

## **Evaluation of English Language Teaching Syllabuses Introduced in The First Year of Secondary Schools in Northern Cyprus**

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**Abstract:** *Since the 1980s, new approaches to foreign language teaching and learning have led to questioning traditional methodologies. In this context, some approaches have lost significance while some others have gained momentum primacy. Parallel to these, educationalists have developed new syllabuses which are appropriate to new approaches and have begun to employ them. This study aims at evaluating a foreign language syllabus that has come into use in secondary schools in Northern Cyprus since 2005-2006 academic year.*

**Key Words:** *Syllabus, Syllabus Design, Foreign Language Syllabus, Northern Cyprus*

## **Kuzey Kıbrıs Orta Okulları Birinci Sınıflarında Uygulanan İngilizce Öğretimi İzlemlerinin Değerlendirilmesi**

**Özet:** *Seksenli yıllardan beri yabancı dil öğrenimi ve öğretimindeki yeni gelişmeler, konuyla ilgili birçok yaklaşımın sorgulanmasını beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu bağlamda kimi yaklaşımlar önemini kaybetmiş, kimileri ise önem kazanmıştır. Buna paralel olarak eğitimciler yeni yaklaşımlara uygun izlemler geliştirmiş ve uygulamaya koymuşlardır. Bu çalışma Kuzey Kıbrıs ortaokullarında 2005 – 2006 öğretim yılında uygulamaya konan yabancı dil izlemlerini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *İzleme, Program Geliştirme, Yabancı Dil İzlemleri, Kuzey Kıbrıs*

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## I. Introduction

The twentieth century witnessed the appearance and disappearance of many approaches concerning foreign language teaching and learning all over the world. The educators and practitioners focused their attention on how to improve their teaching strategies and found out new ways which would help learners become proficient in the field they were interested in. This made and has made the school authorities to initiate new projects with the aim of re-evaluating the contents of language teaching programs and the way they have been taught.

In the early 1980s, man faced a different world that was dominated by a multiplicity of technological societal issues requiring a worldwide language, English. These issues were known to the societies but now they have become considerably important in terms of getting the necessary information and using it whenever needed. School administrators and educationalists are trying to make some changes in their curricula and syllabuses in order to meet this need. In his study dealing with syllabus design, Nation says,

*There are many starting points for curriculum design. For example:*

- 1. Curriculum design can begin with the adaptation of an existing course, gradually reshaping it to become quite different from what it was. This allows the course to be taught while curriculum design is going on.*
- 2. Curriculum design can begin from an unorganized set of resources that are used, supplemented, adapted, or discarded as the design progresses. These resources can include course books, source books (Prabhu, 1989), teacher-made materials, and materials from newspapers or magazines.*
- 3. Curriculum design can begin from nothing except an idea in the mind of the designer (Nation, 2000:2).*

Ergün classifies program/syllabus design models into four groups:

- 1. System-Oriented A Priorists*
- 2. System-Supporting Explorers*
- 3. System opposing A Priorists*
- 4. System indifferent models (Ergün, Powerpoint).*

Recently, there have emerged a peculiar group of learners who need to learn English for especially occupational and general educational purposes. This has necessarily led to an increase in attention on syllabus design as to provide suitable teaching programs.

In Northern Cyprus, this need was met by The Ministry of Education and Culture considering the changes in foreign language teaching and in 2005 a new syllabus design under the name of **'PROPOSED SYLLABUS for the ACADEMIC YEAR 2006 – 2007 (2006 -2007 Öğretim yılı 6., 7. ve Orta 3. Sınıflar Haftalık Çalışma Takvimi)'** was introduced to the secondary education.

## II. What is syllabus?

While dealing with evaluation of syllabuses, we had better have a look at the definitions of syllabus. In literature we have many definitions: Speaking about broad and narrow approaches to syllabus design, Nunan says,

*The narrow view draws a clear distinction between syllabus design and methodology. Syllabus design is seen as being concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content, while methodology is concerned with the selection of learning tasks and activities (Nunan, 1988:5).*

This corresponds with the definition given by Stern who says,

*In its broadest sense, it refers to the study of goals, content, implementation and evaluation of an educational system. In its restricted sense, curriculum refers to a course of study or the content of a particular course or programme. It is in this narrower sense of curriculum that the term 'syllabus' is employed (Stern, 1983:ch.19).*

Variş makes a list beginning with '**education program**' and puts syllabus in the context of '**teaching program**' and defines it as follows:

*Syllabus includes teaching principles, sub-categories of subjects and evaluation and it helps learners receive information included in education and teaching programs... (Variş, 2000:5)*

Ergün gives a very practical definition of syllabus:

*Syllabus includes activities that a teacher does...it is advice to teachers...it includes methods, techniques, and teaching principles that makes a teacher become successful. (Ergün, Powerpoint)*

Basically, a foreign language syllabus can be interpreted as a guide to the teacher, a plan covering what/how to teach, specifying and grading the content and deciding the teaching units designed according to the learners' needs.

## III. Describing the syllabus for English as a foreign language in Northern Cyprus

The EFL syllabus evaluated in this paper is part of the curriculum for all state secondary schools in Northern Cyprus. At the moment, this syllabus is applied and is subject to further modifications when considered the changes and challenges concerning foreign language instruction.

In 2005 the Ministry of Education and Culture decided to give priority to 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' in foreign language teaching. CEFR is a guideline used to describe the achievements of foreign language learners across Europe. Its main aim is to provide a method of assessing and teaching which applies to all languages in Europe. CEFR divides learners into three divisions, each of which can be regrouped into six levels:

A Basic User

**A1** Breakthrough

**A2** Wastages

B Independent User

**B1** Threshold

**B2** Vantage

C Proficient User

**C1** Effective Operational Proficiency

**C2** Mastery

The CEFR describes what a learner is supposed to do in reading, listening, speaking and writing at each level, in details. According to regulations concerning foreign language teaching and learning in Northern Cyprus, at the end of secondary education students should become independent users by achieving B2 level; that is, a learner

*“can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options”* (Wikipedia)

The regulations published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2005 were organized considering Communicative Approaches that require effective communication and interaction in English where skills are emphasized on equal basis. New system suggests that students should acquire communication skills instead of learning grammar; therefore, social environments should be created for the activities. Language should be a tool of communication to express students' own ideas and feelings through the teacher's guidance. There are twelve suggestions for the teachers to consider while implementing new language syllabus:

- Language should be presented in real life situation
- The instructor creates real communication environment
- Students should be given chance to express their ideas and feelings
- Errors are tolerated and correction will be made through various methods
- Student to student interaction should be emphasized
- The instructor assumes the role of a guide or helper
- During teaching, student centered, task-based activities should be used
- Students should be informed about other cultures, social skills and intellectual background

- Autonomy of student should be emphasized
- Computer and other technical facilities should be utilized
- The integration of reading and writing should be provided
- Research and studies should be carried out considering individual differences (Milli Eğitim ve Kültür Bakanlığı KKTC, 2005:22-25).

The new English syllabus was introduced to first, second and third year students in secondary schools. We chose only the first year syllabuses of ten out of fifteen secondary state schools. These were randomly chosen considering the five districts of Northern Cyprus. From Lefkoşa, Bayraktar Secondary School, Demokrasi Secondary School, Değirmenlik High School Secondary Division and Atleks Sanverler Secondary School; from Gazi Mağusa, Canpulat Özgürlük Secondary School, and Çanakkale Secondary School; from Girne, Esentepe Secondary School; from İskele, Mehmetçik Secondary School, and Dipkarpaz Recep Tayip Erdoğan Secondary School; and from Güzelyurt, Lefke Gazi High School Secondary Division were included in this research. Each of these schools was visited and the foreign language syllabuses implemented in these schools were collected from English language teachers and photocopied.

#### **IV. English Language Syllabus Introduced to the First Year Students of Secondary Schools in Northern Cyprus**

The **PROPOSED SYLLABUS (FORM 6)** by Ministry of Education and Culture includes twenty six weeks and has got six broad titles, each of which deals with different aspects of English language teaching. These are **UNITS, THEMATIC CONTENT, STRUCTURAL OBJECTIVES, FUNCTIONAL OBJECTIVES, LEXIS and PORTFOLIO**. The topics given under each title are fixed and there is almost no chance to the instructors to add or exclude any item. For example, there are ten units that will be taught to the students in twenty six weeks. Thematic content begins with the name of the first unit and ends with last unit, unit ten. Structural objectives begin with the verb ‘to be’ and end with ‘going to’ while functional objectives begin with ‘personal information’ and end with ‘asking permission’. Lexis introduces the vocabulary from the easy ones to the difficult ones that are appropriate to structures. Portfolio topics are again arranged in harmony with the units and the vocabulary given.

Syllabus also includes the holidays, revisions, and the date of mid-term and final examination. There is last sentence at the end of the syllabus: ‘P.S Teachers should consider the materials in Teacher’s Book, the Wordstore and the Test Books as supplementary materials (Milli Eğitim ve Kültür Bakanlığı KKTC, 2005:22-25).

In addition to syllabus, a course book titled ‘**Energy 1**’ published by Longman to be used in all secondary schools is prescribed by the authorities. It is supplemented by Students’ Book, Wordstore, Workbook and CD. The course book complies with the ‘Common European Framework of Reference for Languages’.

The role of course book in the syllabus is a debatable issue. In reference to Sinclair and Renouf, Suter says,

*...a course book is not a syllabus suggesting that a syllabus should either pre-exist or be devised independently of other elements like course materials, methodology and assessment (Suter, 2001:3).*

#### V. Evaluating Secondary School Syllabuses in Northern Cyprus

The overall organization of syllabuses implemented in the first year of secondary schools is in the same format including **time allowance** (months, weeks), **subjects** (Unit 1...10, structural objectives), **objectives** (functional objectives), **experiment-observation-research**, and **assignments**. These formats are given in a chart and the topics to be taught are listed in turn. For instance, when we look at the syllabus of Bayraktar Secondary School, at the beginning of the education year English course begins with (Unit 1) subject pronouns and possessive adjectives, revising alphabet-numbers-asking about names-giving personal details, starting a conversation and completing a student profile respectively. The course ends with (Unit 10) **what's next**-going to, asking permission-talking about the future, clothes, and describing someone's clothes.

When we look at the map of the course book, proposed syllabus and annual plan of the secondary schools, they are about the same except for the charts. It seems that the topics and activities in the course book, **Energy 1**, have been first transferred to the proposed syllabus then the annual plans of the secondary schools. School syllabus does not include details but course book package covers all the activities which will be handled in the classroom; that is, this evaluation will be the evaluation of the course book in a way. But this is not currently under consideration in our study.

As mentioned before, this new syllabus has been designed considering CEFR depending on Communicative Approaches that emphasize interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. In recent years, Task-based Language Learning, also known as task-based language teaching or task-based instruction has grown steadily in popularity. TBLL is a further refinement of the Communicative Language Teaching approach, emphasizing the successful completion of tasks as both the organizing feature and the basis for assessment of language instruction.

The new syllabus allows both teachers and learners to do the tasks that are limited in the course book package except for one or two optional activities during the year. Tasks are arranged according to grammar and the package has got enough tasks to practice the language. However, some argue that task-based instruction is not always useful. Swan supports this idea when he says:

*While TBI may successfully develop learners' command of what is known, it is considerably less effective for the systematic teaching of new language. This is especially so where time is limited and out-of-class exposure unavailable, thus making heavily task-based programmes inappropriate for most of the world's language learners (Swan, 2005:376).*

In the course book package, tasks are given in an orderly way as to provide grammatical and functional items which will meet the CEFR and many of the twelve suggestions mentioned above **3**. Especially, that the new syllabus considers culture and everyday use of the target language is appreciated. For instance, in the course book, **gonna= going to** is given. There are also a lot of passages about the ways of life in English speaking countries like England and the USA.

According to regulations concerning foreign language teaching issued in 2005, four skills are given emphasis on equal basis and this is reflected in the course book package. Also, other more socially-based skills such as summarizing, describing, and narrating have been identified in the past years. In addition, more general learning skills such as study skills and knowing how one learns have been applied to language classrooms. More recent textbooks stress the importance of students working with other students in pairs and groups, sometimes the entire class. Pair and group work give opportunities for more students to participate more actively. Although syllabus does not give details about such issues, the package contains these skills; each unit deals with grammar, vocabulary, communication, pronunciation, listening, reading, speaking and writing activities.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In view of the explanation and the description of syllabus by Nunan who states, “*a specification of what is to be taught in a language programme and the order in which it is to be taught. A syllabus may contain all or any of the following: phonology, grammar, functions, notions, topics, themes, tasks* (Nunan, 1988:159), we can conclude that foreign language syllabus in Northern Cyprus meets the requirements of CEFR which says learners who reach B2 level become ‘independent users’ of the language. However, the syllabus is heavily dependent on course book and the teachers have to follow the activities in it. If we consider the suggestions, teachers have no chance to make necessary alterations in their teaching.

Another point is that as the title implies, it is a ‘proposed’ syllabus. So during the implemented period, it is possible that there will be some changes which consider the opinions taken from teachers and authorities. In addition, if there are changes, learners’ needs be considered which is crucial in designing a syllabus as Nunan expresses, *information will need to be collected, not only on why learners want to learn the target language, but also about such things as societal expectations and constraints and the resources available for implementing the syllabus* (Nunan, 1988:14).

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