

Curriculum Implementation from the Perspective of a Language Teacher

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Abstract

The concept of curriculum is defined in various ways. But the perceptions of teachers about the concept of curriculum can determine the effectiveness of teaching-learning process in a positive or negative way (Kyriakides, 1997). Though the involvement of students, parents, and school principals is important (Doll, 2008), teachers, who constitute one of the basic groups, should take an active role in curriculum development (Carl, 2005). Since the curriculum is put into practice by teachers in the classroom (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012), it is reasonable to benefit from their perceptions (Marsh & Willis, 2003). The meaning attributed to the concept of curriculum by teachers includes important information for curriculum development (Yurdakul, 2015). This paper majorly examines curriculum from the perspective of a language teacher. It aims to find out the appropriateness of the given explanation on curriculum in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2020* and describes the concerns of curriculum and compares them with the given explanation. It also tries to answer the question like “does the given explanation on curriculum take care of all its basic features?” After a thorough discussion on curriculum, an attempt has been made to justify the relevance of the process approach to curriculum development. And finally, three Skilbeck's models on curriculum have been compared to find out which of these would be associated with product approach and which of these with process approach.

Key Words: approach, curriculum development, learners, process, school, study

Introduction

The given explanation on curriculum runs like:

'Curriculum refers to the subjects that are included in a course of study or taught in a school, college, etc.' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010*)

As a language teacher, I do not find this explanation satisfactory because it is too narrow and does not imply a larger pedagogical canvas. Indeed, the curriculum can be seen at two levels also, the narrower and the broader one. The *narrower one* is the explanation which is identical with our *broader description* of the syllabus, and the *broader* explanation of the curriculum is what we call curriculum.

The whole scheme can be presented diagrammatically: The narrow description of the curriculum is often seen to be identical with the definition of syllabus. Some view curriculum as a plan and some others view it as group of activities. Hirst (1969 in Hooper 1971: 234) defines curriculum as “*the programme of activities.... the course to be run by pupils in being educated*”. For Ker 1968 (in White 1988) the curriculum refers to activities themselves. He describes the curriculum as, “*all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school*”.

White (1988) defines the curriculum in three ways:

- (a) a plan (like a plan of the house yet to be constructed)
- (b) inputs needed to implement the plan (like a plan of how to build the house)
- (c) implementation of the plan (like the view of the house after it has been completed and is a dwelling for its inhabitants)

Of these three definitions, (a) is the narrowest and (c) is the broadest definition.

According to White's first model, a curriculum will have only the objectives and the content; whereas his second model includes the methods along with the objectives and the content. His third model of

curriculum has four components: objectives, content, methods and evaluation. He considers the one more realistic and so prefers to the first two.

The given definition in '*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*' is also a narrow definition of curriculum which is limited to only a few academic subjects. This statement indirectly means that teachers teach the curriculum exactly what education minister has laid out in the curriculum. They assume that learners will learn exactly what teachers teach them; no more no less, which is not always true. Rather it may be unrealistic if we predict what will happen in the real classroom with real students. This definition also seems to treat learners as objects, who do not contribute a lot in the teaching and learning situation and are always at the receiver side of the learning.

Perhaps it would be safest to argue that the curriculum, in wider sense, is more than a list of subjects, rather it includes planning, implementation and evaluation of educational programme. A V Kelly in his survey to curriculum theory and practice argues that any definition must include the following:

"The intention of the planners, the procedures adopted for implementation of those intentions, the actual experiences from the people resulting from the teachers' direct attempt to carry out there or the planner intention and the 'hidden learning' that occurs as a byproduct of the organization of the curriculum, and, indeed of the school". (KELLY, 1989, page.14)

If we analyze and compare the given explanation of curriculum with the explanation given by Kelly, we find that the given definition does not fulfill what Kelly has said a must to any definition. They are:

- a) The intention of the planner(objectives)
- b) Procedure or methodology
- c) Actual experiences of the teachers
- d) The process of learning, etc.

Moreover, the wider pedagogical canvas implied in the curriculum includes everything that comes within its preview. A particular educational event, relationships, activity, classroom, etc--- indeed, any of these smaller educational phenomena are aspects of the larger pedagogic scene. For example, suppose we are looking at a particular teacher-student interaction. We can say that the interaction is going the way because of the student's:

1. expectations
2. proficiency of language
3. relationship with the particular teacher
4. attitude to the school
5. home environment, and the parent's attitude to the school

We could also say that the interaction is going the way it is, because of:

1. the teaching objective
2. the teacher's attitude to the class-to the student-to the test-to the school
3. the teacher's work satisfaction
4. the teacher's fatigue and home environment
5. demands made on the teacher-by the student-by the society-by the examination system

Therefore, every small pedagogic issue has got larger implications that are basically socio-economic and socio-psychological in nature. The term captures this largeness of canvass. It includes all the factors described above: the attitudes of a society and of individuals in society. It includes factors that can and cannot really be identified, even abstract factors.

According to Nunan (1988) "*Curriculum is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, and management of educational programmes*". Nunan not only focuses on the planning part of the curriculum, rather he talks about the process and procedure of implementing curriculum.

Candlin goes one step further by stating that "*Curriculum are concerned with making general statements about language learning, learning purpose and experience, evaluation and the*

relationships of teachers and learners.... They will also contain banks of learning items and suggestions about how these might be used in class". (Christopher Candlin in 'Syllabus Design as a Critical Process' in General English Syllabus Design, 1984, edited by C J Brumfit).

According to Candlin, curriculum has a broader perspective which gives us a broader view of language learning, learning perspective and experience, evaluation and teacher-learner relationship. He says that apart from this a curriculum should include learning materials and suggestions of using those materials in the classroom. Indirectly, Candlin is throwing light on the role of teacher development in the process of curriculum development, which plays significant role.

An example of a broad area of concern may be the following: let us consider the debate throughout our country regarding the level at which English should be introduced in the regional medium schools. When English was introduced in class VI in West Bengal in 1984, letters to the editor columns in most of the major newspapers recommended the introduction of English in class I, III or V. The state is still in a dilemma, as the newspaper report gives ample proof. These types of decisions, like other large-scale decisions bearing directly on the programmes that schools provide, exemplify large scale curriculum decisions.

The debate on the status of English in India and the formulation of policy bearing on the development of new approaches to the teaching of English in CBSE schools represent decision making that has a wide societal scope.

In short, we can say that the given definition on curriculum in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is not satisfactory because this is smaller in scope and related to classroom-related concerns only. After going through a few definitions given above it has become crystal clear that curriculum goes beyond classroom happenings; it is beyond teaching and learning. It is true that a dictionary gives meaning from a general point of view but if we closely examine the word curriculum from a teacher's point of view, we can associate different meanings even. The concern of curriculum is anything that is linked to the socio- economic and political concerns related to the whole educational enterprise.

The definitions focus two broad views of curriculum: one curriculum which gives much emphasis to the end objectives and the other which believes in the ongoing implementation. We can refer to the earlier one as 'product approach' and the latter as 'process approach' to curriculum development.

Both the approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages. A good curriculum developer can take something from product approach and something from process approach and that of course will be a good contribution to curriculum development. I think it is safe to go in between these two approaches.

But given a choice as a teacher I would prefer Ralph Tyler's *product* approach to Lawrence Stenhouse's *process* approach because it gives us a clear idea of how to proceed with teaching what Stenhouse's process approach fails to do. Tyler's key questions give educational planners, including teachers, a logical systematic framework with which to plan a curriculum. Tyler defines curriculum "*A curriculum should give teachers a basis for determining what they should achieve.... they need a clear set of guidelines that have been decided on through research about what learners need to learn*". The best way to do this is by providing a clear set of objectives. Tyler further says that these objectives become the criteria by which materials are selective, content is outlined, instructional procedures are developed and the tests and examinations are prepared. He supports the idea by saying that all aspects of the educational programmes are really means to accomplish basic educational purposes. Hence, if we are to study an educational programme systematically and intelligently, we must be sure as to the educational objectives in that.

Stenhouse is Tyler's most cogent critic of the product approach. In his criticism, Stenhouse says that such a technical approach limits and restricts teachers. He adds to it by saying that "good education is

simply more open-ended and experimental. Teachers must try out different approaches and find out what works best in their circumstances. Each classroom should be a laboratory and each teacher an experimenter, even a researcher” (the strongest criticism on Tyler’s product approach).

But Stenhouse’s view here sounds problematic. For this, teachers have to be extremely well qualified. I think many teachers would find it difficult to be teacher, learner and researcher in their own classroom. Stenhouse’s process approach seems to be too flexible and more like a teacher development process than a curriculum development process. According to Tyler “*teachers must be accountable and a curriculum cannot be simply about nice things*”. Otherwise, learners will learn irrelevant stuff. They will learn the stuff in which the teachers and learners are interested and which is not very educational or useful to their future lives.

It does not mean that Stenhouse’s process approach is a failure approach to curriculum. What it means is that Stenhouse’s process approach is too vast to be implemented. It does not seem to present teachers with a syllabus setting out the context to be covered in order to fulfill objectives.

Rationale of product approach

The best part of Tyler’s product approach is that it gives teachers a clear idea of how to proceed with the process of teaching-learning. When we develop a curriculum, we need to keep teachers’ abilities and qualification in mind. Teachers in most of the parts in India are comfortable with simply following the four steps which are logical in Tyler’s product approach. They need a clear set of objectives. It also makes sure that learning is achieved by all the learners. No doubt process approach has a big scope but by implication it is less realistic. For example, the emergent of communicative language teaching (CLT) is another significant contribution from the process approach. We enjoy talking about communicative language teaching. But in Indian rural schools it does not work that way. Even most of the teachers are not comfortable with CLT because they are not properly trained for that.

Tyler focuses the following points in the product model of curriculum:

1. The planner must decide what educational purposes the organization should attain.
2. The planner must determine what educational experiences can be provided that are most likely to attain these purposes.
3. The planner must find ways for these educational experiences to be organized effectively.

Classical Humanism: A product Approach

Littlewood (1982) describes classical humanism as follows:

In this the main purpose of education is to *transmit valued knowledge and culture to an elite section of the next generation*, and, in doing so, to *develop their general intellectual abilities*. The curriculum is determined mainly by the *valued subject content, which exists outside the learners and should be transmitted to them*.

Classical humanism is bent towards product approach. An orientation of the classical humanism development throws light on the transmission of content and knowledge. The syllabus is pre-determined. Here learners are treated as mere objects and learning can be planned and determined whereas teachers here are ‘*instructor, explainer, transmitter of knowledge predetermined in advance*’. ‘What is taught is what is learnt’ is the intention of this approach. As has been pointed out by Clark, Classical humanism takes the following things into considerations in curriculum design:

The fundamental aim is to promote generalizable intellectual capacity.

1. a course book is created to cover the various elements of knowledge.
2. unit-by- unit objectives are seen in terms of conscious control of the various elements of knowledge set out along the way.
3. all learners in the class are expected to move through the course book at the same pace.
4. the methodology employed lays emphasis on conscious awareness of rules and patterns, and subsequent application of them in controlled and then more open contexts.
5. assessment is norm- referenced with the selection and placement of those who will enter the next stage of education.

It is crystal clear from Clark's points that classical humanists look to the curriculum planning from a product-oriented approach. They believe in the model of input-output. If I relate classical humanism to the kind of education I received, I can ask myself why I needed to study writers like Milton, Shakespeare, Keats, Wordsworth and others. Did my study of these writers help me to realize my goals as a learner? Did it meet all my needs and requirements in life? In a nutshell classical humanism does not look to the process rather it looks to the end.

Reconstructionism: A product approach Littlewood ((1922) summarizes reconstructionism as follows:

The main purpose here is to bring about desired social change. In order to achieve this, the focus shifts on providing every individual with knowledge and skills that are useful for social life. The curriculum is carefully planned around taxonomies of objectives, which each learner should be enabled to master.

Unlike 'content- driven' of the classical humanism, reconstructionism emphasizes 'objective-driven curriculum'. The main objective of reconstructionism is to bring about some social changes. Education is seen as an important agent for bringing this about. According to Richards and Renandya (2002) this model provides:

1. clarity of goals
2. ease of evaluation
3. accountability

Clark (1987) implies that the methodology related to reconstructionism lays stress on 'rehearsal of a particular'. Here more focus is given on 'mastery learning'. What is learnt is more than how to learn. As the model has already got a pre specified objectives, the success of the programme is evaluated how far the set objectives have been fulfilled. Emphasis is given to pre-determined goals. Unlike in classical humanism where teachers do not play any important role in the process of making the syllabus, in reconstructionism they play the role of manager who look out how far the objectives are to be achieved. This mode strongly believes Tyler's ends- means approach, as particular ends can be achieved through proper instructional planning.

Progressivism: A Process Approach Unlike Classical Humanism and Reconstructionism, Progressivism believes in process approach. In progressivism, the main aim of education is to enable each individual to develop towards self- fulfillment. Since self-fulfillment means different things for different people, the focus here is on nurturing natural growth process rather than hoping to achieve pre- determined end-points or objectives. In Clark's (1987) view, progressivism offers 'a learner-centred approach to education, which attempts to promote pupil's development. Education is a means of providing learners with 'experience' which enables them 'to learn how to learn' by their own. He goes one step further when he says that progressivism allows the teachers and learners to decide what to learn and how to learn. The methodology, unlike the earlier two models, provides focus on opportunities for learners to learn spontaneously through experience. It is clear that learners experience and creativity is valued. In language learning this value appears to Breen's (1987) view of process syllabus, where learners' learning process is valued.

Progressivism is a process-oriented approach, has been clearly stated by Clark. He summarises progressivism as being concerned with the following:

1. individual growth from within through interaction with a favorite learning environment
2. learning through real experience
3. a speculative view of language
4. natural learning process and stages of development
5. the learners as a whole person, thinking person
6. the social nature of the learners and the development of healthy relationship with others in the classroom community
7. the promotion of learner responsibility and of learning how to learn

8. In progressivism, it is believed that a curriculum should be flexible enough to foster the kind of growth aspired for every individual who wants to be educated.

Conclusion

To sum up, it would not be an exaggeration to say that a curriculum includes a wide pedagogical canvas which the explanation of curriculum given in *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* does not seem to do. It should give teachers a clear idea of how to proceed with teaching-learning. No approach is totally right or wrong. Each has got its own relevance. As teachers of English, we should be the decision makers of the classroom.

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