensure students pass. In this respect, evaluation in the form of standardized tests or examinations leads to intellectual immorality, and the general impact is a travesty of the entire purpose of education. Yet this impact should not render evaluation useless. While there are arguments against evaluation, the focus should be on how to do the evaluation well, not how to avoid it. How can evaluation be done well? It is an answer that every conscientious curricularist or syllabist or educator should seek. As Scriven (1991, p. 43) concludes in his celebrated Evaluation Thesaurus that, doing evaluation and doing it well matters in pragmatic terms because bad products and services cost lives and health, destroy the quality of life and waste the resources of those who...
cannot afford waste. In ethical terms, evaluation is a key tool in the service of justice in social and business terms, evaluation directs efforts where it is most needed and endorses a new and better way when if is better than the traditional way and the traditional way when it is better than the new high-tech way. In intellectual terms, it refines the tools of thought and exposes a pervasive and disgraceful prejudice a further step toward demythologizing the disciplines. In personal terms it provides the only bases for justifiable self-esteem.

References


