Chapter Three

Curriculum Centred Problems

3.1.1. Introduction

The goal of education in general, and language education in particular has been identified today as some kind of social change. Recent development in behaviorist psychology and scientific approach to the learning and teaching of language and scientific management of education have defined learning as a process of observable changes in behaviour which could be measured exactly. The recent experimentations in education have brought about curriculum design in the following manner:

1) Unambiguously describes the behavioral change that can be brought about by a courses study.

2) Curriculum must describe the conditions under which the performance will be expected to occur.

3) The curriculum must describe in detail each and every aspect related to bringing about a change in behaviour

Every formal teaching programme has a justifiable objective. For any effective language, teaching programme there is to be an appropriate justification based on sound principles and social requirements and it should state its objectives specifically and quantitatively. The objectives should be realistic and achievable.
The quantum of language the learner requires has to be measured and the strategies have to be evolved to attain it. The second / foreign language teaching programme thus forms a network, of which the skills and the content of language constitute the interlocking parts.

These parts together are known as curriculum, the development of which is a decision making process, consisting of the policy (the aims of the curriculum or what seems desirable to achieve), programmes (the constraints on what it is possible to achieve), and the participants in the decision making process, whose task it is to reconcile policy and pragmatics.

3.1.2. Curriculum and syllabus in the University of Kerala.

In the universities of Kerala, the curriculum and syllabuses are vague or silent about the exact nature of the skills and the quantum of language, which they want the students to learn.

In the past, the universities took it for granted that the tertiary level entrants were proficient in English and so the language education focused more on making the learners familiar with English literature. It is true that in the past the student, entering college possessed all the skills of language, which the situation demanded of him. Things are different now. Teaching of elementary skills in language cannot be considered subsidiary. The present student profile and learner needs demand a very precise approach to areas associated with language teaching, with a view to developing even the basic language skills. It is interesting, to note in this connection, what Dolores G. Garcia has observed. According to him, English education “must be in harmony with social, economic, and political realities of the changing present, of the relevant and
enduring past, on which a community establishes its identity, as well as of the projected future with which man and society must cope” (13). In many education programmes, the term ‘curriculum’, is used “in its widest sense, covering all the issues relating to the planning, implementation and evaluation of a series of language learning events, conceived as a coherent whole with a specified purpose.” (Hall, *Innovation* 1) It includes all that is taught in a course of study including the timetabled subjects and all those aspects that exercise an influence in shaping the personality of the learners. On another dimension, it means the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within the proposed education system. The curriculum considers the following questions.

Who is to be taught?

What is to be learnt?

How is the learning to be undertaken and achieved?

To what extent is the former appropriate and the latter effective.

The curriculum according to Farrent, “represents the distilled thinking of society on what it wants to achieve through education. It tends to mirror society itself, reflecting its aims, values and priorities. It spells out clearly the knowledge society considers important and useful. It identifies those physical and mental skills that society prizes and adopts and those methods which it approves.”(24)

Because of the changes taking place across the world for the last two decades, there has been a, great deal of curriculum change. New ways of looking at knowledge areas have caused the emergence of new specialized subjects.
Developments in psychology in general, and psychology of learning in particular, have paved the way for new methods of learning. J.S. Farrent further observes: “[…] curriculum developer needs the insights provided by basic studies in psychology, sociology, genetics, physiology and different sciences and by empirical investigations in the classroom” (5).

The changes in society and societal relations have made the education systems hither to follow quite irrelevant. This is particularly true of our country where the English curriculum at the tertiary level was inherited before independence. Now, the aims of education have become very complex, on account of the changed social scene and in accordance with this, a change in the requirements of second / foreign language learning has undergone changes and so a change in language curriculum has become inevitable. It should also be borne in mind that the curriculum and syllabus in English of the University of Kerala, at the tertiary level remain with out any qualitative change for over half a century now. To quote Dr. M.K. Ramachandran Nair Vice Chancellor, University of Kerala,

The higher education syllabus being followed in the state is obsolete [...]the syllabus was the same as that during the sixties and seventies. This was one of the main reasons why the quality of education in the state was being questioned. At the national, level Kerala stood 17th in the quality of education [...]the claims made in the field of literacy were not being reflected in the field of education. As a result, the higher
education sector in the state was unable to produce personnel suited to the requirements of the industrial sector. The industrial and education sectors should find a solution to the problem. (3)

According to J.S. Farrant curriculum “tends to mirror society itself, reflecting its aims, values and priorities. It spells out clearly the knowledge society considers important and useful” (24). English language teaching has always been an instrument of change in India, and at the same time it is itself changing constantly due to research and innovations. ELT is now a global phenomenon.

Since the beginning of the history of formal education, the educational needs of the society have changed with every transformation in society. The societal and educational changes were directly related to changes in economic conditions, socio-political and cultural developments and scientific and technological advancement. The rapid spread of ‘effective education’ has, in turn, made proportional changes in all spheres of human endeavours. Consequent on this, new educational requirements have arisen, making curriculum changes inevitable, with every change in the focus of education. This has become a worldwide phenomenon, embracing all branches of knowledge.

The cumulative effect of the changes taking place globally, as far as English language is concerned, is the emergence of a new form of language known as ‘world English’, which is capable of exercising extensive impact on education
all over the world. Periodical review of ELT practices is imperative according to Farrant, to suite

the new set of challenges being thrown at us by the phenomenon of W.E. Up until now a great deal of our taken – for – granted ELT practices have been threatened with the prospect of being declared obsolete for the simple reason that they do not take into account some of the most significant characteristics of W.E.”. (Farrant quoted in Rajagopalan 13-14)

There have been efforts to revise the ELT programme, at the tertiary level during the past few decades, but nothing creative has come out because reasons mentioned else where in the study. It is true that when we try to change something, then we come to understand it. The complex relationships between all those elements that go towards making a curriculum – philosophy, society, educational objectives, administrative machinery, teaching materials, teacher roles and teaching methods, have shown how difficult it is to achieve a significant change. It has to be admitted that those who are entrusted with the task of effecting the required changes quite often lack the appropriate knowledge and vision to carry out the mission. Consequent on this, every effort to reform the curriculum has turned out to be ineffective. Never, in the history of the university, has there been a curriculum development, approved by the majority of teachers, students and academics.
For multicultural nations like India, language is a potent political, economic, and social force and because of this, education in general and English language teaching in particular is as much a political as a pedagogic act shaped by a complex mix of historical, social, economic, cultural, political and demographic forces. Every act of curriculum development involves policy making. The policy makers respond to the ‘needs’, their own, other people’s or those of an entire society. They determine the overall aims of the curriculum and are influenced in varying degrees by special interest groups who are able to bring pressure to bear. In different educational contexts, different people will play the role of policy makers and the policy will be stated more or less formally. What is unfortunate about the curriculum of the tertiary level English in our Universities is that there is not any clear statement of the curriculum policy. There are no pressure groups interested in the tertiary English teaching / learning. Teaching and learning materials provide the corpus of the curriculum. They formally exist as physical entities, and are open to analysis, evaluation and revision in ways that teaching and learning acts do not have any direct bearing upon what happens in classrooms. So, it is necessary that curriculum development and syllabus design in a second/foreign language teaching programme involve assessing the needs of the learners, developing goals and objectives, planning a syllabus, selecting teaching materials and approaches and deciding on assessment procedures and criteria. The first step in the direction of an appropriate curriculum development is needs analysis, which according to Denise Finney, “is now seen as the logical starting point for the development of a language programme which is responsive
to the learner and learning need” (113). Needs assessment of the learner involves seeking and interpreting information about the students’ needs, so that the course will address them effectively. Defining the needs of the students is a complex issue. One way of conceptualizing needs is to distinguish between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ needs. Objective needs are generally derived from different kinds of information about the learners, their use of language in real life communication situations as well as their current language proficiency, and their language difficulties.

Subjective needs involve cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the learning situation, derivable from information about affective and cognitive factor such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learner wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies.

The information gathered through needs analysis could help the curriculum planners and syllabus designers to make choices and priorities on what to teach and how to teach. While modifying the existing English language-teaching programme, it is generally desirable to collect and interpret data about the learners and the institutional context in which they learn. Gathering information about the learners has to begin before the course and will have to continue even after beginning it. It is better to have in general, a socio-cultural, familial, economic and educational background of the learners, as also the contexts in which the learners need the language on completion of the course of study in
English. A wide range of information, in this regard can be collected through needs analysis. From the perspective of communicative language teaching, learners’ needs and wants inform the teaching learning process, and the emphasis is on using the language in stimulating communicative activities. Various orientations are made in the process of needs analysis to suit the requirements of the learners and the methodology involved in learning.

The results of the needs analysis are applied in the development of programme objectives and in the choice of appropriate teaching methodology. According to Denise Finney:

> The participants in the needs analysis ideally should include as many of the programme participants. The as possible, and ideally the learners themselves – where they are involved, in the specification of course content, there is a greater likelihood and they will perceive it as relevant to their needs and can take an active role in course evaluation. (75)

The learner needs change with every change in the society. The instructional objectives at the tertiary level cannot be limited to a narrow area of operation. The needs vary widely. Denise Finney further adds: “In the integrated approach, needs analysis takes place not only at the pre-course planning stage, but also during the course, contributing to the development of teacher learner negotiated learning objectives” (75).
3.1.3 Factors Governing Curriculum In Kerala

The objectives of teaching English at the school level have been defined by the education departments/commissions of each state, in terms of a mastery of basic structures of the English language, of a vocabulary, of various skills in the use of English. The total programme of English teaching is divided for each year, term and month, in terms of the language skills to be acquired by each learner, in the specified time limit. The school context provides, broadly, four options for English in the school curriculum.

1. As an exclusive language of instruction from early age, with either the mother tongue or Hindi taught as additional languages.

2. As the proposed predominant language but with concession to the mother tongue as medium at the primary stage.

3. As an equal partner with the mother tongue and with the federal language. This means a reduction of the importance given to English.

4. As foreign language, which a student can opt.

Today all education programmes at school level have recognized the importance of English. For example the English curriculum of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has been revised by experts, with the
intensive involvement of teachers which has involved, according to Mark Tully,

the development of new syllabus, teaching materials, testing procedures and teacher training initiatives. The texts and activities in the books reflect to a considerable extent, the culture and life of India. The examination scheme is largely skill based, and encourages learners to practice reading unseen texts and writing different kinds of texts for different purposes. (166)

Such attempts have been neither made at tertiary level English teaching / learning in the universities of Kerala nor has there been any uniformity in the pattern of English education. The university academic bodies fear that such attempts at uniformity in English education will upset the academic ‘autonomy of the universities.’

With regard to English at the University level in our state we have, to a large extent, operated on assumptions of a context free curriculum, based first on literacy, and subsequently, a utilitarian model of English as the most useful international language for our development. What kind of English we teach and how we organize our teaching into a curriculum are matters, which have become problematic in the same way. The cumulative forces of social, political and cultural factors weigh heavily on any curriculum we devise. However, the tendency has been either to gloss over these, or discuss them informally on the margins of any serious discussion as things which are just there as a ‘given’, as a
barrier that we cannot get around in any way. But we need to face these contextual ‘constraints’ squarely and see if we can find in them the opportunities for change. Instructional materials should include, the instructional objectives appropriate to the level of the learners, the list of themes to be covered in each term and the possible topics that can be selected under the themes, the list of communicative functions and examples of their communicative expressions, the list of teaching-learning strategies to be selected for the development of each of the skill areas and the list of vocabulary items appropriate for each of them in addition to the general list of vocabulary items to be covered at each level.

Procedures for developing the materials into actual instructional materials may follow the following steps.

1. Determine the instructional objectives to be achieved in a unit of time.

2. Determine the theme appropriate for the level

3. Select one of the possible topics under the theme in the list

4. Determine the appropriate topic to be selected in accordance with the needs of the learners.

5. Determine the kinds of communicative activities that can be developed under the selected topics on the basis of the objectives to be achieved in a particular unit of instruction.
6. Determine the communicative functions, the grammatical structures, and the vocabulary items necessary for the communicative activities to happen in accordance with the level of development.

7. Determine the texts appropriate for the communicative activities and the instructional objectives to be achieved.

8. Texts (written or oral) can be authentic or adapted.

### 3.2 Materials

The teaching materials have essentially to be concerned with developing and bringing into play all aspects of the learners’ personality and not just the cognitive or intellectual side. So a good deal of emphasis is to be placed on the expression of feelings and attitudes on the part of the learner together with a sense of sharing and supportiveness in the class as a whole. These materials must meet primarily the following criteria.

1. The Materials should appeal to the emotions and intellect of the learners.

2. The materials should be selected in such way as to provide ample scope for interaction among the students.

3. The materials should allow the learners to draw on present realities as well as on their distant future goals.

4. The teaching materials should provide for the learners to make self-committing choices in the areas covered by 1–3 above.
Education is usually based on the premise that its primary purpose is to help the youth acquire the skills and values necessary for a productive civil life. It provides direct exposure to social realities as a corrective to the media managed images, which usually bombard young mind.

The literature to be used in the language class should have the potential to transform, to change attitudes, and to help eradicate prejudice and foster empathy, tolerance and an awareness of global problems. What Irna K. Ghosn has said about the use of literature to teach English at the primary level is applicable at the tertiary level also. He says:

The power of literature in developing empathy and tolerance is well documented in research on multicultural literature and peace education, but so far as the opportunities for communicating these sorts of socially beneficial themes have not been exploited in EFL programmes. However, the fact remains that EFL learners around the world could become bridge builders across cultures. (176)

What we experience in today’s education is a frightening loss of human face, leading to very crisis, caused by the lack of self-respect and moral values. Our institutions develop the intellect of our youth, not the mind. Despite the progress we have achieved through economic growth and the development of science and technology, there are forces darkening, the human side of the progress. While restructuring English curriculum, we are not to turn our back to this deterioration. Ghosn further points out: “In the increasingly global world,
language skills, intercultural awareness and emotional intelligence are high priorities, especially in our struggle to create a more just and peaceful world.” (177). Literature has a wonderful faculty of developing an understanding of the self and the world.

3.3 Curriculum / Syllabus

A syllabus considers in detail the educational objectives and the ways of achieving them. It is conceived to be an administrative instrument, partly a day today guide to the teacher, partly a statement of an approach. It is the document in which is listed, ideally the items to be taught, in a particular course, to a particular set of defined learners, on a given number of occasions, per week or day in a given sequence with the aim of achieving, stated interim, and final goals, or objectives and (usually) according to particular teaching techniques for each and every item. The syllabus embodies that part of the language which is to be taught, broken down into ‘item or otherwise processed for teaching purposes.

An effective syllabus is a statement of content, sequence and recommended teaching techniques. The teachers’ activity is guided by the syllabus; it consists of an ordered list of grammatical items, together with a minimum vocabulary. The choice of content for inclusion in the syllabus and its arrangement are exercised by the twin operation of selection and grading.

Setting the goals and objectives provides a sense of direction and coherent framework for classroom teaching. Breaking goals into objectives helps the teacher to conceptualize the course in terms to teachable units. Clear goals and
objectives give the teacher a basis for determining which content and activities are appropriate for the course. They also provide a framework for evaluation of the effectiveness, or worth of an activity. Appropriate goals and objectives have to be fixed before the commencement of the course, based on needs analysis of the learners.

An investigation of the linguistic needs of the learners by the use of a questionnaire reveals that the existing curriculum fails to cater to their needs. Apart from the questionnaire circulated among the graduates, who occupy responsible positions in society, the investigator also held a series of discussions with them. The investigator was not directly asking them whether the tertiary English courses could help them meet their communicational needs, (oral and written) in their work, and social interactions, but indirectly eliciting their linguistic skills, by certain well established methods and cordial interactions. Many of the informant graduates were very co-operative and some of them could easily understand the purpose of the investigator in holding talks.

31% of the learners were of opinion that their English course could not help them meet their language needs in society or employment; where as 51 % of them were able to meet their linguistic needs partially. Some others said that the course helped them to further develop their language skill, while they joined higher courses. Any way all of them had to further develop their skills after graduation, in accordance with the demands of the employment or social interaction. The learner-teacher responses, and the performance accounts of
those who have undergone the tertiary English course clearly reveal the fact that the present situation warrants a thorough restructuring of the curriculum, based on the recent developments in education sciences and requirements of communication. Almost all those who are associated with tertiary English education are well aware of the present requirements. Various administrative, political and academic factors, the lack of personnel to undertake a courageous step in this direction, and the reluctance of making use of the services of the experts in the field to bring about necessary change, slow down the curriculum reform which requires urgent attention.

A very fascinating feature of English courses, in institutions which have sprung across the state consequent on the liberal policies of state government is that their curriculum and course are keeping in tune with the latest research findings in the field of English language learning and acknowledging the plurality and diversity of the context in question. Most of such institutions are going in for a skill based communicative syllabus. Those who design courses in English have realized that work place; public institutions and the private life of the learners are affected by global as well as local changes. To cope with these needs various innovations are made to make language teaching effective.

We are living in a world without boundaries. Despite sporadic instances of terrorism, we live in a cultural, geographic, and economic context in which co-operation has bridged all gaps and helped achieve a sustainable, peaceful and just culture. We are in a global society and gaining knowledge of other cultures
will help us to shape our worldview. Our educationalists have to take into consideration these factors also

The word curriculum includes the objectives of teaching, methods of instruction, textbooks, teaching materials, guidance and counselling, and all the learning experiences provided in the institution and evaluation. It includes the totality of experiences in and out of the classroom. A good curriculum consists of flexibility and innovation, and

a. States clearly the educational achievements of the learner on completion of the course, based on clear rational and objectives consistent with the priorities of the society.

b. Ensures appropriate quality assurance through rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

c. Sort out plans to meet the needs of the society and the learners in the design, delivery and the management of the whole curriculum of the university

d. Makes use of insights provided by basic studies in psychology, sociology, changing technologies and other varied aspects related to academic activities. Needs assessment forms another significant aspect of curriculum development. The needs change with every societal change.

The present curriculum is based on the simplistic assumption that there is a direct equation between planning, teaching and learning. In other words, it is assumed that what is planned will be taught, and that what is taught will be
learnt. Recent studies in various branches of science related to learning show that
the curriculum development is much more complex. Teachers do not always
 teach what they are expected to teach, and learners very often learn things other
than what has been taught. To sum up the goal of education including language
education has been identified as some kind of social change. What has emerged
from the field survey of the ELT seen in the state at the tertiary level is that there
is a need for flexibility and openness to change and influence from the broader
perspective of general educational theory. This also throws light on
the necessity of a coherent model for ELT Curriculum planning and development.
We could not yet develop an integrated and systematic approach to English
curriculum process. For English as a second language, to achieve a proper
curriculum and professional status, it is, however important to address some of
the whole system issues which are fundamental to any development. In order to
achieve this, it is imperative on the part of the educational policy makers,
curriculum planners classroom teachers and examiners to draw their attention to
the following interconnected issues:

1. Conceptualization of the learner: The learner variability, learner needs
   and factors motivating the learners and several other factors related to
   English education can be asessed on the basis of scientifically planned
   observation and survey.

2. Conceptualization of English Teaching as a discipline:

3. Curriculum Development
4. Teacher education and professional development.

5. Educational assessment as an integral part of the whole educational system.