

CHAPTER EIGHT

EXPLORING DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN ESL CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS DESIGN

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Abstract

In response to a questionnaire-based survey of teachers of English as a second language (ESL) (involving a sample of teachers from five different countries), more than one third indicated that the institution in which they worked either did not have an overall curriculum for the English courses offered or that they did not know whether it had one or not. Many respondents added comments indicating that the curriculum documents that were made available to them were inadequate, incomplete or unhelpful. In follow-up in-depth interviews with a sample of language programme managers, interviewees were asked a series of questions about their institutional curricula. All but one claimed that their institutions had curricula relating to their ESL programmes, that each of the courses offered was described in terms of levels with associated proficiency-style level descriptor statements, and that there were ‘can do’ learning outcome statements associated with each course. However, a review of the curriculum documents provided by the interviewees did not always confirm their perceptions of them. This chapter presents and discusses some of the findings of the research project as a whole, suggesting some possible reasons why there appears to be so much confusion and disagreement about the nature of the ESL curriculum.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, there have been numerous approaches related to curriculum development and syllabus design for the teaching

and learning of English as a second language (ESL). The focus of most of the research conducted in the area has been on the structure and implementation of the different approaches. In addition, as experienced trainers of language teachers, we were concerned about the fact that although there is considerable interest amongst teacher trainees in developments in language teaching methodology, there is comparatively little interest in language syllabus design and/or in the ways in which textbooks draw upon these developments. As many ESL trainees (who often teach at language centres) appear to rely heavily on textbooks, it seems important to determine whether and, if so, to what extent widely used commercially available textbooks reflect developments in the area of language syllabus design.

The overarching purpose of the part of the research study reported on in this chapter was to explore the extent to which different curriculum design proposals have impacted on the beliefs and practices of language teachers and language programme managers/co-ordinators working in the tertiary context. The decision to focus on those operating in a tertiary education context related largely to the fact that they, unlike teachers operating in schools, are not generally inhibited by national curricula (and, in some cases, also by the content of textbooks specifically approved by Ministries of Education). They are, therefore, able to make decisions about course and programme content, decisions that presuppose some awareness of issues associated with second language (L2) syllabus design.

The study reported here is part of a larger research project that adopted a multi-method approach in order to explore the various aspects of ESL syllabus and curriculum design. The research discussed here includes a questionnaire-based survey with a sample of ESL teachers from five countries (Japan, Taiwan, Syria, Australia, and New Zealand), a series of semi-structured interviews with ESL programme managers/co-ordinators, and an analysis of a sample of curriculum documents.

Background

Various Uses of the Terms *Syllabus* and *Curriculum*

Research on ESL curriculum and syllabus design has been beset with problems, not least of which relate to the wide range of different ways in which the terms *curriculum* and *syllabus* have been used at different times and in different locations. Some researchers use the term *curriculum* and *syllabus* interchangeably, as is often the case in the North American context. Other researchers use the term *curriculum* to refer to all aspects of

a language programme, including methodology, materials and assessment, and the term *syllabus*, which is commonly considered to be part of the curriculum, to refer to the content of learning. In distinguishing between these two terms, Finney (2001) identifies both a wider and narrower approach to the definition:

“The term *curriculum* is open to a wide variety of definitions; in its narrowest sense it is synonymous with the term *syllabus*, as in the specifications of the content and ordering of *what* is to be taught; in the wider sense it refers to all aspects of the planning, implementation and evaluation of an educational program, the *why*, *how* and *how well* together with the *what* of the teaching-learning process.” (Finney, 2001, p. 70)

Breen (1987, p. 82) has defined the term *syllabus* in broad terms, as “a plan of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning”. In this context, a *syllabus* could encompass a range of organising principles which could be language content driven, activity driven or a combination of both. Interestingly, Breen goes on to question whether the *syllabus* should be contained within the specification of objectives or whether it should include the means by which the objectives/ goals are to be achieved (ibid). It is not, therefore, surprising to find that some have observed that “with the development of communicative language teaching, the separation of syllabus design and methodology becomes increasingly problematical” (Nunan, 1989, p. 10). Numerous issues were raised that related to the definition of terminology such as syllabus, curriculum and methodology. This indicates that there is considerable confusion in the ESL industry about the use of key terms.

Various Approaches to Syllabus Specification

One of the reasons why there has been so much debate about curriculum and syllabus boundaries relates to the fact that there have been so many different proposals relating to *syllabus design* since the mid-20th century. Earlier examples include the *structural syllabus* which grew out of “a theory of language that assumes that the grammatical or structural aspects of language form are the most basic or useful” (Krahnke, 1987, p. 15) and the *situational or topic-based syllabus* in which lexical and grammatical aspects of the language are introduced in terms of their probability of occurrence in the context of particular topics and situations (Ur, 2000, p. 178). The 1970s saw the emergence of the *notional-functional syllabus* which focuses on notional (ideational) and functional (what language is intended to achieve) aspects of language (Wilkins, 1976).

Among the proposals that emerged from the 1980s onward were the *relational syllabus* in which relationships within and between propositions provide the starting point for grammatical, lexical and discursive specifications (Crombie, 1985a, 1985b) and the corpus-based *lexical syllabus* in which the emphasis is on the ways in which lexis impacts on grammar and discourse (Sinclair & Renouf, 1988; Willis, 1990).

These were followed by the *task-based syllabus* in which various types of task form the core. In addition to the above, are a number of syllabus types that relate to specific aspects of language and language learning such as *skills-based syllabuses*, including syllabuses that focus on various aspects of reading skills (such as predicting and skimming and scanning) and writing skills (such as genre and text-type related textual organisation (see, for example, Su, 2008; Swales & Feak, 1994). There have also been a number of proposals for integrating two or more of the other syllabus types. One example of this is the *core and spiral syllabus* proposed by Brumfit (1980) in which the grammatical system constitutes the core, with notions, functions and situations spiralling around it. Another example is the *proportional syllabus* proposed by Yalden (1983) in which an initial 'structural phase' is followed by a number of 'communicative phases' and a final 'specialized phase'.

Globalisation and Neo-Liberalism: Impact on Language Curriculum Design

Definitions of 'globalisation' have varied considerably (see, for example, Giddens, 1990; Waters, 1995) as have views about the beginnings of globalisation. Some researchers such as Giddens (1990) and Robertson (1992) have argued that globalisation is a pre-modern phenomenon while others (e.g., Cox, 1996) have argued that its origins are much more recent. Despite their differences, what most researchers do agree on is the fact that globalisation includes processes of international integration which are associated with economic as well as cultural interdependence. They also agree that since the second half of the 20th century, international integration has been facilitated by two key phenomena: advances in transportation systems and telecommunications, and post-WWII formation of certain international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Globalisation is generally now seen as having been, since the 1970s, closely associated with neoliberalism, an ideology which, whatever precise definition is highlighted, involves policies that promote free trade, open markets and minimum state

intervention in business endeavours. In the case of language learning, the increasing pace of globalisation has led to the massive expansion in the use of a few languages internationally (most notably English). This massive expansion has in turn resulted in a burgeoning of interest in the teaching of these languages to learners of all ages in a wide variety of contexts and settings along with a substantial challenge to the relevance of traditional distinctions between ‘first language’ and ‘second language’ and between ‘native speaker’ and ‘non-native speaker’ (Graddol, 2006). It has also led to considerable tension between local educational needs and interests (Canagarajah, 1999, 2004) and the type of centralisation that is evidenced in the phenomenon of ‘mass curricula’ (Ramirez & Boli, 1987). “Mass curricula” are “directly defined and prescribed through the influence of international organizations [and]...through the models provided by dominant nation-states” (Benavot, Cha, Kamens, Meyer, & Wong, 1991, p. 97). The fact that English language proficiency is increasingly seen as an essential educational requirement for everybody rather than a coveted achievement for a few (Maurais & Morris, 2003) has resulted in attempts to create language syllabuses that cope with the immediate communicative needs of learners, particularly adult learners. This need led to a focus on specific purposes courses (see, for example, the establishment of a unit-credit system for adult language learning (Morrow, 2004)). The focus on immediate language needs rather than on longer term language goals has been described by Widdowson (1983, pp. 17-18) as involving language “training” rather than language “education”. When combined with the impact of neo-liberalism, this can lead to a type of commodification of language learning referred to by Heller (2002) in which language learners tend to “equate expected outcomes with financial input” and “teaching and learning are . . . ‘chunked’ into smaller and smaller packages that are assessed independently of one another” (Crombie, 2008, p. 58). This commodification and chunking of language learning suggests a focus on immediate language needs and outcomes rather than long term language development.

Language Teacher Cognition

Language teacher cognition (LTC), defined by Borg (2006, p. 1) as focusing on “what language teachers think, know and believe—and of its relationship to teachers’ classroom practice”, is the primary focus of the research project of which the research reported here forms a part. Research involving LTC often focuses on teaching methods (e.g., Karavas-Doukas, 1999; Nunan, 1987; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999, 2004; Watzke, 2007)

and/or the impact of language teacher education on teachers' beliefs and classroom practices (e.g., Da Silva, 2005; Johnson, 1996; Numrich, 1996; Spada & Massey, 1992; Wang, 2008). In the case of the research reported on here, the focus was rather different from previous studies conducted in the area of LTC in that: (a) some of the research participants were language programme managers/co-ordinators (not all of whom were classroom teachers at the time the research was conducted); (b) it included a focus not on language lessons themselves but on some of the things that the research participants do that impacts on lessons, such as selecting textbooks, determining achievement objectives, and, above all, designing courses and programmes.

The Study

The research project reported here involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, the primary emphasis being on the latter. A mixed methods approach involving triangulation was adopted. The same issue, namely the impact of research on language programme design on the practices of language professionals, was explored through a combination of a questionnaire-based survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus point-based analysis of textbooks and language curriculum and syllabus documentation.

Almost all of the research participants were employed in the tertiary education sector, the primary focus on that sector being determined by the fact that those involved in it are generally not constrained by national curricula, as is often the case with those employed in the primary or secondary education sectors.

The Participants and the Research Instruments

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted amongst a sample of a total of 93 teachers of English as an additional language from five different countries (Taiwan, Japan, Syria, Australia, and New Zealand), most of whom were known to the researcher (a sample of convenience) or known to those known by the researcher (snowball sampling). The main aim of the survey was to determine how the participants planned and organized the content of their courses and whether, and, if so, how they specified course objectives. The questionnaire included 31 questions, of which 27 were closed (but with many providing space for comments). Reference was not made to any syllabus design types by name. The relevant overarching research questions reported on in this chapter were:

1. How do a sample of teachers and programme managers/co-ordinators working in the context of higher educational institutions decide on the nature of the syllabuses underpinning the courses and programmes they offer for learners of English?
2. To what extent, if at all, are any decisions they make about textbook selection influenced by the nature of the syllabuses that underpin these textbooks?

Among the detailed questions included in the questionnaire and interviews (but set out differently from the way they are set out below) were, for example:

1. Does the institution where you work have an overall curriculum for the English courses it offers (showing, for example, the relationship between each of these courses in terms of level and specific content, and including reference to methodology and materials)?
2. If there are syllabus documents designed by your institution for the use at the level you teach, how useful [essential, very useful, useful, not very useful, not useful at all] do you find them?
3. Does your institution have documents that outline the content of each of your courses? If so, how detailed are these documents? Do they include specific language that is to be taught and, if so, how is it described? Who is responsible for designing these documents? Do they make reference to the nature of tests and examinations? Do they include a list of objectives/ outcomes/ “can-do” statements and what would an example of one be? What do you do to make sure that all of your teaching staff have read these documents?

A selection of curriculum documents supplied by the interviewees was analysed in relation to a number of focus points relating to the types of questions included in the questionnaire and interviews (e.g., presence or absence of explicit achievement objectives specification) and the findings compared with the responses of the interviewees to questions relating to their institutional curricula. It should be borne in mind, however, that discrepancies between the interview data and the content of the documentation might, in certain cases, be more apparent than real in so far as (a) the documentation provided to the researcher may be intended mainly to attract clients rather than to provide accurate curriculum specification, and (b) the interviewees may not have been willing to reveal particular documents due to their commercially sensitive nature.

Results and Discussion

Curriculum and Syllabus: General Overview

More than one third of the ninety three questionnaire participants indicated that the institution in which they worked either did not have an overall curriculum for the English courses it offered or that they did not know whether it had one or not (see Figure 8-1 below), with several (14) adding comments indicating that the curriculum documents that were made available to them were inadequate, incomplete or unhelpful. So far *as institutional syllabus documents* are concerned, while the majority of questionnaire participants considered those that were provided to be essential, very useful or useful, approximately one third either did not respond or indicated that they found them to be 'not very useful' or 'not useful at all'. Of the twenty-four additional comments provided after this question, ten made reference to the lack of clarity of the syllabus documentation made available to them. Even so, only just over half indicated that they actually referred to syllabuses provided by their institutions in determining the content of their courses. Notwithstanding the availability (or otherwise) of institutional syllabus documents, or the extent to which those that were available were actually consulted, the vast majority of questionnaire participants (82-88%) reported that they believed that it was important to have a syllabus for each of the courses they taught (see Table 8-1 below). Where they were *not* provided with institutional syllabuses, however, over one third (37%) indicated that they would either allow the syllabus to emerge as the teaching proceeded or focus on materials and methodology rather than the syllabus (see Table 8-2 below). Almost one third indicated that the selection of an appropriate textbook, generally motivated by the extent to which it included the language they wanted to cover rather than by the activities it contained, was part of the process involved in deciding what to teach, and approximately the same number indicated that they would allow textbooks to determine syllabus content.

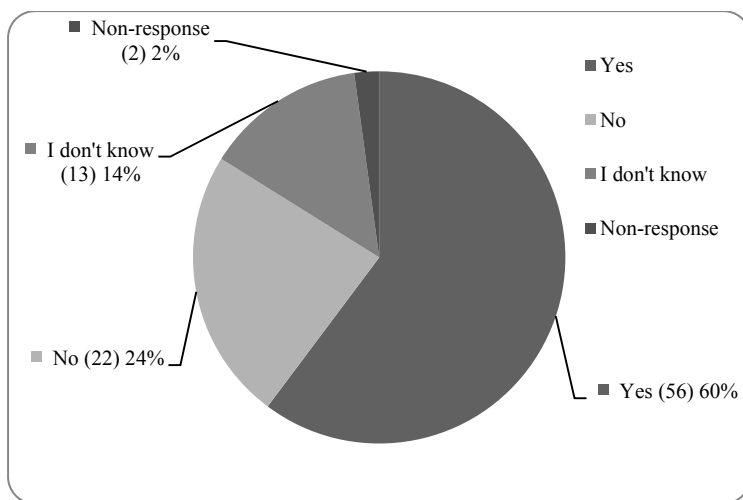


Figure 8-1: Does the institution where you work have an overall curriculum for the English courses it offers?

Table 8-1: I think it is very important to have a syllabus document for each course that I teach.

Answer	No.	%
Agree	82	88.2
Disagree	8	8.6
Not relevant in my situation	1	1.1
No Response	2	1

Overall, the views of the five language programme managers/co-ordinators interviewed (representing four different institutions) on issues relating to the importance of curricula generally, and syllabuses in particular, were similar to those held by the majority of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire-based survey. However, some of the comments they made, combined with the institutional documentation they provided, suggests that their intentions and aspirations are not always realised in practice. Thus, for example, one of the interviewees noted that planning was 'very loose' in the case of one of the programmes offered and that there was no 'actual curriculum'. In fact, the documentation provided by only one of the interviewees was found to include a reasonably clear indication of the language content of the courses offered.

In the case of the documentation relating to another of the institutions, there was found to be very little difference between the (very general) statements relating to the content of different courses within the same overall programme although these courses were described as being at different levels. In the case of yet another institution's documentation, courses were said to be 'based on published course books'. In connection with all of this, it is relevant to note that although all of the programme managers/co-ordinators had the expectation that teachers would be able to interpret, contest, modify and/or create courses, the assumption, presumably, being that decision-making in this area would be guided by some coherent, theoretically-based and historically grounded rationale, none of the institutions represented by the interviewees appeared to provide staff development opportunities specific to this area.

Table 8-2: What participants would do if not provided with a syllabus document for a course.

Choices	Ticked		Not ticked		Non-response
	No.	%	No.	%	
Prepare one yourself for your own use.	28	30	63/	68	2
	<i>22</i>	<i>78.5</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>2</i>
Prepare one yourself for your own use and give a copy to students.	36	38.7	55	59	2
	<i>10</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>2</i>
Allow the syllabus to emerge as the teaching proceeds.	21	23	70	75	2
	<i>14</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>2</i>
Focus on material and methodology rather than syllabus.	13	14	78	84	2
	<i>9</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>2</i>
Other	0	0	0	0	

Note. The top numbers indicate participants in Japan, Taiwan & Syria. The numbers in italics indicate participants in Australia & New Zealand.

Curriculum and Syllabus: Issues Relating to Course Integration

One of the functions of institutional curriculum documentation is generally to indicate the links among the various courses that make up the programme as a whole. A number of questions in both the questionnaire and interviews, therefore, sought to determine whether participants believed that the courses taken by students should be related in a way that ensured that the overall programme provided to students was a coherent and integrated one. Only approximately half of the questionnaire respondents believed that all of the English courses a student took in any particular year should be directly related to one another. Even so, almost all of them indicated that they would try to take account, either in whole or in part, in teaching a reading (or writing) course of the content of any writing (or reading) course being taken by the same students at the same stage in their programme. Respondents indicated that they favoured doing this often by using reading texts as models for writing texts. Although almost all of them said that they would take account, in some way, of the content of courses being taken by the same students, only approximately half of them claimed that they were actually aware of the content of other courses being taken by their students in the same year as those they themselves were teaching (see Table 8-3 below).

Furthermore, when asked whether, if they used a textbook from a particular series with a group of first year students, they would select the next highest level textbook from the same series for the same students when they were in their second year, approximately 35% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they would do so, with the remainder indicating that they would not (9%), or that they did not know whether or not they would do so (41%) (see Figure 8-2 below). While many of the comments added in relation to this question referred to the desirability of variety, none made reference to potential problems, in terms of discontinuity and overall programme content, associated with switching from one series to another, especially where textbooks are being used as a major source rather than as an additional resource.

Table 8-3: Participants’ awareness of the content of parallel skills courses.

Question	Answer	No.	%
If you are responsible for a reading course at your institution, would you be aware in a detailed way of the content of any writing course that the same students were taking in the same year?	Yes	41	44%
	No	13	14%
	In Part	13	14%
	No Response	26	28%
If you are responsible for a writing course at your institution, would you be aware in a detailed way of the content of any reading course that the same students were taking in the same year?	Yes	39	42%
	No	11	12%
	In Part	17	18%
	No Response	26	28%

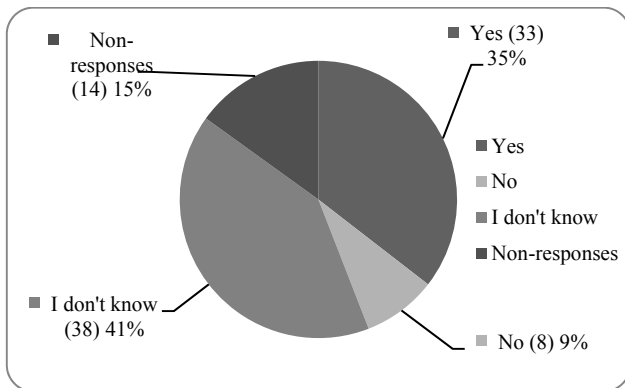


Figure 8-2: If you used a textbook from a particular series with a group of first year students, would you select the next highest level textbook from the same series for the same students when they are in their second year?

The questions asked of interviewees that related to course integration referred specifically to skills-based courses. In responding to a question asking whether they believed that skills-based courses taught to the same group of students in the same year should be closely linked, all but one of the interviewees indicated that they believed that they should be. The interviewees saw the linkage among courses in terms of themes in one case, topics in another, and a combination of topics, vocabulary, concepts and ideas in a third. Thus, so far at least as skills-based courses are concerned, most of the managers/programme co-ordinators and approximately half of the teachers involved in this research project appear, in general, to be in favour of ensuring that there *are* links between courses. However, in the programme documentation supplied by the interviewees any such linkages are largely unsignalled/covert. Overall, it appears that the issue of language programme integration is one about which views differ and there is, in some cases, considerable uncertainty.

Curriculum and Syllabus: Course Content

In terms of the actual content of courses, the majority of questionnaire participants indicated that they would include vocabulary, language structures, and tasks and activities (see Figures 8-3, 8-4, and 8-5 below) in core language development courses at all levels, with approximately two thirds of those who responded to the relevant question indicating that they preferred task-supported to task-based learning (and 24% indicating that they would not include tasks at all at beginner level). Four of the five interviewees indicated that it was equally important to include all of these in their courses (with the other interviewee observing that the main focus of General English courses taught in her institution was language skills). All of the interviewees and most of the questionnaire respondents also considered *learning skills/strategies* to be an important aspect of the content of language courses. However, in the documentation provided by the interviewees, references to learning skills were either absent altogether or were very general in nature. Also, although one of the interviewees referred on several occasions to the importance of tasks in her institution's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme, the documentation relating to that programme makes very little reference to tasks.

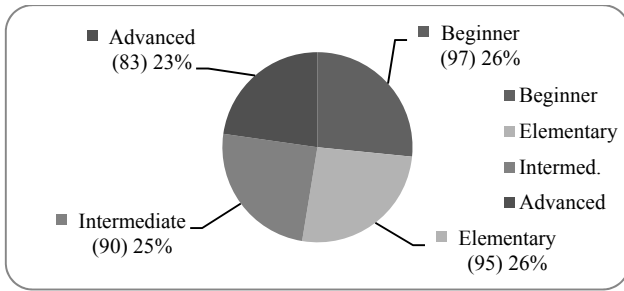


Figure 8-3: Percentage of respondents who would include vocabulary at different levels.

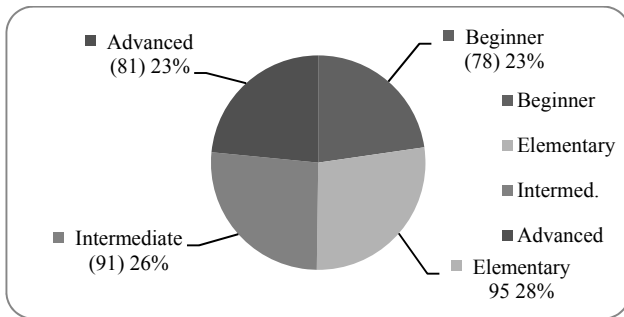


Figure 8-4: Percentage of respondents who would include language structures at different levels.

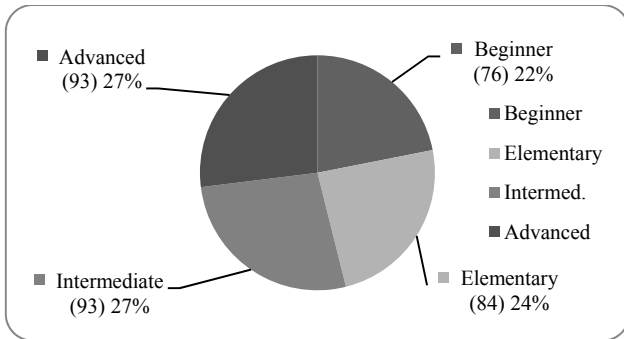


Figure 8-5: Percentage of respondents who would include tasks at different levels.

An almost equal number of questionnaire participants indicated that they preferred (40) or preferred not (39) to focus at beginner and elementary level on words and sentences rather than on larger stretches of language, and just over one fifth that they would *not* include language structures at beginner level.

So far as writing courses are concerned, four of the interviewees made a distinction between lower level and higher level writing courses, two of them indicating that there should be a stronger focus on grammar in the former. There seemed to be, in general terms, agreement about the types of content appropriate for writing courses. However, wording used by at least three of the interviewees suggests that their views may have been strongly influenced by a particular textbook written by Oshima and Hogue (1991), one that was actually referred to directly by one of the interviewees.

As far as textual cohesion is concerned, although the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and many national language curricula clearly signal the inclusion of some cohesive devices from the very early stages of language learning, just under two thirds of respondents indicated that they would *not* include cohesive devices at beginner level and just under one quarter that they would *not* do so at elementary level. So far as genre is concerned, a considerable number of respondents indicated that they would *not* include *description*, *recount* or *instruction* at beginner (55%, 48%, and 59% respectively) or elementary levels (32%, 36%, and 35.5% respectively) or *argument* at intermediate (32%) or advanced levels (29%) (see Table 8-4 below for those who would include these genres at particular levels).

Table 8-4: Percentage of participants who would include particular genres at particular levels or who did not respond.

Content	Beginner	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
Recount	52%	64%	48%	46%
Narrative	41%	64.5%	63%	43%
Instruction	41%	50%	57%	42%
Argument	1%	13%	58%	71%
Report	6.5%	20%	62%	73%
Explanation	4%	35.5%	74%	61%
Description	45%	68%	62%	48%

In this general area of discourse, there was evidence of some widely differing views and considerable confusion. Thus, for example, an almost equal number of questionnaire respondents indicated that they would or

would not include *description*, *recount* and *instruction* at beginner level, and *ellipsis* and *substitution* at intermediate level, and although only just over half indicated that they would include *types of linkage between clauses* at elementary level (55%), well over three quarters (86%) indicated that they would include *cohesive devices* at that level. In connection with this, it is relevant to note that none of the programme documentation provided by the interviewees makes any reference to ellipsis or substitution or, with the exception of one very general reference in one institution's documentation, to types of semantic links between clauses. Also, in the case of one of the institutions, the programme documentation supplied makes no reference at all to genre. In the case of another, reference is made to genre in programme documentation in very general terms (e.g., 'various genres') except on one occasion (when reference is made to 'simple narrative' at pre-intermediate level). So far as the documentation relating to the other two institutions is concerned, one set refers to *narrative* at elementary level, and to *narrative*, *recount*, *report* and *instruction* at intermediate level; the other includes a combination of very general references to genre and some more specific references (e.g., 'narrative and argument') at one of the higher levels.

In addition to signalling the types of content they considered appropriate for the courses offered by their institutions, the interviewees provided some information about the overall focus of courses at different levels, their responses suggesting an orientation towards the type of proportional approach recommended by Yalden (1983). Thus, for example, all of the interviewees signalled a general move from a focus on clause, sentence and paragraph construction in the earlier stages to a more discourse-focused one later and, finally, a focus on skills specific to academic contexts. One of the interviewees signalled that there was a greater focus on grammar in the early stages of her institution's programmes, another observed that at the highest level, her institution's EAP programme was combined with mainstream study and included subject/discipline-related vocabulary and topics.

While the vast majority of the questionnaire participants indicated that they were currently more confident about what they should teach in core language development courses (87.5%), and writing courses (86%) than they were when they began teaching, it appears that this confidence may not necessarily be matched by competence in the area of syllabus design. Thus, for example, although most (78%) of the participants indicated that they could provide a list of specific outcomes for each of their courses if asked to do so, fewer (67%) actually provided an example and very few of these examples were clearly indicative of what the students were expected

to be able to do using the target language on completion of the course, the majority either lacking language indicators altogether or being too general to be measurable. Interviewee responses to a number of questions suggest that at least some of them may be equally uncertain about course outcome specification. Asked whether their institutional curricula included a list of objectives/outcomes/‘can-do’ statements and whether, if so, an example could be provided, three of the interviewees indicated that such a list was available but none of them provided an example. In fact, all but one of the sets of documentation supplied *do* include achievement objectives in the form of ‘can-do’ statements. However, these statements vary considerably in terms of degree of specificity, often being open to a wide range of possible interpretations.

Conclusion

In the area of curriculum and syllabus design, the findings of this research project suggest that there is a considerable lack of fit between belief and practice. While all of the interviewees and most of the questionnaire respondents reported that they believed it was important to have explicit curriculum and syllabus documentation for the programmes and courses provided by their institutions, most of the curriculum documents provided by the interviewees were found to be expressed in very general terms (sometimes with overlapping descriptors for courses at different levels) and almost half of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they did not refer in planning their courses to such institutional documentation as was available, with approximately one third reporting heavy reliance on commercially produced textbooks. Furthermore, while most of the research participants appeared to favour something along the lines of the type of the proportional syllabus type proposed by Yalden (1983), there was evidence of considerable uncertainty about how learning objectives might be specified, what types of content might be appropriate and what aspects of language and discourse should be included at different levels. What all of this suggests is that while the many different proposals relating to language syllabus design types that have been forwarded over the past few decades may have alerted language teachers and language programme managers to the fact that language syllabuses may include a wide range of different types of content, they have done little to alert them to the specific details of different types of proposal and the theoretical rationales that underpin them. Overall, second language teaching appears currently to be marked by confusion and uncertainty in the area of curriculum and syllabus design.

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