Teacher's Voice in Syllabus Design and Curriculum Development

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Abstract

The target of this paper is to put light, on the involvement of a teacher, and to emphasize the need and importance of a teacher to participate in syllabus design process. On reviewing the previous researches done on this topic, I have come to the conclusion that the role of teachers in the making of syllabus design is overshadowed and decentralized. Our system of education infact every educational system depends upon an appropriate and healthy syllabus design as it is considered a pathway to transmit knowledge to the future generations. Not only this, but syllabus design also mirrors the needs of the students and the nation's goals.

This paper tries to show that the syllabus design can be made up to the mark if the role of teachers is active rather than passive. In Pakistan, syllabus or curriculum is usually designed by the higher authorities, educational boards, expertise and many more but it leaves very little or no room for the teachers to take part in it and thus teachers are confined to the four walls of the classroom. The results driven from semi-structured interviews from primary, secondary and intermediate teachers showed their lack of involvement and assistant in syllabus designing.

Keywords:

Pakistani EFL Teachers, Curriculum/syllabus design, Teacher involvement, School and College Teachers.

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Introduction:

1.1 Background

No nation can stand without the contribution of its teachers. The profession of teaching is not merely a profession to earn money but it carries the responsibility of whole nation on its shoulders. Teachers are the main pillars who educate the children apart from their parents. For a nation to rise and progress well, there lies sound efforts of teachers. But if teachers are not involved in the important decisions like syllabus design it will be unfair and equally unjust to them. The goal and aim of education will be easier to achieve if teachers will be given their right place.

As it is said:

“They are, in fact, an integral part of the decision-making process in curriculum planning and implementation at the classroom level. They can supplement and improve the curriculum through planning and working with students, engaging in professional development, and sharing their classroom experiences with other teachers.” (Doll, 1996).

Doll’s view about teacher’s participation in curriculum planning thus clearly marks a teacher as an “integral” and “vital ‘part in curriculum design. Teachers, through collaborating and engaging with students can give sketch a better syllabus while keeping in mind the strengths and weaknesses of students. Secondly, if teachers are given a chance to take part in curriculum design, they can bring about a “positive change”. Kennedy claims that if teachers are involved in syllabus-making process and is given support they will do better when it comes to the implementation. As it is said,

“Teachers have the real power to make or break decisions advocated at any level. Their decisions will ultimately determine the curriculum, regardless of all other levels of decision making.” (Klein, 1999).

These statements by applied linguist, suggest that teacher’s ability to take part in process of making syllabus-design should not be challenged because undoubtedly teachers are sensible and knowledgeable enough to give sound and valid suggestions to the education Ministry.

1.2 Opening the knot between ‘Syllabus and ‘Curriculum’

Syllabus Design helps teachers to think in a systematic way about how and what to teach because if teacher is involved in designing appropriate syllabus design using relevant theories of language learning and employing innovative ways of implementing that syllabus it will add to the development of the students. Besides this discussion that to which extent teacher role is important in syllabus design first of all it is necessary to draw borderline between the two terms.

The terms syllabus and curriculum have created ambiguity not only in what they define but also in their use. Dubin and Olshtain (1986) claimed:

“The terms “curriculum” and “program” are used interchangeably ...in which planning for language instruction takes place. A “syllabus”, on the other hand, is a more circumscribed document, usually one which has been prepared for a particular group of learners. In some places, the term syllabus and a course outline mean the same thing, although recently the term syllabus has taken on a special meaning concerning the specification of language content alone. (Dubin & Olshtain 1986:3)”

This definition says that curriculum is the broader term while syllabus is limited to a specific group. Some linguist considers the two terms different while for some the two terms can be used interchangeably. The curriculum is seen as the set of objectives, the methods, activities, goals, and the content while syllabus is considered as the part of curriculum.

Yalden (1983) defining syllabus uses the term ‘blueprint’ for the syllabus and marks teacher as the one using his abilities converts the blueprint in or plan in the reality. Nunan (1988) says,

“two are different, one being subordinate to the other. He considers curriculum to be the planning, implementation, evaluation and administration of an education programme that occurs in three phases, planning, implementation and evaluation. Syllabus narrowly focuses on the selection and grading of content and material.”

White (1988) makes a clear border between the two terms by saying that curriculum is the “totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system while syllabus is the content or subject matter of an individual subject.” According to Shaw (1975), calls syllabus as the part of curriculum which includes the objectives, goals, aims and the ways by which evaluation of students should be done. Noss and Rodgers (1976), call syllabus a narrow term and curriculum a broader term. Stevens (1977), says syllabus is simple something which guides the teacher about what should be taught at which level (from simple to complex or complex to simple items) while curriculum gives the answer of how the syllabus should be implemented.

Therefore, the terms are dealt different by different linguists some calling it to be one term and some specifying the syllabus to be the content or course outline while curriculum to be the ways by which syllabus can be put to practical application. After the detailed discussion of what the syllabus and curriculum are the important question arises of the syllabus or curriculum designers because a healthy syllabus design is the need of students so while making the syllabus design some questions must be kept in the minds of designers that whether it will fulfill the demands and needs of the students? Are we providing the students with relevant and beneficial pedagogical tasks? Does the provided outline will enhance students’ abilities and boost up their learning and whether they are getting healthy environment to learn in? This is possible when teachers are also involved in the process of curriculum development and syllabus design because teachers can judge the strengths and weaknesses of his students and thus can give sound suggestion and opinion to the expertise and specialists about what course should be added at which level and using which activities their learning can be enhanced.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The teachers are hardly given a chance to share their opinions and innovative ideas in the process of decision making and this is the dilemma of the educational system which is considered as highly centralized and only takes into consideration the suggestions of higher authorities and expertise keeping teachers marginalized and confined to the four walls of classrooms. Many school teachers admit that they are given free hand to participate but majority is of the view that they have to blindly follow the already decided syllabus plan and no flexibility is allowed to them.

1.4 Research Questions

What is the viewpoint held by primary and secondary school teachers towards their role in syllabus design and curriculum development?

To what extent teachers are given flexibility to make modifications in the syllabuses?

Should teachers be given a role in the processes of syllabus design, implementation and Evaluation?

2. Literature Review

Jadhav and Patankar (2013) in their conference paper ‘teachers as curriculum developers’ says that teacher serves as bridge between students and their success so a teacher must be trained and given a chance to take part developing a proper curriculum and designing a fruitful syllabus. Tabari (2013), in his article ‘Challenges of Language Syllabus Design in EFL/ESL Contexts’ quoting different linguists and thinkers, raises the point that in this postmodern era in which the world is progressing rapidly, a part of teacher in syllabus design and curriculum development is becoming crucial and the need of the hour. Anthony Berardo (2014), in his book says, the syllabus designer must be principled and knowledgeable and must involve a teacher because a teacher knows well the need of his students.

Gulam Haider in his article (2016) ‘Process of curriculum development in Pakistan’ asserts that, teachers are the channels through which education is imparted in the generations so a teacher must have a role in the development as well as designing of the syllabus design and curriculum. Kathiri (2016), in her article talks about the voiceless teachers who want to participate in the important task of syllabus design but their capabilities have to face restrictions by the upper authorities. Dundar and Merc (2017), in their article tell that, a teacher’s abilities should not be challenged and bound by the higher syllabus deciding authorities. Masuhara (1993) affirms that in the age of progress and advancement teachers can play a pivotal role in the development of his students by freely exercising his abilities. Richards and Rodgers (2003) contend that teachers are treated as passive participants whether they are in teaching or learning phase. Their roles include being a facilitator, mediator, need analyst, classroom manager but at the stage of selecting, grading and implementing their ‘no’ or ‘less’ involvement is seen. Dublin and Olshtain (1992) inform that, in the process of framing syllabus design the role of teachers is important. Cunningsworth (1998) says that teachers must be given some relaxation and flexibility to create sound environment in the classrooms and this only possible if they are permitted to

take part not only is curriculum development. Bartlett and Butler (1985) propound that, learning and teaching both are crucial tasks which need a healthy and growing environment. In create such environment teachers' hands must be free for the remodeling and redoing of the planned and already designed curriculum and syllabus so that he can make adjustments according the goals, needs and lacking of the students. Kennedy (1996) claims that, syllabus design and development of the curriculum is done somewhere else and teachers are expected to do its correct application only while remaining within the boundaries of the classroom. Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelchand, & Tucker (1999), assert that classroom is the only place where teacher adds her part in the curriculum and syllabus and that is of 'implementation' but they have least to less role in their making.

3. Research Design

The research design chosen for this paper is mixed method design involving both qualitative and quantitative approach. Besides using mathematical figures, ratios and percentages, the interviews taken from teachers are analyzed qualitatively. Heli Aramo-Immonen (2013) in his article, Mixed Methods Research Design, talks about the importance of mixed method design.

"Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. (Aramo, 2013)"

Mixed method design, gives the researcher more liberty and freedom to answer his research questions and this new methodology to use the blend of these two methods is now becoming popular and more in use day by day.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

Total twenty teachers from different schools participated. Half of the teachers were from government schools and remaking half were from private sectors. All the teachers who willingly participated were from primary and secondary levels. Those teachers were selected whose teaching experience was of atleast ten years or more.

W. Creswell in his book 'Research Design' and also ZinaO' leary in his book 'The Essential guide to doing research' talks about the qualities that a respondent must possess. O' Leary says, the respondents must have intellectual capacity and psychological maturity to understand the nature of questions" and must be aware of the subject matter and their participation should not be forced. So, keeping in mind the points given by O'Leary and Creswell the whole study is conducted accordingly by the researcher.

4.2 Instruments used

The procedure used for this study was of semi-structured interviews held in natural setting. The willing participants were interviewed and were given relaxation and liberty of speech to share their feelings and teaching experience and also about their involvement in the syllabus design and curriculum development. While on the other hand, close ended questionnaires were also made to judge the proportion.

4.3 Interview Questions

The general perception of Government and private school teachers:

Have you ever attended any programs or workshops in which you were taught about syllabus design?

Have you ever been asked to give any suggestions for improvements in the syllabus you are teaching?

To what extent you feel that you have been deprived from participation in designing a syllabus for your students?

B) The limitations of teaching English:

Do you think that an identical syllabus limits the chances for teacher's creativity?

Do you apply the activities in your textbooks or you prefer to create your own? Why?

Do you follow the assessment criteria provided by the Ministry of Education or you design your own?

C) The possession of qualifications:

What are the basic elements of a teaching syllabus?

If you were asked to participate in designing a syllabus, what is the most convenient type you would

D) Questionnaire questions:

Have you ever been asked to give any suggestions for improvements in the syllabus you are teaching?

Are you bound to follow the 'already decided' and planned syllabus design?

Do you support 'active role' of teacher in syllabus design and other important tasks?

Do you support 'up-to-down' system of education?

Do you think the 'passive recipients' suffer from motivational fall?

Does it hinder the teachers' abilities?

Does it also hinder students' performance and results?

If teachers are not involved in the decision making process does it blocks their creativity?

Teacher training sessions should be conducted so that they can take part in 'syllabus designing processes?

Teacher's voice in syllabus design is beneficial in every regard?

4.3 Procedure

During the interview which was held first, the notes were made so that the feelings and thoughts shared by the teachers could be analyzed and mentioned in the study. Secondly the questionnaires were given to them to be filled in which there were ten questions as

mentioned above. The sequencing of questions and clarity of words was keenly focused so that participants might not find any difficulty.

Zina O'leary in his book 'The Essential guide to doing research' highlights the qualities of a good researcher and also defines the ethical responsibilities that are on the shoulder of researchers. He says, the researchers must act within the law of research ensuring no harm to the respondents and it is the ethical duty of the researcher to seek respondents' permission if he wants his institute name or his own name to be confidential. Moreover, he says, the interviews or any other quantitative approach used, the participants must not be forced or induced to take part.

The researcher has strictly followed the ethical considerations and the study is based on fair grounds without being biased.

5. Data analysis

The results driven from the interviews and questionnaires were analyzed subjective and objective grounds respectively. Analyzing the interviews and questionnaires reveal a dire and deep-rooted need for the involvement and access of teachers in the important decision making process. The crux of the responses analyzed is that teachers are considered only the 'recipients' or 'receivers' of the syllabus and curriculum which is designed by the specialists and higher authorities in educational board leaving no room for teacher to use his abilities and knowledge for shaping the syllabus design so to say the decisions are made on their behalf.

Moreover, teachers added that, their hands are tied by the ropes and they blindly follow the 'up- to-down' system in which teachers confining them to the classroom walls are expected to meet the deadlines to cover the syllabus and are also instructed that in which way they have to teach the students. As one of the teachers asserted that this up-to-down way hinders not only the teachers capabilities but also on the part of students it hinders their abilities because restriction on teachers also effects the performance of students in a way that when teacher herself is not free to implement the ways seeing the needs of the students so how the students will come up with their shortcomings. Two of the private school teachers claimed that they are not much bound by the restrictions as they are given possible free hand to make changes in their classroom curriculum according to the needs of their students but somehow, they are again bound by some other reasons. One of the teachers also raised the point of teacher qualification and training that if teachers are given training and proper guideline along with some motivation, they can come up with new innovative ideas for the syllabus design and curriculum development but unfortunately teachers are not given privilege and chance to take part in this crucial task and the function of teacher remains only within the four walls as they are asked for the correct application only.

5.1 Quoting exact responses of two teachers

" During my teaching career of 13 years at secondary level, I have never been asked to take part in syllabus design or curriculum development process." (Government school teacher, at secondary level)

“ Now it’s been 10 years, that I am in teaching field and since now I haven’t seen or heard of any teacher, teaching in this institute, to participate in the important task of making syllabus and also I and other teachers are bound to complete the syllabus on time without skipping the part of the syllabus which I think is not suitable at the level I am teaching. ” (Government school teacher, at primary level)

During my 11 years of experience in teaching, firstly I have never played any part in the syllabus design process and secondly if I am ever asked in courtesy about my opinion it is never considered on serious note,” (Private school teacher, at secondary level)

“I like to teach students by using methods which I consider, are more helpful and fruitful in the growth and abilities of the students but I am bound by the authorities.” (Private school teacher, at primary level)

“Students need motivation to meet good results and this is possible if teachers are given free hand to employ the methods we want.” (Private school teacher, with more than 9 years of experience)

5.2 Graphical representation of results

The statement ‘Whether teachers are asked to participate in the crucial process of syllabus design/curriculum development, or are only bound to only implement the already decided curriculum and syllabus? So almost 70% responses were in ‘No’ (they are passive recipients only) and almost 30% responses were in ‘yes’ ‘partially agreed’ (they are given not as much liberty but to some extent they are asked for their opinion but the end the changes are not made according to their opinions so they partially agreed.

6. Discussion

After analyzing the views given by the teachers, it can be summed up that in our education system teachers are given privilege but not in every aspect. At one hand teachers are considered that nation makers but on the other hand their abilities are questioned by not letting them to contribute in the pivotal task of defining and designing the syllabus as well as how it show be implemented. Such type of syllabuses should be designed that deals with the needs of the students more than to meet the set standards. Using classroom activities, student engagement, and friendly learning environment can aid learning of students and this possible if teachers are considered active participants in the curriculum development and syllabus designing process.

Teachers are the precious jewels who are working hard for their students and also the nation so they should not be kept voiceless and must be given chance.

7. Conclusion

Curriculum development and syllabus design is a skillful, hardworking and intellectual activity so it needs sensible and intellectual programmers for planning, developing, designing, implementing, evaluation and improving phase. Teachers are the one who can better understand the needs and psychology of the students or learners as they are well aware of the different teaching strategies using which they can bring the learners to the higher level of success so a teacher can also play the important roles of syllabus designer,

planner, developer, evaluator and implementer but for these the teachers' abilities should not be restricted and bound by the chains of 'up-to-down educational system. For the effective implementation of the effective syllabus design the teacher involvement should be maximized and along with the teacher participation another important thing which is the need of the time is the teacher training so that they can be added in the process of decision making. The Ministry of Education must work for "a new, innovative reform in which curriculum is regarded as a dynamic event, not as "a river of experience that courses through student and teacher over the years of school."

So, with such support and changes teachers will be motivationally charged and will effectively add their part in the important decisions by sharing their materials, approaches and insights.

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Appendix:

The general perception of Government and private school teachers:

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