

## **Challenges in Developing an ELT Primary School English Grammar Curriculum in China**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The national curriculum in China is the most crucial guideline for teaching in primary and secondary schools. This research looked at how English language teaching (ELT) preservice teachers in China learned to implement critical pedagogy (CP) through the process of co-constructing a compulsory ELT curriculum with ESL students (ELLs). Having a clear understanding of English grammar is essential to learn it successfully. Second language (L2) classrooms increasingly involve teachers and researchers in curriculum development and implementation. Different educational aims and objectives are reflected in how these educators communicate concerns about the second language acquisition process, mainly grammatical competence. The data for this qualitative study were obtained from (1) audio recordings of discussions between teacher educators and (2) audio recordings of discussions with students in primary school. Researchers and teachers have devised a syllabus to facilitate learning, teaching, and research in primary grammar classrooms that addresses their concerns. The syllabus can be adapted over time to meet the classroom's needs. Describe how to design a course that meets pedagogical goals based on experiences as a syllabus participant in this paper. Based on the procedure of ten-week classes, the author examines its approximate necessity and practicality from the perspective of the teaching objectives. The research's significant focus is exploring the integration and implementation of syllabus tasks and the associated challenges and issues. Furthermore, the syllabus's effectiveness in engaging students is also responsible for its reliability. The paper focuses on the new pedagogical approaches and analyses the potential future of ELT in China.

*Keywords: Grammar Design, Primary School, English Language Teaching, Language Teaching, Teaching Syllabus*

There is no doubt that English has the most students of any world language taught in schools. Significant shifts in the English curriculum have occurred during the last twenty years, reflecting the country's social, political, and economic climate. However, in many of today's classrooms, students play an active role in their learning as learners. A more engaging and exciting curriculum is required to study English grammar, which is otherwise tedious. Practising the English grammar syllabus in practice involves observing students' learning and updating teaching methods (Warner et al., 2021). The teacher plays the role of advisor, coach and co-participant, encouraging students to be meaningful, understanding and supportive in their collaboration. English teachers constantly enhance their teaching ability and keep updating new teaching theories with the progress of the times to obtain the needs of students' language learning and positive learning. The learning plan for each unit is purposefully designed to meet the requirements of the learning objectives.

Evaluating students' learning is a good test of the practicality of the syllabus. Furthermore, it can demonstrate the efficacy of hands-on instruction by revealing students' current levels of comprehension.

An English syllabus is usually a programmatic document developed by the national or local educational administration to guide the teaching of English (Wotring et al., 2021). It is imperative

that all textbooks, not just English textbooks, reflect the syllabus guidelines in the selection and organization of their content. This shows that the syllabus should guide the teacher's 'teaching' and the student's learning.' It is essential for teaching English in primary schools, positively impacts teachers' teaching and students' learning, and provides a valuable reference for further syllabus development. Most primary school students need to understand the syllabus better, and they need to be aware of its content, meaning, and importance to their learning. The teacher usually mentions the syllabus to students in the first lesson. For teachers to be successful in teaching and learning, the syllabus must be the primary framework. Only by analysing and thoroughly reading the syllabus can a good lesson be taught effectively, a powerful lesson can teach to meet the curriculum standards, and the whole child can develop (Thwaites, 2021).

The curriculum directly impacts the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. Due to the times' development and society's progress, the demand for language learning is increasing. A good syllabus must meet the teaching objectives and reflect teaching competence. This research examines the meaning and purpose of syllabuses for teaching and learning and how to improve student's learning through the scientific design of syllabuses as well as teaching tools to achieve teaching objectives based on the following research questions: (1) What kind of syllabus applies to current primary school teaching?, (2) Which factors affect the development of teaching materials due to the syllabus?, and (3) How does the syllabus design affect important teaching goal?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As of now, the preparation of the syllabus of teaching materials has a profound influence on teachers themselves (Tórrez & Lund, 2021). A small group of people may engage in further discussion and development after the teacher preparation programme has concluded. Due to the significant theoretical shape, individual teachers' subjective elements significantly impact the curriculum syllabus. In addition, teachers may spend little time on syllabus development, leading to a lack of seriousness, which also contributes to irrational syllabus development (Sarigoz, 2019). In contrast to being completed by a single teacher alone and too theoretical, the syllabus should be prepared collectively by professionals, discussed, and perfected collectively rather than by a single teacher alone (Chris & Constant, 2009; Chumbi & Morales, 2021).

In such a context, a second language program's curriculum is neither something that teachers and students can use privately nor that students can come up with on their own. It is a record of the negotiations between the parties and a contract or other legal document that can be used by either side (Norro, 2022). Specifically, it is about why we teach and what we hope to accomplish in the classroom (Xodabande & Hashemi, 2023). This is a minor concern because many other limitations must be considered in any negotiation outside the physical location of instruction and the current state of the educational theory (Chiekezie & Inyang, 2021). Students in sixth-grade Chinese primary schools are enrolled in an English grammar course, and approximately 45-minute lessons are planned for the designed syllabus (Lee, 2012; Lee & Macaro, 2013; Zhang et al., 2019).

There is a dilemma for Chinese educators because elementary school students are exposed to a lot of English (Mann, 2005). Generally, primary school students have limited comprehension of basic English grammar (Chan, 2019). English grammar differs from Chinese grammar in terms of grammatical structure and expression. To aid students in acquiring appropriate grammar skills, teachers must be actively involved in improving their grammar instruction (Carey et al., 2011). A firm grasp of grammar is essential to grow English into a complete language. Thus, it is strongly recommended that teachers devote substantial class time to grammar instruction. When taught in a Chinese classroom for sixth graders, grammar does not excitingly engage primary school students. Most Chinese English educators do not use traditional practices while teaching their students.

Among these needs are opportunities for practising what they have learned through collaborative interactions, group activities, and scaffolding aimed at individual development (Tseng et al., 2020). Nevertheless, most of the time, teachers are the ones who impose their will on their students, and the entire session revolves around them. Using this common method of teaching grammar to Chinese sixth graders is inappropriate as they are between 11 and 12 years of age (Ma et al., 2022). Using this

grammar ELT syllabus, students will enjoy learning grammar more, and teachers will better understand pedagogically constructivist teaching methods for grammar (Poole, 2022; Richards et al., 2023).

Here are certain shortcomings in the above domestic and international studies. Most of the arguments have been on different "methods" of teaching a language, most of which are now understood to have focused primarily on the grammatical or structural aspects of learning a second language (Bergström et al., 2022; Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020; Masduqi & Fatimah, 2021)—a syllabus is essential for achieving two types of efficiency. The first is pragmatic efficiency, or time and money conservation. The instructional environment must be planned. The second type of efficiency is pedagogical: the economical administration of the learning process (Duli & Ramana, 2021; Uttley, 2021). It is considered that instruction offered in an institutional context is a more effective means of addressing learning than leaving the learner to proceed in an unstructured environment (Alipour, 2020; Reynolds & Shih, 2019).

Firstly, although scholars are aware of the importance of local culture in foreign language teaching, textbook writers and teachers are gradually increasing the proportion of local culture teaching in foreign-language textbooks (Bardel et al., 2023; Wang & Luo, 2021) and foreign language teaching, the current research on local culture syllabus in foreign language teaching is relatively weak (Zhu, 2020). Providing certain references for selecting local culture teaching content in English is difficult. Secondly, regarding the cultural content syllabus, most existing studies have focused on teaching Chinese as a foreign language (Sun & Zhang, 2021). Although these studies can also provide ideas and references for developing a Chinese cultural content syllabus for primary school English teaching, there is still a need to build a local cultural content syllabus for primary school English teaching (Vu & Pham, 2022). Moreover, the existing cultural content syllabus is mostly based on the theoretical level, and the practical level also focuses mainly on the classification of cultural items, and less on the importance and competence requirements of cultural items, making the syllabus less specific and comprehensive (Hasram et al., 2021; R. Yuan et al., 2021).

Finally, in terms of research methods, the existing cultural syllabuses are mainly based on text analysis to complete (Ji et al., 2022), and there is no research to conduct empirical studies such as questionnaires or interviews after text analysis, lacking the process of validating the syllabuses derived from text analysis (Yuan, 2022). In addition, although there are certain commonalities between teaching the target language culture and the native culture in foreign language teaching, there are also differences. In summary, the study of Chinese cultural content syllabus in secondary school English teaching is still in its infancy, and there is still much room for research (Ardell, 2022). Based on the existing literature, this study draws on both domestic and international English textbooks and Chinese English syllabus preparation combined with questionnaires and interviews to integrate Chinese cultural content, hoping to provide a reference for teachers (Guo, 2021; Ma et al., 2023).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This section describes the process of participating in the syllabus study: exploring and designing a practical syllabus. Data was collected explicitly through the five participants' design of a teacher syllabus and observation of classrooms. Participants were interviewed through semi-structured and group interviews. Interview questions will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of syllabus design and the balance of teaching objectives. A strategy of 45 minutes per lesson and ten lessons as a syllabus will stimulate the researcher to create a teaching that suits their needs.

**Table 1.** Summary Of The Syllabus Curriculum For Grade 6

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Curriculum	:Grammar for Grade 6: Primary school English
The purpose of Teaching	:Ensure that students learn the following: nouns, verbs, prepositions, phrases, and tenses
Points of difficulty	Verb collocations; prepositional collocations. Easily confused tenses
Aids for Teaching	Multimedia recorder and projector

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Teaching procedure	Eight steps: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Warming up</li><li>2. Introduce new words.</li><li>3. Present new sentences</li><li>4. Interaction.</li><li>5. Pair work.</li><li>6. Role-play.</li><li>7. Practising.</li><li>8. Homework.</li></ol>
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## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Table 1 provides a summary of the syllabus curriculum for Grade 6. The results were analysed from narrative analysis that involves participants' stories and experiences to highlight critical points in the research. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to prevent inaccuracies. The codes were used to identify patterns and concepts to align data with essential themes.

## **RESULTS**

The findings of this research are shown below, and these were categorised into themes.

### **IMPACT OF ELT SYLLABUS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN CHINA**

In this research, the finding shows that students should be considered when choosing the syllabus in school. Grammar instruction in primary schools should be based on effective methods such as grammar concepts should be taught in a way that inspires, is constructivist, and is enjoyable for 11-12-year-old primary school students. It has been established that acquiring English knowledge is a major purpose of primary school education (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Grammar instruction must be conducted through engaging and task-based activities that support reading, writing, listening, and speaking, which is essential for acquiring a foreign language. Ideally, all four of these skills should be incorporated into the learning environment and curriculum (Van den Branden, 2016).

### **PRIMARY SCHOOL SYLLABUSES SHOULD AVOID TEACHING THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

In primary schools, some teachers disregard grammar instruction because they believe it is complex and does not address key learning objectives (Sarigoz, 2019). In the classroom, teachers put less emphasis on teaching grammar and more on teaching vocabulary and sentence structure. If these beliefs are incorporated into an English syllabus at the primary level, students will not be able to communicate effectively because of their weak grammar foundation. Consequently, others

misunderstand their message. Grammar challenges should not be ignored in the syllabus design; strategies should be offered to mitigate the challenges posed by grammar.

The purpose of grammar classes for young learners is to encourage their language acquisition. Therefore, grammar classes should not be too formal. There are many students in Chinese primary school classes, and teachers often choose to teach informally because informality is perceived as negatively impacting behaviour and achievement. According to (Rahman & Pandian, 2018), some primary school English teachers are doubtful about their abilities to develop engaging grammar activities. Alternative methods train teachers, including models and methods developed specifically for them. It is not taken into account that primary school students' English foundations and characteristics are not considered in this case. Many long-term negative consequences are associated with inflexible teaching methods, so it is advisable to avoid them.

It is critical not to place excessive emphasis on rote learning. The lack of thorough research conducted by teachers on teaching methods affects the specific practice of teaching English grammar in primary schools. Students cannot effectively and accurately use English grammar because they can only explain grammar knowledge purely, along with poor mechanical memory (Mendieta & Barkhuizen, 2020). The consequences of this may even result in primary school students losing interest in learning English.

Based on the findings, in conjunction with a broader curriculum for English-language learning aimed at sixth graders, the ten-week grammar syllabus described in Table 1 will benefit students. As part of a more comprehensive program to aid students in learning English, the class is designed to assist them in learning the language. On top of the other English language learning activities that the students undertake throughout the week, such as writing and reading, the students will need to complete one lesson per week with ten lessons. The objective of this class is that the syllabus would help students become more fluent in English.

The school provides a variety of study materials, such as grammar and vocabulary, some of which are pre-made curricula. Teachers should implement a ten-week grammar curriculum designed specifically for their classes and follow the overarching syllabus. A course syllabus provides a structure for gathering information about the subject. In addition to goals, objectives, topics, and evaluation, it can also include a schedule of activities (Jackson & Burch, 2017). To gradually guide children outside their comfort zone, the syllabus has been structured to introduce progressively new grammar material in a gradual, easy-to-difficult manner that is interconnected and unified. Developing a curriculum is an iterative process that involves content, design, implementation, and evaluation to provide project-based language learning and content-based instruction. It is important to note that the developed grammar syllabus is integrated into this process, contributing to the holistic learning journeys being implemented (East, 2021; Ellis, 2010; Lantolf et al., 2021).

Learning situations, games, grammar lessons, and language acquisition exercises must be provided to learners to accommodate their unique learning needs. Learning-based syllabuses, also known as grammar syllabuses, are more prevalent than subject-based schemes. Structure, semantics, and application were all incorporated into his tridimensionality theory of grammar. This is a gradual method of instruction in which the student is exposed to an interconnected body of knowledge about languages, gradually building from easy to difficult, step by step. As a result of using these stages, it is possible to create authentic, understandable, diverse, meaningful, flexible analogue activities in the classroom that avoid the monotonous classroom situations associated with traditional grammar instruction. Children can learn languages through activities relevant to their everyday lives, realistic, achievable, meaningful, and adaptable. These lessons provide them with language-learning activities that can be incorporated into their daily lives and can be incorporated into their everyday lives. An evolutionary syllabus framework for tenses, verb phrases, and prepositions based on Larsen Freeman's three-dimensional model of grammatical structure. This section explains why some parts of the ten-week syllabus are easy, and others are difficult. For instance, an Example of prepositions:

*In: indicates the position and state of the book in the drawer.*

*Usage: It should be noted that when prepositions indicate the orientation of an object, such as in the terms emphasising that exposure is not considered to be part of the sentence component alone*

## **DEVELOPING THE SYLLABUS BASED ON STUDENT'S NEEDS**

Ideally, primary school kids aged 11 and 12 would be introduced to grammar ideas in a motivating and engaging way. It is widely accepted that learning English is one of the fundamental aims of primary school. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are the cornerstones of language learning, so grammar lessons must be presented in a way that keeps students interested and supports their development in these areas. All four abilities belong to a well-rounded education, so ensure they're emphasised in class. Students can focus more on their learning by utilising images, physical objects, and multimedia teaching equipment. Thus, students are more likely to learn English and are less likely to get bored with grammar when they are exposed to it this way. It is vital to design a syllabus that will engage primary school students and make grammar lessons enjoyable, concrete, vivid, and lively. This will enhance their engagement and help them learn English grammar more practically.

If these beliefs are incorporated into an English syllabus at the primary level, students will not be able to communicate effectively because of their weak grammar foundation. Consequently, others misunderstand their message. Grammar challenges should not be ignored in the syllabus design; strategies should be offered to mitigate the challenges posed by grammar. It is critical not to place excessive emphasis on rote learning. The lack of thorough research conducted by teachers on teaching methods affects the specific practice of teaching English grammar in primary schools. Moreover, students cannot effectively and accurately use English grammar because they can only explain grammar knowledge purely, along with poor mechanical memory (Mendieta & Barkhuizen, 2020). The consequences of this may even result in primary school students losing interest in learning English.

## **SYLLABUS AND ITS SEQUENCE**

Using Purpura's syllabus for studying English as a foreign language and the grammatical lessons are tailored to the student's current linguistic competence (Purpura, 2004). Grammar can generally be considered a rule of language that regulates and restricts how language is used. Users can progress from easy to complex learning in a set period by following the system's step-by-step instructions. Every month, teachers get access to a new syllabus for their classroom to implement for the students (Batstone, 2012). It is specifically tailored to meet the needs of my class students and is designed to meet their current academic level. Upon completing the course, students can use several basic tenses, prepositions, phrases, and synonyms for verbs. Understanding prepositions and how they combine with other words is generally easy to grasp. A prepositional phrase will be developed by students, which will be transformed into tense sentences. Through this process, learning is gradually transitioned from easy to more profound. Passing an exam requires proper grammar practice and an understanding of how to read correctly. Understanding videos and other text-based materials are essential for understanding grammar (Ahmadian, 2016; Chan, 2019).

Using context-based grammar can spice up an otherwise dull grammar lesson. Diverse activities, as well as creative content with collaborative themes, should be incorporated into the program. It is commonly believed that teaching grammar to students enhances their chances of becoming fluent in the language by helping them communicate and use it correctly and consistently. There was never any intention to improve education or social justice in China, so the inclusion of ELT English grammar in the country's educational model was driven only by economic concerns for the future.

## **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

There is a lot of assessment to be done in the language classroom. The teacher will give constant feedback to the students. Immediately following class, the teacher will present an oral summary of each student's homework. The teacher will conduct a final evaluation to assess the student's participation. As part of the test, a targeted assessment of preposition usage and collocation will also be undertaken, as well as a test of multiple tenses. With these tests, we can determine whether students thoroughly understand grammar concepts. For the ELT syllabus to be successful, it must undergo constant evaluation of its efficacy and applicability. A continuous cycle of preparation, execution, and informal and official assessment backs up this approach.

The initial research found that teachers need to focus and multimedia teaching tools to enhance and supplement classroom content and interaction due to the lack of effective integration of multimedia technology and social context in teaching words. During the syllabus design process, teachers overly focus on theoretical knowledge teaching methods to help students better learn the meaning and practical use of vocabulary itself, but this is ineffective for students, and teachers' use of video, audio, colourful pictures as well as interactive games usually get students' attention. To stimulate students' interest in learning vocabulary and to keep up with today's technological age, the study found that creating interactive game programs with multiple features and fun to help engage students, such as short story characters to play, interactive drama games, and game features that help them learn and make it enjoyable, are some of the features suggested to be implemented in the syllabus.

This study's findings align with some other studies on the design of vocabulary syllabuses, such as Köksal et al. (2013) found that the design of syllabuses using multimedia and social context can provide differentiation and make vocabulary learning fun for students. However, teachers need to adapt to the benefits and challenges of using technology. Their study found that engagement and motivation in the classroom were higher when using multimedia, social back and online resources (Elgort et al., 2020).

Primary school research also advocates using multimedia technology, social context and online resources as teaching aids in the classroom, as technology has been found to improve primary school student's academic performance and enhance interest in learning (Sikki et al., 2013). Putting is also used as a necessary representation of the content and procedures of the syllabus. Also, it makes learning fun for students, which is similar to what current research has found. Panezai & Channa (2017) stated that the importance of vocabulary learning is how using assistive technology and social context, and online resources in the classroom is very important for students to learn efficiently. This is because the use of multimedia innovations in our daily lives is inseparable. Without the use of multimedia technology and social context and online resources, it is difficult for children or students to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Zhang et al. (2008) mentioned that these assistive technologies have benefits and drawbacks. Teachers can become too reliant on technology, thus reducing opportunities for practical application or interaction. As a recommendation, it is important to use assistive technologies in the classroom, such as apps on laptops, iPads or mobile phones, to keep students interested in the course content. Still, it is also important that these technologies are hands-on so that students do not become bored with too much technology. Also, using technology in the classroom with interactive teaching can better facilitate interaction between students and teachers.

The educator intends to evaluate the syllabus informally by observing student reactions and measuring their excitement for the syllabus throughout the mid-term and final reviews, as well as to conduct gentle assessments of the student's progress towards meeting the syllabus' targets. This study was based on a cross-sectional perspective that limits the knowledge of clarity and greater certainty the relationship between students' challenges in developing ELT English grammar in school. The findings of this study might not represent students at large. As a matter of course, students are welcome to share their experiences and make suggestions for improving the grammar course. Unfortunately, due to a lack of understanding of the obstacles that teachers face every day, they are often held responsible for the inadequate consequences that have resulted from English language policy rather than the widening gap between policy expectation and practical application in highly nuanced, challenging, and under-resourced language learning environments. Further research

needed in this area would contribute to understanding the post-methods discussion in EFL English grammar classrooms and the relative importance of the "negative" and "positive" influences on the students of task-based language teaching in EFL contexts.

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