



AN EVALUATION OF THE SYLLABUS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN CHADIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

Chad has over 200 local languages plus French and Arabic as its two official languages. All the other languages taught/learnt in the country are seen as foreign ones. Since the early 21st century, of those languages, Chadian learners have been having a strong interest in English, which they see as a developmental tool. However, given the embryonic state of that language in the country, very little research has been carried out to see how Chadian learners acquire it, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the policy put in place to foster it. This paper critically looks at the current syllabus used in the teaching/ learning of the English language in Chadian secondary schools. The informants came from various secondary schools in N'Djamena, and the data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires administered to both teachers (N=50) and learners (N=100). The findings show that the current syllabus mostly dwells on grammar and vocabulary, leaving out other key components of the language such as socialisation, fluency or the various types of writing which make efficient users/speakers of any foreign language. The teaching approaches proposed/used, and the textbooks in use have not been adapted. The vast majority of teachers recruited to teach that subject are not trained /qualified. All these factors combine to make the teaching of the English language inefficient in Chadian secondary schools. This study ends with some proposals on how to ameliorate the syllabus to make it more adequate.

Keywords: syllabus, skills, learners, teachers, components, fluent, competent

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1. Introduction

For almost 20 years now, Chadian learners/speakers of English have had a strong interest in and positive attitude toward that language (Anderson, 2008; Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2018). The government has reinforced this by making the English language a compulsory subject in all secondary school classes and by creating two full English departments at the Universities of N'Djamena and Doba. Anderson (2008) calls this rush for English 'developmental expectations' due to the exploitation of oil in the south of Chad. This is also attested by the number of Chadian learners in the various linguistic centres across the county and in Cameroonian and Nigerian universities. In Cameroon, The Universities of Maroua, Yaounde I and Dschang have become the best destinations for Chadians seeking for registration into a First Degree, Master's or PhD's programme in English. Unfortunately, even with a *Baccalauréat* (the equivalent of GCE Advanced Level), a First or a Master's Degree in their hands, their performance in English remains very poor in writing and speaking. A number of students' dissertations (Temsala, 2017; Mbaidilar, 2022) have mostly pointed out the training/qualification of teachers and poor teaching practice. Yet, the poor performance of a given group of learners results from so many factors. The few existing papers on the English language in Chad (Anderson, 2008; Safotso, 2018, Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2018; Safotso & Ndoubangar, 2020; Ndoubangar & Safotso, 2024) have rather concentrated on other aspects of that language such as its development, pronunciation, learning difficulties and preferred variety. This study looks at the English syllabus currently in use in Chadian secondary schools to evaluate its impact on teaching and learning.

2. Review of Literature

In language teaching/learning, there are many types of syllabuses including grammar, lexical, structural, situational, notional, functional, task-based, skill-based and content-based syllabuses. Some of those syllabuses are, at times, combined into an eclectic syllabus. Widdowson (1990:128) defines syllabus as "*the specification of a teaching programme or pedagogic agenda which defines a particular subject for a particular group of learners [...], an idealised schematic which serves as a reference*". Breen (1987: 184) insists that "*any syllabus is primarily a plan of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning... and the plan details the objectives and selected outcome.*" Since Syllabus and curriculum go hand in hand and are at times even confused, Nunan (1988: 5) points out that there are "*conflicting views on just what it is that distinguishes syllabus design from curriculum development.*" Hutchinson & Waters (1987:80-95) clearly make a distinction between the two:

Curriculum is a very general concept that involves consideration of the complex philosophical, social, and administrative factors that contribute to the planning of an educational programme. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that part of the curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught. Being the

fundamental instrument of any successful acquisition of languages, many scholars have looked at how syllabuses are organised, designed or implemented (Nunan, 1988; Brown, 1995; Willis, 1996; Long & Robinson, 1988; Nation & Macalister, 2010, 2010; Sabbah, 2018, Tante, 2018, Usman & Anwar, 2021, etc.).

Long & Robinson (1988) remark that syllabi are generally divided into two broad categories: product-oriented and process-syllabuses. Product-oriented syllabuses focus on what the learner will acquire, while process-oriented syllabuses concentrate on the pedagogic process. Examples of product-oriented syllabi may include grammatical, lexical, notional, and topic-based syllabuses. In process syllabuses, nothing is pre-set. At the beginning of the course and during it, the content is negotiated with the learners and only listed retrospectively (Candlin, 1984, Breen, 1984). Recent research has focused on the analysis of particular syllabuses (Kara, 2001; Safotso, 2011; Yucel et al., 2017; Tante, 2018; Do Le & Tien Tran, 2021; Usman & Anwar, 2021). Safotso (2011) evaluated a number of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) syllabuses in Cameroonian universities and reported that in all the universities concerned, the design and implementation of the various syllabi were a clear disorder: each lecturer designed his personal syllabus without taking into account the learners' needs and what they had done in the preceding classes. Do Le & Tien Tran (2021) evaluated a Vietnamese university's English language teaching curriculum based on learners' perceptions. From data collected through questionnaires and semi-structural interviews, they reported that five components of the English language training curriculum (objectives, content, material, teaching method and assessment) were not at their optimum as perceived by the students. Their participants suggested that more effective adjustments be made to meet their expectations. Darama et al. (2018) evaluated the 5th-grade English Curriculum of a private school in Aydin (Turkey) according to Stufflebeam's context, input, process, and product model. Seeking the teachers' opinions about the curriculum being implemented, the findings showed that they were undecided.

3. Methodology

The data for this research mainly consists of the official syllabus for English Language teaching in Chadian secondary schools. The teachers' (N=50) and students' (N=100) opinions on its adequacy and efficiency were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The teachers' questionnaire aimed to know their level of education and training, their awareness of the content of a good syllabus, and their general appraisal of the syllabus in use. The learners' questionnaire aimed to collect their views on the syllabus's efficiency and their expectations. The questionnaires were completed with unstructured interviews conducted with teachers and learners.

Since the syllabus is part of the curriculum, the analysis which follows will be done following some items of Clements' (2007:39) framework for curricula analysis briefly summarised as follows:

- 1) Is the curriculum effective in helping children achieve specific learning goals?
- 2) Is there credible documentation of both a priori research and research performed on the curriculum indicating the efficacy of the approach as compared to alternate approaches?
- 3) Are the curriculum goals important?
- 4) What is the effect size for students?
- 5) What effects does it have on teachers?
- 6) Why is the curriculum effective?
- 7) What were the theoretical bases?
- 8) What cognitive changes occurred, and what process was responsible?
- 9) When and where? Under what conditions is the curriculum effective?
- 10) What are the support requirements for various contexts?
- 11) Why do certain sets of conditions decrease or increase the curriculum's effectiveness?
- 12) How do specific strategies produce previously unattained results, and why?

4. Results

4.1 The general objectives and weekly load

A quick look at the current syllabus for the first cycle of Chadian secondary schools (*Sixième-Troisième*) shows that it is quite dense and mostly dwells on functions/notions, structures and phonology. The same observation can be made on the second cycle (*Seconde-Terminale*) syllabus. The general objectives are clearly stated for both cycles, e.g. being able to interact with other people, describe one's health situation, express one's age, quantify, talk of space/time, write correct sentences/paragraphs, accurately produce English sounds, etc. (for the first cycle); and being able to listen, speak, read and write the English language in diverse situations, translate English text into French and vice versa, produce correct texts in English, etc. Unfortunately, the time and coefficient allotted to the teaching of this subject in the school timetable from *Sixième* (Form 1) to *Terminale* (Upper Sixth) are so limited that they cannot permit to cover many items of the syllabus. Following is the weekly load for the first cycle.

Table 1: English language weekly load for the first cycle of Chadian secondary schools

Subject	Class	Number of weekly hours	Teaching periods	Coefficient
English	Sixième (Form 1)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	2
	Cinquième (Form 2)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	2
	Quatrième (Form 3)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	2
	Troisième (Form 4)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	2

Source: Programmes Réactualisés de l'Enseignement Moyen 2008: 209-210.

Table 2: English language weekly load for the second cycle of Chadian secondary schools

Subject	Class	Number of weekly hours	Teaching periods	Coefficient
English	Seconde Unifiée (Form 5)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	3
	Première Littéraire (Lower Sixth Arts)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	3
	Première Scientifique (Lower Sixth Science)	3 hours	2 times (2h+1h)	3
	Terminale A4 (Upper Sixth Arts)	4 hours	2 times (2h+2h)	3
	Terminale D (Upper Sixth Biology)	2 hours	1 time (2h)	2
	Terminale C (Upper Sixth Science)	2 hours	1 time (2h)	2

Source: Programmes Réactualisés de l'Enseignement Secondaire Général 2008: 184-186.

As the tables show, two to three hours of English per week in *Première and Terminale* is so limited that it can just permit teachers to focus on public examinations, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, translation and essay writing. The weekly three hours in the first cycle cannot even enable me to cover half of the syllabus.

4.2 The teaching approaches

The teaching approaches proposed by the syllabus are the 'Communicative Approach and Grammar-Translation Method'. Unfortunately, the Grammar-Translation Method does not match the content of the prescribed textbooks, as they do not contain any text to be translated. The poor level of most teachers does not enable them to use the communicative approach, i.e. to teach in the target language and in an interactive way. In Chadian secondary schools, teachers generally teach English in French.

4.3 The syllabus content as seen by teachers and students

Although most teachers (60%) involved in the study could not differentiate between syllabus and curriculum, they were able to make interesting judgements: 15 of them (30 %) remarked that the current syllabus is very poor, 10 subjects (20 %) mentioned that it is poor, 20 (40%) judged it acceptable, and only five respondents (10%) deemed it good. None of the teachers reported that the syllabus was very good or excellent. These responses somewhat express the teachers' dissatisfaction with the syllabus, which they generally consider inadequate. This is reflected in the learners' general performance, as discussed later in 4.5. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most teachers were, in fact, confusing the syllabus with the textbooks. As to the learners, 51 of them (51%) declared that the current syllabus cannot help them achieve their dreams in English. Only 16% of the subjects said they were satisfied with it. Most of them complained that after studying the English language for seven years, they are still unable to hold a discussion in English to write a good essay or letter in that language.

4.4 The textbooks in use

The prescribed textbooks are from the series *Go for English from Sixième to Terminale*. The use of that collection in Chad is a major problem. Written by Cameroonian and British authors and focusing on the Cameroonian context, those books are not adapted to the Chadian context. Even in Cameroon, they have been replaced by more updated more than fifteen years ago. In those days, they were very good books that promoted the communicative teaching approach, but due to the changing world, they have become obsolete, as remarked by a number of teachers. Because of the good content of those books, some teachers thought that they should just be revised and updated by taking into account the Chadian context and the 21st-century fast-changing environment. Nevertheless, many of them were quite categorical. To them, those books should be changed as they do not take into account the learners' needs. Another major issue that is combined with poor textbooks and syllabus content is the teachers' educational background, discussed below.

4.5 The teachers' educational background

As already pointed out, the level of Chadian secondary school teachers is generally poor. Of the 50 teachers who took part in the survey, three (6%) were holders of the *BEPC* (*Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle*), which is the equivalent of the GCE Ordinary Level; 15 (30%) were holders of the *Baccalauréat* Certificate (the equivalent of the GCE A Level); 18 (36%) declared being holders of the First Degree, while two (4%) claimed to hold a Master's Degree. Only 12 (24%) of the respondents reported holding a *DIPES I* (Secondary School Teacher Grade I Certificate). None of the participants mentioned holding a *DIPES II* (Secondary school Teacher Grade II Certificate), a diploma meant to teach in grammar schools. The fact that only 4% of the subjects mentioned holding a Master's Degree is quite understandable, as to date no Chadian university offers a Master's programme in English language. Chadian students who struggle to get that degree abroad, back home, prefer to look for jobs in more lucrative sectors. The situation where *BEPC* and *Baccalauréat* holders continue to teach in secondary schools in the 21st century is quite striking. Given the general falling standards of education in Africa nowadays, the wonder is to know what those people teach in their various classes. So, the Chadian secondary school teachers' very poor educational background greatly contributes to the poor implementation of the syllabus (which is itself a problem) and learners' performance.

4.6 The learners' performance

All the factors examined above (inadequate syllabus, limited teaching hours, obsolete textbooks, unqualified teachers), among others, naturally lead to poor learning performance. Of the 50 teachers who took part in the study, only 20(40%) judged their learners' performance acceptable. 15(30%) reported that it is very bad, and 10(20%) that it is poor. 14% of them attributed this poor performance to poor syllabus, 8% to poor teaching methods, 50% to unqualified teachers, 34% to lack of trained teachers, and 22%

to inadequate teaching materials. As to the learners, 43% of them attributed their poor performance to poor teaching methods, 27% to unqualified teachers, 23% to inadequate textbooks, and 24% to the poor syllabus. As a matter of fact, the learners' performance is so bad that after seven years of learning the English language, many of them are unable to hold short discussions in that language or to write correct sentences in it. The last section below summarises some of the suggestions made by the teachers and their learners to try to improve the situation.

4.7 Teachers' and students' suggestions

To ameliorate the situation analysed above, the teachers made the following suggestions. A number of them said that the current syllabus should be updated to suit the changing world and that the textbooks should be changed. They also proposed that the teaching of the English language starts in primary school and that the government should train a sufficient number of teachers who will be able to implement the new syllabus. The learners suggested that the government should create and supply libraries with textbooks and other resource materials in all secondary schools to enable all students to have access to books. They also wished to see the teaching hours increased and the government recruit only trained teachers. As to the content of the textbooks, they indicated that to be useful to the learners, they should be more focused on discussions, oral skills and practical issues as they are part of the requirements of job interviews.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current English syllabus in use in Chadian secondary schools has a number of weaknesses. For example, it does not take into account the learners' daily needs and is somehow not contextualised, i.e. it is not effective in helping children achieve specific learning goals. The teaching approaches proposed are not applicable because of the teachers' poor educational background and training. The textbooks used to implement it are inadequate and somewhat obsolete, and many learners do not have them. The educational authorities, therefore, need to design a new syllabus or update the current one. They should also prescribe new textbooks to implement it. Those books and other teaching materials should take into account the 21st-century digital and changing world to help young Chadians better acquire and use English to realise their dreams. School libraries should be created and supplied with textbooks in all Chadian secondary schools. Given that the teaching staff nationwide is generally made up of untrained teachers, some in-service training and workshops should regularly be organised to help them catch up. The best syllabus with the best course books and other teaching materials cannot yield any result if the teaching staff is unqualified and incompetent.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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