

البحث الحادي عشر:

Does the M.O.E. pray what it preaches in the newly-adopted curriculum?

هل تفي وزارة التربية والتعليم بما تعظ به في المناهج التي تبناها حديثاً؟

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أستاذ مساعد مناهج وطرق تدريس اللغة الانجليزية

بكلية التربية جامعة قناة السويس

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• المستخلص :

لقد تبنت وزارة التربية والتعليم المصرية منهجا جديدا للغة الانجليزية للمرحلة الابتدائية منذ عام ٢٠١٨، ولقد دافعت وزارة التربية والتعليم عن المنهج موضحة انه يساعد في رفع مهارات التفكير الناقد وحل المشكلات وينمي من استخدام التكنولوجيا كوسيلة بحث للتعلم الذاتي ومع ذلك ، كان هناك جدل كبير في المجتمع في ما يخص طبيعة هذا المنهج واشباعه لإحتياجات التلاميذ والتزام المعلمين بتوجيهات المنهج الجديد ، وهدفت هذه الدراسة الي كشف مكونات المنهج الجديد وتقييمه ما اذا كان المنهج يشبع احتياجات الطلاب ام لا وتقدير درجة التزام المدرسين بتوجيهاته ، ولقد تبنت الدراسة أدوات نوعية مثل تحليل المحتوى لمنهج الصف الثاني الابتدائي ومقابلة شبه مقننة مع عشرين مدرسا وعشرين ولي امر من خمس محافظات ممثلة للسكان في مصر، كما طورت الدراسة قائمة ملاحظة لتقييم درجة إلتزام المعلمين بالمنهج الجديد ، وقد تم تطبيق هذه الاداة علي خمس معلمين آخرين في الاطار التدريسي بالفصل ، ولقد كشفت النتائج عن ان المنهج الجديد كانت له مكونات مثل أهداف مؤكدة (تحت افكار رئيسية) و كان له محتوى لغوي تواصل، ووسائل تدريسية معينة مناسبة، وطرق تدريس ، وطرق تقييم ، بالإضافة الي ذلك ، وجد ان المنهج قد لبي احتياجات التلاميذ الي حد معتبر، ولكن كان التزام المعلمين بتوجيهات المنهج متنوعة الدرجة الي حد معتبر، ويرجع ذلك بصورة رئيسية الي قلة التدريب وحجم الفصل الكبير وعدم وجود الأجهزة الالكترونية وكراهية التغيير.

كلمات مفتاحية : منهج، تقييم، التعلم القائم علي المهمة، تدريس اللغة القائم علي المهمة، تقييم اللغة القائم علي المهمة ، بطاقة قائمة ملاحظة ، وزارة التربية والتعليم ، مصر

Does the M.O.E. pray what it preaches in the newly-adopted curriculum?

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Abstract

Egypt's MoE has adopted a new English curriculum for the Primary Stage since the year 2018. The M.o.E. defended the curriculum, stating that it helped with heightening pupils' critical thinking and problem-solving skills and promoted use of technology as a search tool for self-learning. However, there was much debate within the society about the nature of the curriculum, satisfaction of pupil needs, and teacher commitment to curriculum instructions. The aim of this study was to uncover the components of the curriculum, assess whether or not it satisfied pupil needs, and examine teacher degree of commitment to

curriculum instructions. The study adopted the qualitative tools of content analysis of Year 2 Primary curriculum and a semi-structured interview with twenty teachers and twenty parents from five governorates representative of Egypt's population. Also, the study developed a Teacher Curriculum-Commitment Observation Checklist to assess teacher degree of commitment to the curriculum instructions. The checklist was administered to another five teachers in classroom teaching setting. Results revealed that the curriculum had evident goals (i.e. under themes), communicative language input, appropriate teaching aids, teaching and assessment method components. Besides, it was found that the curriculum satisfied the pupil needs to a considerable extent. However, teacher commitment to the curriculum instructions varied considerably, mainly due to lack of training, large class-size, unavailable electronic equipment, and reluctance to change.
Key words: curriculum, assessment, TBL, TBLT, TBLA, observation checklist, MoE, Egypt

Introduction

Change to suit circumstances is inevitable when they change. The ministry of Education (M.o.E.) has adopted a new curriculum approach for the Primary Stage since the year 2018-2019. Reinders et al. (2019: 67-69) state that the new curriculum is intended by the M.o.E. for better student learning, and it has six main aspects:

1. students' relying on electronic sources of information and leaving traditional textbooks
2. adopting the Task-Based Learning (TBL) procedures alongside the CEFR
3. promoting students' self-regulation and self-learning for preparation before they go to classroom
4. making use of activities which heighten learners' abilities to critically think and solve problems
5. utilizing activities to get learners to work in pairs and groups, i.e. active learning
6. abandoning tests and using performance-based assessment

According to Reinders et al. (2019: 67-69), the new curriculum was planned to achieve the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) stages (i.e. A1, A2, B1 and B2) which cater for social communication, use of language, mediation, and active learning (Piccardo et al., 2019) in addition to promoting the four language skills. The tasks were determined under themes designed in line with the CEFR with oral and written learning outcomes (Reinders et al., 2019: 67-69). The activities were to be performed in pairs or groups. Everyday life examples which included thinking critically as well as solving problems were into play. Every activity/task followed the order of: first, before-task, then task, and finally after-task procedures (Ibid). A pre-task requires learners to prepare using electronic equipment searching for information whereas the task itself requires student collaboration to finish it, and the after-task procedure requires evaluation, feedback and comments from the teacher (Ibid: 67-69).

There is also a number of related terms. Task-based language teaching (TBLT), for example, is focused on language which is used in society to attain certain objectives in communication (Keiken and Veddar, 2018 :265). TBLT can be referred to as an approach which is considered centered around the learner, as compared to the traditional approaches in which the teacher dominates (e.g., Branden et al., 2009: 3). Task-based learning assessment (TBLA), another term, is concerned with assessing the products of TBLT from the 1990s onwards and related exams suit the students' capabilities in a better way (Norris, 2016). It provides better assessment in all ways than traditional assessment (Ibid, 2016).

TBL and TBLT have been used in language learning and teaching classrooms. Both have proven effective in developing learner's language (Branden, 2016), particularly, learner paragraph writing (Muluhneh, 2018), translation (Alenezi, 2020), listening (Kuswoyo & Wahyudin, 2017; Brown, 2018), learner metacognitive strategies used in listening (Chou, 2017).

Ellis (2018:104-105) mentions a number of features for TBL. Those include innate language production, task form which is based on activities of the learners, language emphasis on real life, beneficial language teaching, an emphasis on form while learners learn, learner-autonomy and centeredness, and traditional approach refusal.

The ministry wanted a drastic change in adopting a curriculum which is technology-dependent away from traditional paper books. The M.o.E. aspired after a shift from teacher-centered to rather student-centered approaches.

It is noteworthy that the TBL is considered an innovative technique (Kandari et al., 2020: 551) and achieved success in learning and teaching (Sholeh, 2020: 1). It makes students rather, again, student-centered and boosts students' communicative competence (Ibid: 3). It is reported that TBL makes learners connect easily, makes vocabulary learning automatic, supports communication, and establishes critical foundations in learners (Sholeh: Ibid:3-4).

However, it has a number of drawbacks. For instance, some teachers are not proficient enough to cope with it; teachers may lack training, and some classes are too big (Ibid: 6-7). Besides, some classrooms are not well equipped (Ibid: 6-7).

Reinders et al. (2019:69-70) stated that the challenges that they found in applying the new curriculum were represented in a number of obstacles. These include students' resistance to not looking at paper textbooks and not being corrected by their teacher as the curriculum required students to self-assess themselves from time to time and as teacher assessment comes at a later stage. Also, Reinders et al. (Ibid: 70) mentions that a large number of schools do not have enough equipment, nor are connected to the internet.

Background to the study

After the ministry adoption of the new curriculum, and although there is much argument and debate within the society about its benefits, pupils' readiness, and availability of equipment and resources, and class-size regarding the curriculum application, i.e. compared with the old one, the M.o.E. defends the curriculum. It states that it helps heightening pupils' critical thinking and problem solving skills, and promotes use of technology as a search tool for self-learning. From another perspective, the curriculum components, relating satisfaction of pupil needs, degree of teacher commitment to curriculum instructions, and curriculum benefits and limitations have not been uncovered in the Egyptian classroom context, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. This formed the rationale for conducting the present study in order to overcome this shortage of information. Therefore, the aims of the present study were to

1. investigate the components of the newly-adopted course,
2. assess teacher and parent opinions the new curriculum satisfaction of pupil needs, and

3. assess the degree to which teachers are committed to its components, to examine whether the new curriculum is well understood and practised in the Egyptian classroom teaching context

Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the components of the newly-adopted English curriculum?
2. How far do the components satisfy the actual needs of the target pupils?
3. How far are these components implemented by the English teachers?

Methodology

The study adopts the qualitative approach on a general basis, utilising the content analysis, interview, and observation checklist tools. To be able to answer the first study question, a content analysis of the new curriculum was conducted, checking the existence and characteristics of the following concepts: goals, language input (communication and topics), teaching aids, teaching methods, assessment techniques, and blueprint/ design/color of the book cover. To check the validity of the procedure, the electronic textbook sample, tabulation, categories, recording of information was reviewed by a professor in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and an agreement was made to reach a consensus about disagreed categories and content. To make sure that the results were reliable, another TEFL professor performed the analysis a week later. No changes of results were reached. The results were ready to be obtained and analysed.

To be able to answer the second study question, a semi-structured interview with both teachers and parents was conducted. Both teachers and parents were to tell whether the components of the new curriculum met the needs of the pupils or not.

To be able to answer the third study question, an observation checklist was designed by the researcher. Later, it was used in the classrooms of the Ismailia Governorate in three primary schools: Saad In Aby Wakkas, Almahsama Albalad, and Alfarouk Omar to gather information about the satisfaction of pupil needs. The interview comprised the following two questions:

1. Are you satisfied with the curriculum regarding its goals, content, teaching methods, teaching aids, and assessment? Why/Why not?
2. To what extent are you satisfied with such items infused in the curriculum as TBL, CEFR level, communication, and availability of internet-connected equipment? Why

Data were addressed qualitatively (with minor references quantitative percentages).

Participants

The participants of the study included twenty-five teachers and twenty parents from the governorates of Ismailia, Alsharkaya, North Sinai, Sohag, and Aswan. Four teachers and four parents from each governorate were electronically interviewed over the Zoom application. They were selected from those governorates because they represent the original population of Egypt. All the teachers taught the 2nd year primary curriculum of English -the target sample of the study, as will informed later.

Classes of the remaining five teachers were attended by the researcher during their presentations of lessons in order to observe the degree of teacher commitment to the curriculum instructions, i.e.in the Teacher's Guide (Dutton, 2019). The checklist was used for recording the information on a scale. The scale was never, sometimes, and always, for checking the degree of teacher commitment to certain items (see Appendix 1).

Sample of the study

The study used the second-year Primary Stage e-book of the new curriculum (second term) available on the internet. The e-book was taught in the year 2019-2020. It aided in extracting, recording, and analysing information in terms of goals, language input, teaching aids, teaching methods, assessment techniques, and blueprint. Also, it aided in identifying the content of lessons while classroom observation of teachers.

Results and discussion

The qualitative data of results were obtained. Result analysis was performed according to order of questions. To answer the first study question, 'What are the components of the newly-adopted English curriculum?', the content analysis conducted reached the following results:

As for the themes and goals of the curriculum stated in the Students Book, as the goals were categorized under themes, as mentioned earlier, the curriculum aimed at developing the following goals under the following two themes (Shadid, 2019):

Theme 1 How the world works

1. Improving students' knowledge of the world around them, i.e. animals, objects in the sky, plants, insects, places, colours, letters, adjectives,

2. Promoting communication, i.e. listening, reading, and writing contents related to simple yes/no questions on birds, plants, animals and insects in the environment
3. Promoting scientific knowledge, i.e. of adjectives,
4. Working with other students to fulfil tasks
5. Promoting environment-friendly behaviours
6. Developing active learning
7. Working in a team
8. Promoting self-assessment
9. Gaining basics of mathematics
10. Promoting such language as imperatives, statements, questions, functions,
11. Carrying out a task in a team

Theme Two: communication

1. Providing vocabulary related to homes, i.e. name of appliances, furniture, numbers
2. Developing interaction with instructions
3. Making a presentation
4. Relating words to pictures
5. Speaking to a group

As for all unit language input, as extracted from the Student Book (Ibid), the units deal with and develop vocabulary, language, phonics, life-skills, values, issues and challenges, and integrated cross-curriculum topics (i.e. as contained in the above themes and goals.) As for content, the student's book (Shadid, 2019) consists of six units, as well as another two for revision, one after each four. Also, there is a story component. The Unit titles (Ibid, 2019) are as follows:

1. Unit 7 – into the countryside
2. Unit 8 – a trip to the store

3. Unit 9- At the Farm
4. A Review Unit
5. Unit 10- It's home time
6. Unit 11- At the toy store
7. Unit 12- Go straight on
8. A Review Unit
9. Story component

As for the teaching aids, they were found to be posters, flash cards, phonics cards, digital toolbox. They appear to be appropriate for such a type of curriculum.

As for the teaching methods, there is detailed instructions provided on how to teach phonics, reading and writing, content and language-integrated learning, life-skills, values, issues and challenges. Using total Physical response and games are present.

As for assessment and evaluation of the curriculum, there is pupil self-assessment, teacher-assessment, and closing section at end of each unit (with no tests) for the teacher to check pupils' understanding and provide feedback

As for the Blueprint/ design of the cover, the cover was colored with a school bus carrying happy smiley boys and girls were found.

The above-addressed record addresses the answer to the first study question.

Comparing the above results with those of the traditional paper book used in the past, it was found that the goals of the traditional book comprised no story element at first glance. It is important to say stories form a great way of inspiration to children and boost communication (Rodríguez et al.,

2020:3375). It comprised listening, speaking, reading, writing, phonics and grammar activities distributed over six units and another two review units. There appeared to be clear distinction between the new and old curricula, in favour of those in the new one, examples of distinctions not found in the old curriculum were found in the following goals:

1. Promoting scientific knowledge, i.e. of adjectives,
2. Working with other students to fulfil tasks
3. Promoting environment-friendly behaviours
4. Developing interaction with instructions
5. Making a presentation
6. Relating words to pictures
7. Speaking to a group

Another difference was that there were no themes in the old curriculum, and objectives were written in academic language, not relating to simple social contexts. The units and language input in the old curriculum were not as communicative as the new one, although the topics were quite similar. The teaching aids were quite the same: flash cards, posters, phonics cards, except for the digital toolbox which was considered a merit for the new curriculum. For assessment techniques, the old curriculum incorporated four tests and one final test at the end of Students' Book. Compared with the new curriculum assessment which had student self-assessment, teacher assessment, and closing at the end of each unit, aspects of which were mentioned earlier. The new curriculum adopted quite ongoing assessment which had real benefits into the classroom (Scachter et al., 2019). Besides, the new curriculum was found to be student-centered, and catered more for communicative competence, language form. These results are in line with what Ellis

(2018) and Norris (2016) and Keiken and Veddar (2018) all supporting TBL infusion in the curriculum.

To answer the second study question, ‘How far do the components satisfy the actual needs of the target pupils?’, the results of the interview with both teachers and parents were obtained. The interview with teachers yielded rather positive results. In answer to the first interview question stated earlier, the teachers said, “generally, “yes, to a great extent!” In explanation, they said, “The course is fantastic.” They added that it has everything a child could need: names of animals, furniture, insects, plants, and maintained that the curriculum is based upon life experiences of a child and communicative situations. This was the answer of 18 (95%) of the participant teachers. They said that, generally, the curriculum components were appropriate for the pupils, but added that “Sometimes, the course asked the pupils to make a presentation/talk to a group about what happened, and this was not easy for pupils.” “The large pupil number was an obstacle towards showing our classroom skills,” they added. However, it was assumed that the teachers were not trained appropriately for the curriculum. Also, during the informal talks it also appeared that they were reluctant to the change. These barriers cope with those mentioned by Sholeh (2020).

This reflects that the vast majority of the teachers were largely satisfied with course components. Besides, actually, the curriculum is seen to have all the components of a successful curriculum, as it has real life appropriate goals, communicative language input, various teaching aids, i.e. colorful, paper-type, and electronic, and teaching methods (here, TBL and communicative approach could be related), and assessment appropriate for the pupils and the teachers.

The language is at simple level appropriate for the pupils and it is life and student-centered. Communication is quite basic and appropriate, too. The topics are related to real-life situations, and the book has coloured pictures which attracted pupils as well as an attractive life-centred story. It aimed at active learning, students' projects, and learner autonomy and presentations (as well as electronic use of all types of computers). This made a rationale for teachers' inevitable answers.

This copes with Sholeh (Ibid) and Reinders et al. (2019: 67-69), in that TBL is student-centered and is based on real life situations, and level of language is in line with the CEFR, too.

The teachers (n. 20) said they were much satisfied with TBL, CEFR level, communication but not with availability of equipment with internet connection as "they do not exist in our classrooms." This is a well-known problem facing TBL in Egypt (Reinders et al., 2019: 70), as mentioned earlier.

As regards parents' views, they had mostly positive view. Twelve of them (60%)- female majority- said they enjoyed the book with their children when helped them prepare the lessons. They added that everything was organized and quite fun. They were satisfied with the components very much and never had problems as the level of the book was appropriate to their children. The remaining eight parents said they did not have enough time to sit with their own children in order to know the components and related concepts as TBL or otherwise. They just relied on private tutoring which is a social teaching dilemma in Egypt (Sieverding et al., 2019; Ghenghesh, 2018).

Then, the answer to the second study question is that because the vast majority of teachers were satisfied with the components of the new curriculum and most of the parents, too, then the curriculum satisfies pupil needs considerably. Reasons for the positive answers of both teachers and positively-participating parents may be attributed to the curriculum appropriateness for pupil's levels and pupil attraction and use of real-life situations, pupil-centeredness tasks, and use of personal/parents' electronic equipment.

To answer the third study question, 'How far are these components implemented by the English teachers', data from the observation checklist was obtained. The following table (1) shows percentages of teachers who were either always, sometimes, or never committed to the new curriculum components on each item of the checklist (see Appendix 1). The data will be dealt with qualitatively below the table.

Table (1): Degree of Teacher Commitment to New Curriculum Components

Item	Percentage of teachers always committed	Percentage of teachers sometimes	Percentage of teachers never committed
Objectives of the lesson assessment	60%	40%	0%
Interaction/communication with pupils	60%	40%	0%
Clarity of language	40%	0%	40%
Proficiency of language skills	40%	20%	20%
Student involvement	60%	20%	20%
Teaching methods	60%	20%	20%
Principles of active learning	40%	20%	40%
Use of real-life examples	60%	40%	0%
Motivation of pupils	20%	60%	20%
Availability of resources	40%	20%	20%
Use of pupil self-assessment	40%	20%	40%
Promotion of self-learning	40%	20%	40%

As shown in Table (1) above, 60% of the pupils were always committed to objectives of the lesson assessment, interaction/communication with pupils, student involvement, teaching methods, and use of real-life examples. 40% of the teachers were always committed on clarity of language, proficiency of language skills, principles of active learning, use of pupil self-assessment, and promotion of self-learning.

In addition, the table demonstrates that 60% were less committed on the following item: motivation of pupils, and 40% were never committed to clarity of language, principles of active learning, use of pupil self-assessment, promotion of self-learning.

In brief, teacher commitment to the instructions in the Teacher's Guide (Dutton, 2019) were varied, and no 100% full commitment (i.e. as expressed by the adverb always) regarding an item was observed. This may be referred to, again, lack of training, big pupil number, unavailable electronic equipment, and teacher untold reluctance to the change. These can be compared with those of Sholeh (2018). Generally, the teachers appeared to be a little committed though there were many items to which they were not fully committed.

Conclusions and recommendations

The new curriculum appears to be into good play. It has logical, complete set of components, catering for language input presents with life situations, pupil-centeredness, communicative competence, self-learning, and learner autonomy. The curriculum satisfies pupil needs considerably and, thus, is appropriate for them. The teachers were not fully committed to the curriculum instructions. Possible reasons include the facts that they were not trained, their classes were

too large, they were not accepting the change, and electronic equipment was not available, as all this was contended in the interviews with them.

The M.o.E. should continue teaching the curriculum, paying no attention to criticism. However, it should provide training on the curriculum, particularly issues of TBL, TBLT, TBLA, CEFR, communication in the classroom. Besides, it should endeavour to build more schools to absorb and reduce pupils' large numbers in classroom. Talking to teachers about the usability of the curriculum and providing equipment, tools, and stationary may help in reducing teacher anger and reluctance to the curriculum.

The M.o.E. should talk to the people in the society to tell them with examples about how the new curriculum works and what the embedded implications are. The M.o.E. should provide electronic equipment and, furthermore, find ways to raise teacher's low salaries in order to reduce their latent reluctance to teaching and in order to raise their efficiency standards. Some linguistic intervention/training from time to time is also suggested to improve/ maintain teacher's proficiency level of the language. Therefore, it is to be confirmed that as far as the M.o.E. is concerned, although the curriculum prays what it breaches, it still needs a number of reforms.

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