Exploring Curriculum Alignment through Syllabus Document Analysis: From National Language Policy to Local ELT Practice

Anthony Wotring [a, *], Honglin Chen [a], Mark Fraser [a]

[a] *University of Wollongong, Australia*

A B S T R A C T

Effective syllabus document design hinges on an alignment between learning objectives, teaching principles and curricular policy. Much of the work on syllabus design in the English Language Teaching (ELT) context focuses on the implementation of language teaching principles, such as those from the Communication Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Limited attention has been paid to this alignment, which is pivotal for ensuring the coherence and consistency between the intended outcomes, content selection and organisation, and assessment tasks. Employing qualitative document analysis (QDA), this study identifies the core syllabus elements and their alignment with current teaching approaches in twelve, localised ELT syllabuses. Utilising elements from Richards and Rodgers' (2014) methods analysis and Nunan's (1988) syllabus design, the analysis demonstrates that while CLT principles have been incorporated into the syllabuses, misalignments remain, such as those between intended objectives and assessment tasks. This paper offers an analytic framework to guide teachers in designing a more closely aligned syllabus and making visible its connections.

Keywords: syllabus design; communicative language teaching; document analysis

© *Urmia University Press*

* Corresponding author: School of Education, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Australia
Email address: arw891@uowmail.edu.au

Introduction

Curriculum, as a concept, in English as a foreign language (EFL) courses comes in many forms: from a localised syllabus document outlining a list of discrete language learning features to a national policy focused on developing language skills for global proficiency (Breen, 1987; Finney, 2002). Recent curricular reforms in many Asian countries have attempted to embed Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles into syllabus design, re-orienting the classroom dynamic from teacher-directed instruction to a learner-centred approach. These reforms focus on improving students' English communicative capabilities through meaningful communication (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016; Savignon, 2005), i.e., purposeful and authentic communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Nunan, 1991). Japan (MEXT, 2015), the People's Republic of China (hereafter, China; Cheng, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2011), and South Korea (DeWaelsche, 2015), for example, designate enhancing students' communicative abilities as central to English language curriculums. Little attention, however, has been given to investigating how these policy reforms aimed at improving language learning outcomes transformed into syllabus document components.

It has long been acknowledged that effective classroom innovation depends upon an alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment (Anderson, 2002; Bernstein, 2004). The syllabus document is an example of attempts made by those responsible for course design to forge such an alignment. Syllabus documents developed for Asian EFL classrooms reflect an intent to specify target linguistic forms, communicative tasks, and course objectives (Ellis, 2009). However, it is yet unknown how these elements are integrated into the syllabus documents and aligned with broader curriculum and policy goals. A closer analysis of syllabus documents created for EFL teachers in Asian contexts, specifically in China, Japan, and South Korea, will provide greater insight into the relationships within syllabus documents, moving beyond mere descriptions of their constituent elements.

Using a qualitative document analysis (QDA) methodology (Bowen, 2009; Rapley, 2007), this study draws on existing descriptions of syllabus components (Nunan, 1988; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) to explore and interpret curriculum alignment in syllabus documents designed to guide teaching and learning in Asian EFL classrooms. If national education policies are integral in directing pedagogy and practice (Fullan, 1994) and these policies now house communicative objectives (Hu & McKay, 2012), then such reforms *should* be evidenced within the syllabus documents enacting said policies. Incorporating syllabus document analysis into the language teaching discourse is critically important to identify and strengthen effective curriculum alignment through course design.

Literature Review

Curriculum Alignment

The curriculum in EFL higher education contexts plays a central role in course organisation and implementation often perceived as guiding or informing classroom practice (Li & Yuan, 2013; Tan & Guo, 2014; Yassi, 2018). Curriculum, as Finney (2002) details, covers the selected content, the course organisation, and the assessments and tasks. The unique relationship between these components can be investigated through the concept of 'curriculum alignment', which seeks to both identify and strengthen the relationship between these components (Anderson, 2002). Although the concept of alignment attempts to make visible the connections between these core components (Meij & Merx, 2018), there is a paucity of understanding of its role in realising learning objectives and policy expectations in a syllabus document. Such understanding is

important because of the crucial role of a syllabus document to orientate teachers and students to course objectives, content, and assessment and instructional materials.

Parkes and Harris (2002) perceive the syllabus document serving three simultaneous functions in higher education contexts: a social contract, a permanent record, and a learning aid. By informing students of teacher expectations, the syllabus acts as a tangible resource for students (Parkes & Harris, 2002). Likewise, an effective syllabus document promotes student understanding of both '*how* to learn in a class as well as *what* to learn' (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2014, p. 16, emphasis in original). Language teaching literature, however, primarily construes the syllabus document as written for instructors (Nunan, 1988), rather than documents constructed around students' uses or needs.

An important consideration informing syllabus design is the theoretical underpinnings through which students' needs are perceived. In the EFL context, these theoretical principles connecting teaching practice and national curriculum reforms are typically rooted in CLT (Littlewood, 2007; Thompson & Yanagita, 2017). The CLT approach to language teaching focuses on improving students' English communicative capabilities through meaningful communication (Kirkpatrick & Bui, 2016; Savignon, 2005). By promoting the co-construction of meaning through purposeful and authentic communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Nunan, 1991), the CLT approach aims to develop students' communicative skills emphasising the importance of learner interactions in the target language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This communicative goal can be realised through activities that possess 'communicative intent' (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 141), thereby authentically linking the conversations inside and outside of the classroom. Yet it is not known how the intentions of CLT principles align to the students' learning needs through syllabus document design.

The reconceptualisation of what it means to learn a language has provided considerable impetus for curriculum innovations, resulting in a re-orientation of the classroom dynamic from teacher-directed instruction to learner-centred communication (Littlewood, 2007; Moodie & Nam (2016). Investigations into factors impacting CLT adoption are often limited to analyses of classroom practice or teacher beliefs (e.g., Chung & Choi, 2016; Hu & McKay, 2012). Regularly reported in the research is the failure to successfully realise CLT due to a wide range of militating concerns such as large classroom sizes and students' reticence to participate in communicative courses (Bax, 2003; Chang & Goswami, 2011). Less frequently reported in the literature is an analysis of the classroom's guiding framework, here realised as the syllabus document, in enacting these trends. For example, attempts to modify existing syllabuses through a needs analysis (Remache & Ibrahim, 2018) or task-based approach (Cao, 2018) reveal deep conceptual misalignments in their treatment of syllabus. Seen prominently in Bakar (2020) is this blending of the concept of the syllabus, the overarching direction of a curriculum, with the syllabus document, the physical representation of a course's syllabus. These few empirical studies into language courses' syllabuses may be representative of a want of theoretical rigour contributing to uncertainty in both research and pedagogical decisions (see, e.g., Cirocki, Anam, & Retnaningdyah, 2019; Seifoori, 2020). We argue that there is a need to refine the definition of a syllabus as a concept in order to inform an analysis of the syllabus document.

Syllabus Analysis

Our understanding of the syllabus design and its analysis are informed by the works of Nunan (1988) and Richards and Rodgers (2014). Nunan's (1988) seminal work identifies fundamental syllabus elements, including the teacher's enactment of a syllabus, the role of theories of language and language learning, and the objectives orienting this learning. These elements serve to both inform, or 'signpost', the learners of the syllabus designers' pedagogical choices while

simultaneously demonstrating how the syllabus has been oriented to students' language learning needs (Nunan, 1988). Nunan conceived of two syllabus orientations: product-oriented syllabuses focusing on the 'knowledge and skills', and process-oriented syllabuses directing 'the learning experiences themselves' (Nunan, 1988, p. 27), which were further refined as synthetic (i.e., featuring discrete language structures) and analytical (i.e., emphasising whole text learning) syllabuses. These orientations, which serve to specify a designer's methodology and intended outcomes, can be applied to a plethora of syllabus types, including grammatical syllabuses focusing on mastering increasingly complex items, notional syllabuses focusing on a set of functions to be acquired, or task-based syllabuses focusing on development of content and communicative skills (Breen, 1987; Cao, 2018; Nunan, 1988). However such concepts and descriptions, while useful in interpreting and evaluating the design of syllabuses at an official- or national-level, do not necessarily supply an individual teacher or syllabus designer with a coherent framework to guide or examine their own syllabus documents.

Richards and Rodgers' (2014) framework comprises three overarching elements: the *approach*, *design*, and *procedures*, shown in Figure 1, each of which deals with, respectively, the theoretical nature of language and language learning, the organising principles and methods, and the teachers' techniques, practices, and observable behaviour. Viewed through this lens, a curriculum's methods are 'theoretically related to an approach, [are] organisationally determined by a design, and [are] practically realized in procedure' (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 36), which provides insights into the kind of connections or alignment that are created in the syllabus design.
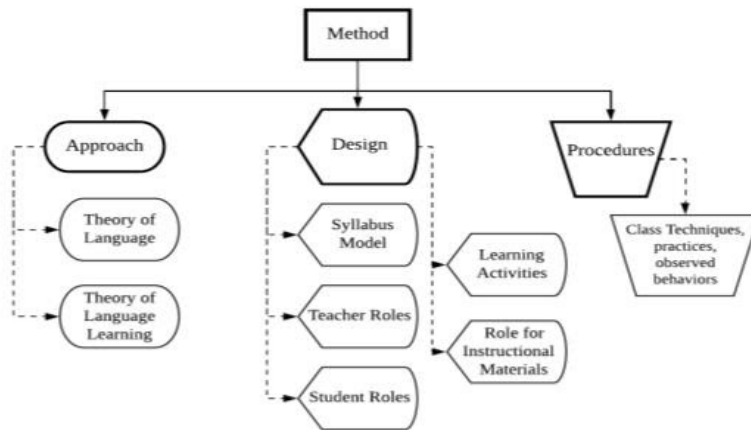

Figure 1. Conceptualisation of Richards and Rodgers' (2014) Methods Model.

Pertinent to this paper's analysis are six elements specified in Richards and Rodgers' (2014) model. Firstly, theories of the nature of language and theories of language learning serve as the basis for a teaching method. These two aspects deal respectively with the purposes of language and how language, a second or foreign language in this context, is acquired. Teacher and student roles specify the instruction, responsibilities, and status taken up or allocated among these classroom participants. Instructional materials serve as a bridge to meet course objectives through course content organisation. It should be noted that several additional elements, including the entire procedures level, are not considered in this paper, as it is impractical to employ the complete teaching methods model in a syllabus analysis. Absent in Richards and Rodgers' model is a clear explanation of the relationship between the elements and how they form a connected and visible methodology, curriculum, or syllabus document.

Nunan's (1988) description of syllabus design corresponds with Richards and Rodgers' methods model in several key respects. Integral to Nunan's (1988) syllabus design are four considerations: 'the nature of language and language learning' (p. 18), 'the role of the classroom teacher' (p. 7), 'objectives' (p. 61), and 'selecting and sequencing content' (p. 10). Pertinent to syllabus analysis, Nunan suggests that by holistically examining these core elements the nature of a syllabus can be assessed. A close analysis of Richards and Rodgers' model shows that the content selection and sequencing is also a key consideration across methodologies. The intersections between the two reflect Nunan's (1988, p. 52) assertion that 'the traditional distinction between syllabus design (specifying the "what") and methodology (specifying the "how") has become blurred'.

One notable aspect of the two models is the stance that both take towards syllabus design. Both centrally place the instructor's perspective in design and analysis. For example, Nunan argues that his intent is 'to present the central issues and options available for syllabus design in order to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for evaluating, ...modifying and adapting the syllabuses' (1988, p. 8). Richards and Rodgers' model describes language teaching methods so teachers and curriculum designers may make more informed pedagogical decisions, and thereby improve teaching quality. Although a dearth of research employs these models to guide language teaching practice, little recent investigation explores the alignment within existing syllabus documents.

Research Context

Education standards across the linguistically and culturally diverse East Asian region have, broadly speaking, seen a shift from traditional language teaching approaches (e.g., grammar, translation approaches) towards a more communicative approach (Hu & McKay, 2012). These innovations in language teaching and learning place a greater emphasis on communicative language objectives and methods. For example, South Korea's national curricular revisions remodelled language teaching from structural, grammatical approaches to student-centred objectives targeting learners' communicative abilities (Moodie & Nam, 2016). This policy shift, as discerned by Chung and Choi (2016, p. 296), represents the government's continuing 'efforts to make English teaching to be communication-oriented'. Similarly, Japanese English policy reforms endorsed early compulsory English education as a strategy to foster students' English communicative competence (Tahira, 2012). China has likewise seen CLT initiatives directed through a 'top-down' policy approach, with the government prescribing specific language targets (Hu & McKay, 2012). For example, the College English curriculum in China requires 'university English language programs … [to produce] students able to communicate through spoken and written English' (Gil, 2016, p. 68). In Thailand, education policies further designate English as a communicative tool meant to be used outside the classroom (Hayes, 2010). These four countries necessarily vary in precise methods of localised policy translation; but connecting them is the concern in designing English language teaching (ELT) curricula that prepare EFL students for communication. An examination into how these connections are made within the syllabus document across EFL tertiary classrooms is necessary in order to understand how language instructors and syllabus designers attempt to address students' needs.

Methodology

Data informing this paper were drawn from EFL course syllabus documents from universities in China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. This document analysis seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How can the descriptions of syllabus components be used to examine the alignment of national language policy and CLT principles in localised syllabus documents?

- What can be learned of the alignment and relationship among the syllabus document components through this analysis?

Document Selection and Analysis

Using purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016 a total of twelve English syllabus documents were selected from four universities from China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand as detailed in Table 1. Suitable syllabus documents publicly available via the Internet were selected based upon the following criteria: 1) designed in public, higher education institutions, 2) intended for use in either basic or intermediate EFL courses, 3) recently developed syllabus documents (2018-2019), and, 4) originated in the East Asian region. While these criteria may not provide a comprehensive sample of tertiary ELT in the targeted region, these inclusion criteria will yield valuable insights into higher education English syllabuses in these contexts and potentially be representative of current syllabus document design in similar EFL contexts.

Despite the fact that these documents are publicly available, pseudonyms were used to minimise any risk of identifying the institutions or teaching staff. The following section details our analysis of the sampled documents utilising the syllabus descriptions, as supplied by Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Nunan (1988): the course objectives and the course content and its organisation; the roles and relationships among materials, teachers and students; and the documents' orientations of language and language learning theories.

Table 1
Characteristics of Sampled Syllabus Documents

Country	English Course Name	Instructor(s)	Year
China	College English (CE) I, II, III *N= 3*	N/A	2018
Japan	Fundamental English *N=1*	Suzuki	2019
	English Writing-Listening *N=2*	William, Yosuke	
South Korea	College English 1 *N=3*	Paul, Yoonsook, Topher	2019
Thailand	Foundation English 1, II *N=2*	N/A	2019
	Fundamental English Listening and Speaking *N=1*		

This study adopts the stance that documents are to be actively engaged with, rather than perceived as neutral documents to be quantified and coded (Rapley, 2007). QDA allows investigation into the underlying meaning within documents while seeking 'to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon' (Bowen, 2009, p. 32), with the phenomenon investigated here being syllabus documents alignment. Following the document selection was an iterative reading, re-reading, and coding process (Bowen, 2009), employing predefined codes informed by the syllabus document components listed above. For each of the syllabus documents, the researchers first identified the seven key components. The components were then coded for their intertextual

connections (i.e., their relationship between the other components). Finally, a synthesis of these findings across the individual syllabus documents was sought to provide an understanding of the sample as a whole.

Results and Discussion

Connecting Course Objectives to Content Selection and Organisation Principles

We expected that the selected content and organisation would centre on providing students with communicative, interactive opportunities given the previously discussed policy movements. However, our analysis of the course objectives and content's alignment revealed disconnections among these components and a lack of clarity in their relation to students' perceived communicative needs. The English courses as described in the syllabus documents aim to enable students' communication and engagement in 'simple activities and tasks in daily life' (Foundation English II, Thailand). The selection of course objectives appears to have followed CLT principles as they are couched in language that emphasises authenticity, interactivity and language learning for communicative purposes. Students are expected to develop the ability to 'converse fluently on everyday topics' (College English I, China) and 'improve [their] overall English competence by focusing on both receptive and productive skills' (Yoonsook, Korea). For example, the Chinese College English curriculum intends to 'develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way ... so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively' (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2007, p. 24). Objectives in these foundational courses often directly link language learning within and beyond the classroom, as seen in Suziki's (Japan) Fundamental English course: 'This interactive English language course … will also prepare you for English-medium/English-taught courses, English proficiency tests ... and studying abroad.' It would be expected that the content selection and course organisation would directly connect the stated language learning objectives to students' authentic language learning needs; however, such a connection did not appear to be in evidence.

Content in these syllabuses appeared to be selected from and organised around the course textbook, centring topics purportedly involving real-world interests. Course schedules indicate the primacy of textbook units or chapters with weekly topics attending to subjects like 'College Life: Ten Secrets for Success as a College Freshman' (College English I, China); 'Lifestyle' (Foundation English 1, Thailand); or 'Ch. 3 Nutrition Studies', and 'Ch. 7 Forensics' (Yoonsook, Korea). Critiques of the centrality of textbooks in course content organisation point to the selected contents' disconnection from students' lived experiences or interests (see Tomlinson 2012), a disconnect noticeable within the sampled syllabuses. For example, the College English I (China) course dedicates four class meetings to the 'wonders of crystals'. Certainly students majoring in geology or engaged in related hobbies could consider this unit as a 'personalised, relevant and engaging' language learning experience; but, generalising the appropriateness of this extended period of study to other learners may raise concerns about how meaningful the class communication may be (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 159). The argument put forward here is not whether teachers should do away with or continue to use textbooks. Rather, course designers and language instructors should carefully weigh course content decisions in order to promote classroom discussions and topics connected to the students' authentic language learning aims established in the course objectives.

Establishing Roles: Restrictive, Evaluative, and Imbalanced Dynamics for Materials, Teachers and Students

Analysing the roles of instructional materials, teachers and students further challenged the communicative aims and functions of the documents' design. The instructional materials and activities set down in these syllabus documents vary as the majority of these courses attempt to cover the four English skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Assessment tasks included in the syllabuses feature both non-communicative and communication-oriented tasks (Nunan, 1991). As indicated in the documents, individualised, non-communicative tasks would not require contributions from an interactive partner, for example listening tests (Yosuke, Japan), dictation (Foundation English I, Thailand), and writing submissions (College English II, China; William, Japan; Yoonsook, Korea). While written texts can be construed as communication; however, the communicative function of writing does not centrally feature in these tasks. By way of example, Topher's (Korea) first writing assignment intends to recognise 'how academic English prefers a definitive structure'. Such a structural orientation places a greater emphasis on the written form over the communicative purpose of the writing. Similarly, in an ostensibly communication-oriented task students are 'asked to write a formal email to the instructor' (Yoonsook, Korea). Yet again the task's focus on 'following the proper email conventions in the formal academic setting'. This class activity could have served dual purposes, promoting specific writing skills and bringing about a closer, albeit formal, connection between teachers and students. As evidenced here, however, the courses' syllabus document stresses adherence to form and conventions over communication.

Nevertheless, examples of communicative tasks are evident in the syllabus documents. These include, for example, role-plays (Foundation English II, Thailand) and debates (Suzuki, Japan). These more collaborative activities call on the exchange of cultural information and personal opinions. These activities seemingly align with national standards, as seen in Thailand's language objectives meant to support the use of foreign languages 'in various situations in the classroom, in community and in the global society' (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 267). Assessments, in contrast to these communicative goals, tend to be oriented to students' acquired knowledge, as seen in Foundational English II's (Thailand) description of the final exam:

> Final Examination (30 points)
>
> The exam will evaluate students in the following aspects:
>
> - vocabulary from Unit 1-6,
> - expressions especially from Part 2: Speaking in Unit 1-6,
> - grammar from Unit 1-6,
> - reading comprehension on the relevant topics.

Display-oriented, summative assessments reflect this course's connection to textbook content and depart from the courses' communication-driven objectives. Grammar-oriented assessments paired with intermittent communicative tasks typify the discord within the other syllabus documents between course design and instructional materials, as well as serving the imbalanced relationship between teachers and students.

This striking feature, the teachers' role in directing and regulating students' behaviour, appears common across the syllabus documents (Bernstein, 2004). Substantial space is devoted to explicating classroom expectations and class policies, thus relegating students to a more passive role in classroom interactions. Positioning students in this manner is most pronounced in Topher's (Korea) syllabus, in which three complete pages of a seven-page document detail

compliant student behaviour. To delve a little deeper into this restrictive imbalance, an entire paragraph is devoted to classroom 'respect' (i.e., cleanliness). The use of smartphones is regarded as taboo, permitted only when 'signalled by me', or students risk losing participation points. Food, drink, and even headwear are all either expressly prohibited or given lengthy explanations for their sanctioned and tightly controlled use. The other sampled syllabus documents similarly portray the teacher as regulator and evaluator of classroom practice and interaction, although not to such a drastic degree. Students in Fundamental English (Thailand) are succinctly, but no less bluntly, told 'No uniform No attendance'. Likewise in Suzuki's (Japan) Speaking and Writing class, students 'MUST ... check their mail every day' and should this prove challenging, students 'should not take this class'. Preoccupation with procedural concerns may be an attempt to set expectations (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2014) for students choosing language courses. However, regulative discourse may not be conducive in promoting classroom communication between instructors and assumed independent, adult students (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

Compared with teachers' roles, students are more often framed as passive classroom participants within these documents. Studies in the teacher-student relationship in mainstream university courses highlight that incongruities between students' expectations and realities (e.g., their 'connectedness' to their instructors) can result in decreases in student retention (Brinkworth, et al., 2009; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Not only does this imbalanced social dynamic risk distancing these participants, but it also categorically contrasts with the learner-centred characteristics and learning aims of national curricula (Ministry of Education, South Korea, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2015).

Responsibilities for students in these syllabus documents are limited to producing outputs: either achieving specified language standards, completing classwork, or exhibiting behaviours aligned to classroom procedures. Although quantifiable language learning standards are unique to Chinese contexts, as seen in reading objectives: 'Students will be able to read articles of general topics at the speed of 130wpm with an accuracy of 75%' (College English III, China), many of the syllabuses have similarly product-oriented objectives. Paul's (Korea) College English I class forewarns students on the dangers of online tutorials and '*Forgetting to do it* [online tutorials] *will ruin your grade*' (emphasis in original). Even in allowing student choice in assessment (Suzuki, Japan), limitations include the selection to two of six elective assignments, either: 'Group presentation', 'Chanting a song', 'Mock speaking test', 'Debate participation', 'Writing (communication)', 'Writing (statement)'. Linking expected class outcomes and assessments to performance objectives can afford students with clear goals, transparent evaluation criteria, and accountability in course selection (Finney, 2002). However, as Kelly (1989, as cited in Finney, 2002) points out, the fundamental criticism with production-oriented objectives is that it 'philosophically reduces people to the level of automatons' (p. 72). Taken altogether our analysis uncovers a tenuous relationship among the classroom participants, instructional materials, and course goals, which may be attributed to an ill-defined use of foundational language theories.

Implicit Language Theories: Inconsistent Orientations and Obscured Foundations

Identifying the precise theories of language and language learning is particularly challenging considering the previously discussed misalignments. As such, these foundational understandings, which should ground all other syllabus elements, need to be examined throughout the syllabuses' constituent components (i.e., the objectives, course organisation, and assessments). Our analysis of the language and language learning theories had to be conducted in such a fashion as statements on the document designers' beliefs on language and language learning were evidenced. These university courses are, purportedly, purposefully 'interactive' (Suzuki, Japan) aimed at equipping students to 'build their communicative skills to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions effectively' (Yoonsook, Korea). The expressed, and previously discussed, objectives

seemingly align with the functional or interactional models of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Such models perceive language as a process to negotiate interpersonal meaning (Brown, 2001), a tool to mediate understanding and maintain social relationships (Halliday, 1969), or a social construction through which both knowledge and context are used to bridge comprehension (Donato & MacCormick, 1994). However, the prevalence of idiomatic expressions like 'rags to riches' in the 'American Dream' unit (College English III, China) or even cultural references like 'Only a Sith Deals in Absolutes' (Paul, Korea), though undeniably authentic in the target language, may prompt one to question the instructor's interpretation, or even foundational knowledge, of communicative language learning theory. Nonetheless, the above analysis on utilised models of language is based on an interpretation of the syllabus documents' implicit components. As seen in the above discussion on the content organisation and assessment design, these structural syllabuses based on product-oriented language learning approaches are in disconcert with the communicative course objectives. Such foundational interpretations about language and language learning should be easily recognised, but the misalignment between the explicit syllabus elements obscures these essential theoretical underpinnings necessary to support informed teaching practice.

Towards an Analytic Framework

Our discussion utilised existing syllabus elements from Nunan (1988) and Richards and Rogers (2014) to examine curriculum alignment in EFL syllabus documents. We found that syllabus designers in our sample employed differing, sometimes conflicting, theoretical, methodological, and practical approaches to meet students' communicative outcomes. These syllabus document descriptions may only serve to challenge language teachers and not support them in designing more aligned documents. What is needed is a mapping tool, or framework, to help syllabus document designers make visible the connections between these critical elements (Meij & Merx, 2018).

The misalignments revealed through our syllabus analysis point to the importance of an organisational and relational framework that assisted us in evaluating our sampled documents. In Figure 2, we propose an analytical framework integrating elements from Richards and Rodgers' (2014) model for method analysis and Nunan's (1988) syllabus design. Our framework is designed around three conceptual levels. At the heart of these foundational elements informing a syllabus document's design is the theory, or theories, of language and language learning. These elements serve to theoretically ground the syllabus document and provide overarching cohesion throughout the subsequent levels.

Building upon this theoretical understanding, the roles of the learners, teachers, and the instructional materials connect theory to course content and objectives. Together, these roles inform participants on their expected responsibilities and repertoires of participation in the classroom. This middle level is crucial to ensuring how the various components coherently interact with one another. These interactions are guided by the uppermost level, encompassing the course objectives and course content and its sequencing. These elements can be perceived as organising the entire syllabus document, alternatively, they may also be seen as the instantiation of the underlying, more abstract levels. This three-tiered structure contributes to understanding the interplay of these elements as opposed to taking a merely descriptive approach seen in the two models drawn upon. We conceptualise this framework as a tool to explore syllabus documents' alignment with pedagogical principles or, should there be conflicts within these documents, allow for an investigation at the classroom-level, as we have previously presented.
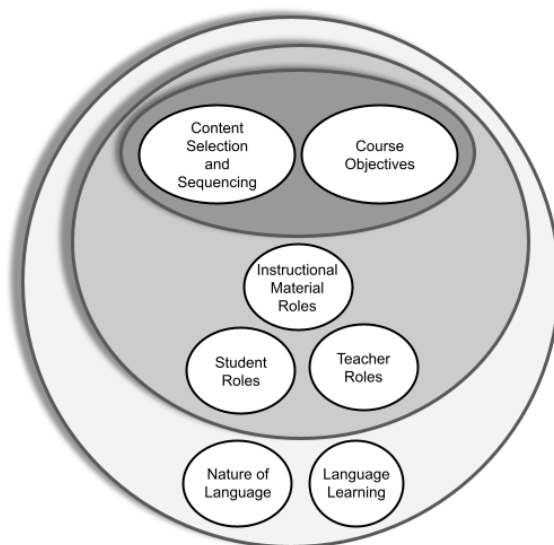
Figure 2. Proposed Analytical Framework for Syllabus Document Analysis

Implications and Conclusions

ELT teachers face difficult choices in syllabus document design, ranging from promoting authentic language experiences to addressing national policy alignment. Important in these considerations should also be students' perceptions. Should syllabus document designers intend for these documents to serve a communicative function between teachers and students, they may be obliged to seriously investigate the *what* of their syllabuses alongside the *how* learning occurs in the classroom. EFL teachers must strive to balance policy demands with students' needs if successful educational practice is to truly address pedagogic and localised concerns (Bax, 2003). Seen within this sample is what may occur when such alignments are not made visible.

Our above analysis may also be perceived as a word of caution when designing syllabus documents tailored to localised ELT practices. These syllabus documents are indeed so localised as to be individual representations of a single instructor's choices. What is evidenced here is that when individualised syllabus documents lack a coherent and aligned organisational structure, the document itself may approach language teaching and learning in a fractured manner. Syllabus document designers may confront such incoherencies simply with explicit statements of their understanding of language and learning. Making visible these foundational orientations can ensure that all subsequent elements align. Demonstrated in this analysis is what can happen when these theoretical understandings are left implicit, and, oftentimes, disconnected from explicit communicative objectives.

It is our hope that ELT instructors can utilise the inter-level links within our framework when reflecting on their courses. Construing students in syllabus documents as co-constructors of knowledge in the classroom instead of passive participants following procedures may foster improved connections between language learners and teachers. Our proposed analytical framework positions these documents as a crucial communication tool and will, hopefully,

support EFL learners and teachers towards achieving more aligned and effective language learning experiences.

References

Anderson, L. W. (2002). Curricular alignment: A re-examination. *Theory Into Practice*, *41*(4), 255-260. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4104_9

Bakar, E. W. (2020). Can-do descriptors–realigning English language curriculum at higher education institution to CEFR. *International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics*, *4*(2), 84-97. https://doi.org/10.24191/ijmal.v4i2.7975

Bax, S. (2003). The end of CLT: A context approach to language teaching. *ELT Journal, 57*(3), 278-287. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/57.3.278

Bernstein, B. (2004). *The Structuring of pedagogic discourse.* Routledge.

Breen, M. P. (1987) Contemporary paradigms in syllabus design Part II. *Language Teaching, 20*(3), 157-174. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480000450X

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27-40. https://doi:10.3316/QRJ0902027

Brinkworth, R., McCann, B., Matthews, C., & Nordström, K. (2009). First year expectations and experiences: Student and teacher perspectives. *Higher Education, 58*(2), 157-173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9188-3

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An Interactive approach to language pedagogy.* Longman.

Cao, P. T. H. (2018). Task-based language teaching: Affordances and challenges in TBLT implementation at the Vietnamese tertiary level. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, *15*(2), 510-514. http://dx.doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2018.15.2.19.510

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, *1*, 1-47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1

Chang, M., & Goswami, J. S. (2011). Factors affecting the implementation of communicative language teaching in Taiwanese college English classes. *English Language Teaching, 4*(2), 3-12. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n2p3

Cheng, X. (2011). The 'English curriculum standards' in China: Rationales and issues. In A. Feng (Ed.), *English language education across greater China* (pp. 133-150). Multilingual Matters.

Chung, J., & Choi, T. (2016). English education policies in South Korea: Planned and enacted. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 281-299). Springer.

Cirocki, A., Anam, S., & Retnaningdyah, P. (2019). Readiness for autonomy in English language learning: The case of Indonesian high school students. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, *7*(2), 1-18.

DeWaelsche, S. A. (2015). Critical thinking, questioning and student engagement in Korean university English courses. *Linguistics and Education, 31*, 131-147. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2015.10.003

Donato, R., & MacCormick, D. (1994). A sociocultural perspective on language learning strategies: The role of mediation. *The Modern Language Journal, 78*(4), 453-464. https://doi.org/10.2307/328584

Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 19*(3), 221-246. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2009.00231.x

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, 5*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

Finney, D. (2002). The ELT curriculum: A flexible model for a changing world. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 69-79). Cambridge University Press.

Fullan, M. (1994). Coordinating top-down and bottom-up strategies for educational reform. In R. J. Anson (Ed.), *Systemic reform: Perspectives on personalizing education* (pp. 7-24). Falmer.

Gil, J. (2016). English language education policies in the People's Republic of China. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 49-90). Springer.

Hagenauer, G., & Volet, S. E. (2014). Teacher–student relationship at university: an important yet under-researched field. *Oxford Review of Education, 40*(3), 370-388. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.921613

Halliday, M. A. (1969). Relevant models of language. *Educational Review, 22*(1), 26-37. https://doi.org/10.1080/0013191690220104

Hayes, D. (2010). Language learning, teaching and educational reform in rural Thailand: An English teacher's perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 30*(3), 305-319. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2010.495843

Hu, G., & McKay, S. L. (2012). English language education in East Asia: Some recent developments. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 33*(4), 345-362. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2012.661434

Kirkpatrick, R., & Bui, T. T. N. (2016). Introduction: The Challenges for English education policies in Asia. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 1-23). Springer.

Larsen- Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. OUP.

Li, H., & Yuan, Y. (2013). Comparison and contrast of English language planning and policy for senior secondary education between mainland China and Hong Kong. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *22*(4), 439-447. 439–447. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-012-0043-z

Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching, 40*(3), 243-249. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444807004363

McKeachie, W., & Svinicki, M. (2014). *McKeachie's teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers.* Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Meij, L. W., & Merx, S. (2018). Improving curriculum alignment and achieving learning goals by making the curriculum visible. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *23*(3), 219-231. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2018.1462187

MEXT (2015). *Plans on the promotion of improvement of students' English abilities.* Available at: www.mext.go.jp/en/news/topics/detail/1378469.htm (accessed 6 December 2019).

Ministry of Education, PRC (2007). *Daxue yingyu kecheng jiaoxue yaoqiu* [College English Curriculum Requirements]. Beijing: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education, PRC (2011). *English curriculum standards for compulsory education.* Beijing: People's Education Press.

Ministry of Education, South Korea (2007). *Education Vision for the Future Curriculum, Instruction and Evaluation in South Korea (I): New Directions for Korean Elementary and Secondary School Curricula.* Available at: www.ncic.re.kr/english.dwn.ogf.inventoryList.do# (accessed 6 December 2019).

Ministry of Education, South Korea (2015). *The National Curriculum for the Primary and Secondary Schools.* Available at: www.ncic.re.kr/english.dwn.ogf.inventoryList.do# (accessed 6 December 2019).

Ministry of Education, Thailand (2008). *The Basic education core curriculum B.E.2551 (AD 2008).* Available at: www.ipst.ac.th/images/2017/CoreCurriculum2551/EN.pdf (accessed 6 December 2019).

Moodie, I., & Nam, H. J. (2016). English language teaching research in South Korea: A review of recent studies. *Language Teaching, 49*(1), 63-98. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144481500035X

Nunan, D. (1988). *Syllabus design.* Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D. (1991). Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly, 25*(2), 279-95. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587464

Parkes, J., & Harris, M. B. (2002). The purposes of a syllabus. *College Teaching, 50*(2), 55-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567550209595875

Rapley, T. (2007). *Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis.* Sage.

Remache, A., & Ibrahim, M. K. (2018). Business English syllabus design: Putting students' needs first. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, *7*(4), 81-93. Available at: https://ideas.repec.org/a/asi/ijells/2018p81-93.html (accessed 8 June 202)

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T, S, (2014), *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Savignon, S. J. (2005). Communicative language teaching: Strategies and goals. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 659-676). Routledge.

Seifoori, Z. (2020). Negotiated Strategic Awareness-Raising at Postgraduate Level: Contributions to Reading Comprehension and Content Retention. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research, 8*(2), 115-132.

Tahira, M. (2012). Behind MEXT's new course of study guidelines. *The Language Teacher, 36*(3), 3–8. Retrieved from: https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/36.3_art1.pdf

Tan, L., & Guo, L. (2014). Multiliteracies in an outcome-driven curriculum: Where is its fit?. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *23*(1), 29-36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-013-0082-0

Thompson, G., & Yanagita, M. (2017). Backward yakudoku: an attempt to implement CLT at a Japanese high school. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 11*(2), 177-187. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2015.1088856

Tomlinson, B. (2012). Materials development for language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching, 45*(2), 143-79. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000528

Yassi, A. H. (2018). *Syllabus Design of English Language Teaching*. Prenada Media.

Acknowledgements

Anthony Wotring is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Wollongong. Previously a language instructor at South Korea's Kyungpook National, he is interested in dialogic teaching practices in EFL contexts.

Honglin Chen's research focuses on advancing understanding of how all students, native English speaking and second language, in primary, secondary, and tertiary contexts, can raise their literacy and language achievements. Her research traverses language and literacy education: literacy and language development; teacher knowledge and practice; and curriculum development and enactment.

Mark Fraser teaches in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, specialising in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). His main research interests include critical reflection, professional identity, and self-study in teacher education.