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Early language teaching and syllabuses

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Abstract

Early language teaching frequently offers new perspectives on foreign language education. The aim is to describe the process of foreign language teaching to YL and the role of syllabus, its design, selection and implementation in a primary classroom. In particular, the research study concentrates on the main tendencies in early language education observed during English lessons in Poland. The idea is to investigate the factors that direct the process of syllabus design and syllabus implementation.

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Keywords: early language teaching; young learners; syllabus.

1. Introduction

For understanding the theory and practice of early language education, teachers should know the characteristic features and needs of children as language learners. Moreover, for success to be certain, appropriate conditions in terms of pedagogy and resources should be provided including syllabuses.

2. Research aims

Then, the research project on a FL (foreign language) syllabus in the context of YL (young learners) is designed. In particular, the following aims are targeted:

1. To describe FL education in primary schools.
2. To analyze a selected number of English syllabuses in terms of their design and implementation.

2.1. Research questions

The following questions are formed to direct the research project:

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- a) What is the nature of English learning and teaching in primary school?
- b) What are the factors that direct the process of syllabus design?
- c) What are the factors that direct the process of syllabus implementation?
- e) What is the model framework of syllabus for YL?
- f) What are the implications for training English teachers?

3. Research scheme

The project is performed in two stages. The first stage concentrates on the main tendencies in the contemporary syllabus design and three English syllabuses are analyzed during the interviews with teachers at the beginning of the semester. The second stage of the study concentrates on syllabus implementation observed during English lessons at the middle of the semester. The observations are based on syllabus guides and each lesson is recorded on an observation sheet. Then, the observation study is performed to identify the most common patterns and models of syllabus implementation in a FL classroom.

3.1. Syllabus design

Five detailed aims are focused in this stage of the project:

1. To investigate teachers' qualifications and experience for teaching English to YL.
2. To investigate the process of English language education in primary schools.
3. To describe the process of syllabus (course book) selection for YL.
4. To describe the most important factors that guide syllabus design.
5. To describe a role of syllabus in the context of teaching YL.

For the purpose of the interview, a list of forty-eight questions is designed. The interview is composed of two parts and five sections. The first part entitled *Foreign language education in the primary schools* serves as the introduction to the study. This part of the interview encompasses three sections entitled: *Respondent's qualifications and background*; *English language teaching*; *Syllabus and course book selection*.

The second part of the interview includes two sections. The first entitled: *Foreign language syllabus design – description and selection* includes questions considering details about syllabus in terms of imprint, syllabus assumptions and curriculum statement, syllabus users, syllabus objectives, implementation conditions, syllabus content, procedures and strategies, teaching materials, procedures of assessment and standard criteria plus additional elements. The second and final section in this part entitled: *Foreign language syllabus design, implementation and evaluation in the context of the young learners* serves as the summary of the interview, investigating the most interesting or difficult parts for the respondents and syllabus functions.

3.2. Syllabus implementation

The second stage of the project – syllabus implementation is based on the data obtained during the observation study. The detailed aims in this part of the project are:

1. To design a lesson observation sheet.
2. To investigate the process of syllabus implementation.
3. To describe the most important factors of syllabus implementation in a FL primary classroom.

A lesson observation sheet is designed in two parts. The general part serves as the introduction to each lesson and lists ten items. These are: *Date*, *Lesson time*, *Teacher*, *Class*, *Number of the learners*, *Syllabus*, *Syllabus guide* and *Course book applied*, *Lesson topic* and *Aims*. The second part of the sheet designed in the form of a chart, gathers the details about English syllabus implementation. The chart is composed of five sections such as *Syllabus Implementation*, *Content*, *Procedure*, *Course Book Adaptation* and *Comments*. Items further clustered under *Syllabus Implementation* are: *Time*, *Stages of the Lesson*, *Types of Interaction*. Similarly, items added under *Procedure* are: *Techniques*, *Tasks* and *Forms of Work*.

The observation study is supported by syllabus guides, which direct teachers in syllabus implementation and serve as a kind of the map for each lesson. There is often one syllabus recommended for the same group of learners by a particular publishing house. However, there are various course books and each course book has a different

syllabus guide. As far as structure is concerned syllabus guides do not differ much within the same publishing house. As a rule they include syllabus content, for example a list of skills, words/phrases plus procedures recommended for teaching a FL during a specific unit and lesson.

The proper investigation started in February and lasted till June 2007 being carried out among four teachers of English in three different primary schools. The study focused on the implementation of three syllabuses (SP1, SP2, SP3) respectively in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades. It was the direct observation of syllabus implementation during fifteen lessons and the on-the-spot examination of the syllabus guides (in relation to a particular lesson). Then, forty-five lessons of English were recorded during the whole study (five lessons in the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd grades respectively).

4. Interpretation of the results

Interpretations of the results from the first and second stage are presented in the following points respectively.

4.1. Interpretation of interview results

Teachers' qualifications vary as English teachers have a degree either in primary integrated education or in English teaching. They rarely have degrees in both teaching children and in English. Therefore, they often take English national exams (CAE, FCE), or undertake post-graduate study in teaching English or teaching children. The respondents' experience in working with children ranges from six months to ten years as compulsory teaching of English to YL in Poland is a relatively new tradition.

In teaching English to YL two groups of priorities are popular among teachers. The first group refers to the teacher-learner(s) relationship in a FL classroom in terms of rapport and communication. The second group includes development of a positive attitude to English, teaching vocabulary, pronunciation, receptive skills, and later, productive skills plus exposure to English through games.

Two categories of difficulty are identified in teaching English to YL. The first category includes an insufficient number of grammar constructions included in English syllabuses and difficult teaching conditions such as overlarge groups of learners (discipline problems); limited number of English lessons; time limits for covering a course book or a syllabus. The second category includes learners' difficulties with reading comprehension, building sentences, learning skills such as memorization of content and problems with paying attention during lessons.

Conditions of teaching English vary from grade to grade. Two lessons of English are assigned to 1st grade, 2nd and 3rd grades. The average number of YL ranges from 10 to 30 in one group. The standard set of facilities includes a course book, a CD-player, flashcards and a DVD-player. English teachers usually work for 1–4 hour(s) a week with YL, being supported by the school's administration.

Syllabus selection is directly linked with course book selection and evaluation. In practice, a course book is selected and accepted at face value with the respective syllabus (or the syllabus guide). Even if a particular course book is changed for some reason, teachers still try to stick to the same syllabus which has been introduced and tested in the primary school earlier. The process of syllabus selection is based on three following criteria: functional language, educational standards suggested by EU organizations and types of course books recommended by publishing houses. All teachers follow English syllabuses accepted by MEN, recognizing them as official documents that should not be changed. English course books, on the contrary, are tested practically only in a classroom and evaluated as good or bad for YL.

The process of course book selection refers to the evaluation of topics and content, which should be interesting for YL and associated with life and the world around them rather than a fictitious world. Course book selection is based on analysis of the whole layout, selected sections or units and tasks, which focus on communicative skills, vocabulary, and integration of skills. The final decision is always linked to a course book's price and the financial situations of the learners.

As a rule, teachers' preparation for syllabus implementation involves reading educational materials – syllabus, the syllabus guide, the course book and result schedules – or other resources recommended for teaching children. The process of selecting extra materials is based on two main criteria: topics and vocabulary. In practice, it involves the comparison of a particular syllabus guide with the respective course book.

To answer the question about syllabus design at least ten factors are identified in the research study. These are: clear imprint, theoretical assumptions and curriculum statement, teachers and learners, objectives, implementation conditions, content (topics), integration of skills, procedures and strategies, standard criteria and procedures of assessment, teaching materials.

At this stage of the analysis, it becomes clear that imprint is generally well-defined. Namely, titles of the investigated syllabuses and their authors are listed precisely. In addition, a focus is given to the clear identification of courses and learners. However, practical experience with the syllabuses varies from respondent to respondent. For example, their experience stretches from just three weeks, to six months, then to the longer period of four years, still longer, to five years.

Interpreting the data about syllabus assumptions, three common observations are made. The first indicates that theoretical concepts are not known to the respondents, who sometimes do not recognize which concepts originate from the syllabuses and which are theirs. The second observation, on the contrary, implies that key assumptions are known about the syllabuses, for example, their level, their outline of vocabulary, structures and methods. The third observation refers to the comments about the time needed by YL to cover the syllabuses, and their easy adaptability to learners' individual needs and skills. Similarly to the first observation, the core curriculum statement and its articulation in the selected syllabuses is not commonly remembered (or known) by the respondents. The investigation of features that differentiate SP1, SP2 and SP3 syllabuses from others leads to two observations. The first refers to the difficulty in estimating such differences because the respondents have not got enough experience with the implementation of their syllabuses or do not pay attention to other syllabuses. The second observation indicates that all English syllabuses are similar to one another and include many tasks for the classroom practice.

As for the results concerned with syllabus users, it becomes apparent that the respondents know for whom the syllabuses are designed - 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade learners. The study of learners' skills and knowledge required at the very beginning of the syllabus implementation indicates that they are usually perceived as beginners in English and start learning English from "zero". Another remark concerns the attention to Polish reading and writing practice, which is needed in 2nd and 3rd grades. It is also a comment on writing and handwriting tasks, which are recognized to be a challenge for those learners who do not remember Polish letters very well. A focus on more or less gifted learners in terms of skills and abilities demonstrates that 50% of the respondents do not perceive differentiation in their syllabuses while the other 50% recognize it mainly in tasks.

Subsequently, the interpretation provides insights into syllabus objectives. The opinions about educational objectives vary from total ignorance, some knowledge of linguistic objectives and their influence on content and tasks to more precise description of general, educational and operational objectives for classroom practice. In addition, there is a comment on the educational values that can be taught and discussed with YL; for example, English lessons about healthy and unhealthy food or feelings. The data referring to linguistic objectives in the investigated syllabuses reveals that major attention is given to the objectives based on language skills and areas. A focus is both on the communicative and receptive skills as well as knowledge of vocabulary.

The findings about conditions indicate that the standard facilities include a tape-recorder, a CD- and DVD-player, a TV set and a board. As for the number of YL, it is indicated that SP1 syllabus is designed for 10-12 learners while SP3 syllabus is for up to 30. The number of learners in SP2 syllabus is not specified in the interviews. In addition, it is stated that SP1, SP2 and SP3 syllabuses are normally adapted to mixed-ability groups in the primary context. In practice, the number of learners in one class varies and can reach 20-30 (SP3 and SP2), which is not a favorable factor for the language education of YL. Similarly, the number of English lessons differs and can be limited to only one (or two) per week (SP3).

As far as content is concerned, the general tendency among the respondents is to analyze the whole syllabus content (its order and gradation) in the context of teaching skills, language areas and topics. Here, there are both positive and negative comments provided. The positive comments are specified respectively about content selection in SP2 and SP3 syllabuses. In particular, the positive opinions about SP2 syllabus refer to the selection based on fairy-tales; the order of grammar taught from simple to more complex, and the order of teaching vocabulary, which is first presented and then practiced in activities. The favorable comments about SP3 syllabus also include the selection of vocabulary practice, the introduction of all skills from the start and selection of topics. These topics are perceived to develop from *I-world* concepts into *The world around* co-correlating with ideas characteristic for integrated primary education. The content provided in SP1 and SP2 syllabuses respectively is also criticized for the level and amount of teaching materials expected to be covered. In particular, the spiral structure of SP1 syllabus is

mentioned, plus the length of topics, which are too long considering the time suggested for their implementation. There is also a negative remark about the level of texts in the course book, which initially seem to be easy for the learners but later appear to be very difficult. Further explanations about the order and gradation in SP1 syllabus are not provided by the respondents. The “weak” selection, and an insufficient amount of content and communicative tasks are criticized in SP2 syllabus.

The examination of the data regarding integration of linguistic skills repeats a popular model of teaching. First, the receptive and then the productive skills are listed. What also comes to light is the common tendency to teach all skills from the very beginning of learning English in 1st grade. Additional attention is given to a teacher’s responsibility for this integration, and to communication and the receptive skills being prioritized over other areas in teaching a foreign language to YL.

Moreover, the interpretation specifies the most favorable pattern of teaching skills and subsystems recommended in the syllabuses. The pattern usually starts with the practice of vocabulary and receptive skills, then the practice of productive skills. In particular, the introduction of 5 new words per lesson, plus the balance of pronunciation, listening and handwriting practice is recommended in SP1 syllabus. It is claimed that reading skills are difficult to practice if not enough texts are available in the course book plus the basic level of grammar that should be practiced more in 2nd and 3rd grades. Another point stresses language functions that are described mainly as forms of greetings, which are usually taught in the 1st semester of FL learning. It is emphasized that all subsystems in SP2 syllabus are based on fairy-tales. A final remark about teaching the target language functions implies that they should not be linked only with vocabulary and examples of saying *Thank you*.

The investigation of the data regarding the degree to which English content correlates with content of other subjects reveals a few observations. Firstly, this integration is defined in the context of similar topics (such as *school, sport, house, etc.*) covered during both English and primary education lessons. In practice, however, it is difficult to establish time-correlation. For example, English topics are longer in comparison with primary education ones. Secondly, this type of correlation is difficult to implement in primary education. It is not even possible unless it is the English teacher, who herself/himself integrates English content with other subjects, for example teaching about the similar national holidays and customs during Polish and English lessons. Thirdly, the correlation is also understood as the integration of English course book with primary education course books. It is explained that English course books can correlate with the content of other subjects such as mathematics (for example through counting) and primary courses (through the seasonal character of topics, teaching about cultural symbols and festivals). The last observation made here relates to teaching primary integrated courses with elements of English. SP3 syllabus, whose author is both a primary educator and an English teacher, is given as the best example, and it is believed to correlate with content of the other subjects.

Viewing procedures and strategies recommended for teaching YL in syllabuses, the major attention is given to English teacher’s books and course books. These books describe gradually the teaching procedures and serve as the spring for supplementary tasks and innovations, like *Portfolio* in SP2 syllabus. Another comment is about *New Adventure* course book which is based only on selected fairy-tales, which in fact may be a difficulty for a teacher who does not know these stories. Much attention is devoted to the following techniques: TPR, rhymes, memory games, songs and role-plays (SP2 and SP3 syllabuses). In practice, all techniques that stimulate YL to learn English are commonly practiced (SP3), or those which have been introduced and tested by the respondents earlier (SP2). As far as syllabus modification is concerned, the possibility of adding new ideas and topics to enrich a lesson’s script is stated unanimously. There is a common tendency to adapt the new teaching materials from other course books or even modify official documents for the sake of introducing a particular topic. Still, it is maintained that it may be difficult for a teacher working with SP2 syllabus to introduce new stories which differ from those designated in the course books. A less popular tendency is to define a syllabus as a picture frame that should not be changed.

Further study concerned with teaching materials reveals the basic set that usually includes a course book, a teacher’s book, a syllabus guide, flashcards and result schedules. Fairy-tales, DVD films and materials found via the Internet are recognized as extra resources regularly used by the respondents. Nevertheless, a detailed range of materials applied in primary schools varies from one respondent to the other.

The analysis of the procedures for the evaluation of learners’ progress reveals that the most attention is given to result schedules, criteria of grading, tests and self-assessment forms. Other forms of assessment such as projects, *Portfolio* and marks for learners’ active participation in English are also considered. It is reported that actually requirements, and grading systems such as marks and measuring scales are created by English teachers, who

introduce and impose them in primary education. In practice, the learner's progress is defined both by marks, descriptive and continuous assessment, and can be prepared by each English teacher or by a primary educator.

At this stage of the interpretation, the data concerned with parent's role illustrates two tendencies. The first tendency includes a group of English teachers who do not remember exactly the roles planned for parents and do not pay attention to these roles in a FL classroom, which implies that they do not engage parents in this process. The second tendency indicates that, on the contrary, there is a group of teachers who try to engage parents in such activities as practicing English vocabulary at home and supporting YL in preparation for tests with the help of the *Parents' Guide*.

The final part of this analysis brings observations concerned with English syllabuses in the context of teaching YL. In this ranking, the stage of syllabus implementation is regarded unanimously as the most interesting, enabling English teachers to compare lessons and reflect on their teaching. This stage is compared to the process of transferring information when the progress in learning a FL can be observed. Later on, other stages such as syllabus design, syllabus selection and syllabus evaluation are listed in the data. The most difficult stage is not identified explicitly and stated unanimously in the analysis as a different stage is listed by each respondent. Namely, syllabus selection is recognized as the most demanding and stressful task because there are many English syllabuses, which are very similar and easily available on the market. Syllabus design is also perceived as the most difficult stage that requires a lot of work. Then, syllabus implementation is described as the most challenging stage especially for English teachers who are ambitious and want to implement a lot of teaching materials. Finally, syllabus evaluation is defined as the most difficult stage, which requires both an analysis and a review of the syllabus.

The results show that syllabus selection requires, first of all, knowledge of other English syllabuses in order to compare them and select the most appropriate one. Nevertheless, a teacher's ability to reflect on a syllabus and adapt it to learners' abilities is highlighted here, plus understanding of YL' needs and their psychological development.

The analysis of English syllabus design and its requirements in the context of teaching YL reveals two views. The first view is linked to the teacher's experience in teaching YL, for example, understanding their needs, skills and difficulties in learning a FL; as well as the teacher's knowledge of the structure of the syllabus. The second view is linked to the very process of writing and designing a syllabus document; with a group of procedures and factors important for this process; for example, consistency in content selection, cohesion and logical order of the structure and linking between topics.

As far as English syllabus implementation is concerned, two tendencies are observed. The first refers to a teacher's creativity and her/his preparation for teaching English lessons, which should not be based only on course books but on other materials as well. The second tendency is linked to the teacher's good knowledge of the English syllabus and the abilities of the children in her/his class. At the last stage of the undertaken analysis, there are no major differences detected in English syllabus functions. Each English syllabus itself is described unanimously as an instrument, a guide, a signpost and an outline supporting both teachers and learners. It is stressed that a FL syllabus serves as an instrument in drawing an appropriate range of content, and should include material which is neither too easy nor too difficult for YL. Finally, it becomes clear that each syllabus' function depends on the teacher's approach to this official document. Nevertheless, its helpful and guiding role is always emphasized in teaching a FL in the primary context.

4.2. Interpretation of observation results

To answer the question about syllabus implementation, five factors are identified. These are: lesson aims, content, procedures, syllabus users (teachers, learners) and teaching materials. To sum up, the data from the interviews reveals that syllabus pre-implementation is affected mainly by the teacher's preparation, which is based on reading and comparison of teaching materials. Consequently, issues that may be controlled by English teachers include: variety and amount of lesson content; lesson pace; motivation of YL to participate in English lessons and relationships within the class. Issues that are difficult to control in the primary context include: YL' abilities and disabilities, their previous experiences with English; their knowledge of the world; an imposed syllabus or course book; a school's policy of teaching English; classroom size and facilities; the number of lessons per week and number of learners. The learners' approach and reactions to teaching materials are also challenging for the teacher due to the learners' individual differences and preferred learning styles (mixed ability groups). The most difficult issue is associated with pressure to cover the whole English syllabus or course book in one school year.

Here, the data is interpreted in terms of similar and different tendencies typical for English syllabus implementation. The aims of the lessons in the implementation of SP1, SP2 and SP3 syllabuses are presented in categories. In the observation of SP1 there are four categories identified: revision, introduction, practice, and consolidation of content; plus two subcategories: vocabulary and structures. In SP2 there are three categories: revision, introduction, and practice of the content; plus three subcategories: vocabulary, structure, and integration of skills. In the same way, in SP3 these are three categories: consolidation, introduction, and revision of content; plus two subcategories: vocabulary and structures.

Comparison of the aims in the syllabuses shows their differences in the levels of quantity and challenge. Namely, more challenging aims are recorded with SP2 and SP3 than SP1, which becomes even clearer when comparing the aims at grade level. Interpreting the aims of SP1 in 1st grade, the main tendency is to introduce four (sometimes six) new words or phrases in the context of simple structures (verbs *can/to be*) with prepositions (*up, down*). In 2nd grade, there is one group of vocabulary (e.g. pets) and simple constructions (verbs *can/to have got*; imperative verbs). In 3rd grade, the tendency is also to consolidate one group of vocabulary (e.g. animals) and simple structures (verbs *can/to be*).

Then, the aims of SP2 in 1st grade show a tendency to focus on both revision and the introduction of thematic vocabulary (e.g. clothes, colors), simple structures (verbs *to be/to have got*, imperative verbs) and more complex ones (*the Present Continuous Tense*). In 2nd grade, these are two or three groups of vocabulary (e.g. colors, toys), prepositions, plural forms of nouns and more complex structures (*the Present Simple Tense*). Subsequently, in 3rd grade there is a tendency to introduce two groups of vocabulary, simple and more complex structures (verb *to be/the Present Simple Tense*) as well as integrate skills.

Similarly, considering the aims in SP3, there is a tendency to introduce thematic vocabulary (e.g. feelings, needs) with a lot of new words, simple structures (verbs *to be/to have got*) and more complex ones (*the Present Continuous Tense*). In 2nd grade, the tendency is to introduce two or three groups of vocabulary (e.g. toys, seasons, directions), prepositions, simple and complex structures (*the Present Simple Tense*), comparative and superlative adjectives, plural forms of nouns. In 3rd grade, there is a considerable amount of vocabulary (e.g. countries and nations), simple and more complex structures (verb *to be, the Present Simple Tense*) singular and plural forms of nouns.

Examining the content in terms of topics, two opposing tendencies are apparent in each syllabus implementation. The first one indicates that topics are not written on the board during the lessons in 1st grades (SP1, SP2, SP3) and partly in 2nd and 3rd grades (SP2 and SP3). The second tendency reveals that short and informative topics are still introduced in a written form, for example in 3rd grades and partly in 2nd grades (SP2, SP3). These topics usually derive from titles of course books' sections or chapters, for example "My Room" (SP1), "I'm scared" (SP2) and "Countries" (SP3). The greatest variety and range of topics are recorded in the implementation of SP1, while topics are rarely observed in this form in the implementation of SP3 and SP2.

At this stage of the analysis, two patterns of English lessons in terms of stages are identified. The first pattern includes: warm-up (revision), presentation, practice, production and feedback (wrap-up). The second pattern is similar to the first, except for the longer revision part which includes: warm-up, revision practice, production and feedback (wrap-up). The revision part usually substitutes such stages as presentation and practice of the new content.

Each stage of the lesson focuses on a particular set of skills. Then, skills and language areas practised in the warm-up of SP1 in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades include pronunciation and reading skills, vocabulary, function and handwriting skills. In SP2 there are also pronunciation, vocabulary, functions and speaking skills. In the same way, in SP3 there are pronunciation, vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. Then, much attention is devoted to vocabulary and pronunciation in the warm-up during English lessons. Skills and language areas practiced in the presentation of SP1 in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades include handwriting, listening and reading skills, recognizing letters and sounds, pronunciation, translating, writing, drawing and speaking skills. In SP2 these are pronunciation, listening and speaking skills, grammar, reading and writing skills, and in SP3, pronunciation, listening, writing, speaking and reading skills. Thus, it becomes clear that pronunciation, along with both receptive skills, is the priority, and only later are the productive skills taken into consideration in the implementation of the syllabuses in primary schools. At this stage, handwriting skills, translation and drawing skills in case of SP1 are different from the others suggested in SP2 and SP3.

As for the skills and areas stressed in the practice and production of SP1 in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades, these are pronunciation, listening, drawing, reading and hand/writing skills; correcting, translating, speaking, guessing and

craftwork skills. In SP2 these are listening skills, pronunciation, speaking, handwriting, drawing, guessing and reading skills. In SP3 these are listening, speaking, reading, handwriting and guessing skills, plus pronunciation. Here, it comes to light that SP1 is implemented with the widest selection of skills in comparison to other syllabuses.

Finally, the skills and areas practiced in the feedback of SP1 in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades include handwriting, spelling and reading skills; plus organizational skills such as how to prepare for tests or projects, drawing and counting skills. In SP2 these are pronunciation, language functions, speaking skills, plus organizing skills, social skills, discussions about learning experiences, playing skills, singing, miming and drawing skills. In SP3 these are language functions plus social skills, discussions about learning experiences, playing and singing, and the aforementioned organizational skills. As the data reveals, the skills stressed in the feedback are linked in the majority to non-linguistic abilities, which help in organizing the process of learning.

The data reveals another universal tendency – the syllabuses are implemented with the characteristic sets of the procedures that focus on skills practiced in each stage of the lesson. The warm-up with SP1 in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades includes the following procedures: greeting YL; pronunciation practice (the choral drills), singing and chanting the rhymes; checking attendance and homework; discussions about the project; handwriting and learning skills; distribution of tests; revision of vocabulary; learning simple functions; reading practice (choral and individual drills); fixing words into memory and playing class guessing games; introduction of the topic in Polish and English.

As the results show, there are at least five tendencies identified among English teachers in the implementation of the syllabuses. The first tendency indicates that the teachers observed are well-prepared for each English lesson, and for teaching YL. The second tendency indicates that the majority of instructions are provided mainly in English. Polish is used for translating words, correcting mistakes, talking about traditions and culture and commenting on discipline. The third tendency proves that English teachers have a good rapport with YL – the whole group, and individuals, irrespective of how many of them are in the class. English teachers pay attention to the development of linguistic and non-linguistic skills, helping them with difficulties in learning such as dyslexia and dysgraphia, and with integration in the group when they come from children's homes. The fourth tendency signifies that English teachers have good classroom management skills, although they may have problems with keeping discipline in large groups. The fifth tendency shows that they try to be flexible in the implementation of English syllabuses, syllabus guides and course books, meeting the demands of school administration, parents and considering local teaching conditions.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the project's results and answers to the research questions concerned with syllabus design and implementation enable the author to recommend some modifications. These modifications refer to a model framework of the syllabus for YL and implications for teacher training (suggestions for syllabus use).

5.1. *Syllabus design for young learners*

The framework is designed in two parts. The first part is general and illustrates three stages of syllabus design, implementation and evaluation within the TSA (Total Systems Approach) plus the holistic perspective of child development. The second part is more detailed and involves two categories of assumptions recommended for syllabuses of YL. The first category focuses on the most important theoretical assumptions that explain YL' development in terms of physical/biological, mental/emotional, individual/social dimensions plus aspects of FLA/SLA for this age learners. The second category focuses on the process of teaching English to YL based on the course design approach, both teacher and learner development in learner-centered classroom with a focus on the integrated teaching/learning recommendations, a wide range of practical approaches and innovations in this field.

Syllabus design in the context of primary education may be compared to ESP syllabus design and requires an eclectic approach. English syllabus design for YL can be a multidimensional framework and may include the following categories (cf. Stec, 2001:25-29):

1. Educational goals (key competencies): are listed in the core curriculum statement for primary education and focus on the most essential schooling skills and abilities.
2. Teaching goals (educational goals): are listed as non-linguistic skills including intercultural competence of YL, development of a positive attitude to other languages and cultures, learning strategies and learning autonomy.

3. Teaching objectives: are listed as linguistic skills to be learnt by YL and can be defined in operational forms.

4. Selection of topics and situations: the most interesting topics for YL are listed as *Family and Relatives, Games and Toys, Animals and Pets, Food and Drinks, Home, Health and Parts of the Body, Clothes, Shops and Money, Sports and Hobbies, School, Friends, Jobs and Skills, Everyday Objects, Time/Days/Months/Season, Weather and Everyday Plans, Places and Buildings, Holidays and Traditions, Countries, Nationalities and Travelling, Means of Communication, Directions and Means of Transport, Feelings and Opinion, Literature for YL – Fairy Tales.*

5. Selection of vocabulary (pronunciation): is listed as words, phrases that describe the world of YL – their personal details, names of objects in the classroom, home and school, toys, daily activities, colours, animals, fruits and vegetables, seasons, days, months and other words associated with the topics and situations interesting for YL.

6. Selection of functions: is listed as the basic communicative functions needed for dialogues, for example to greet, say goodbye, identify and present people/places/time, describe skills and abilities, describe behaviour and give orders.

7. Selection of grammatical categories: are listed as structures and grammatical patterns that are recommended for comprehension at this level of the FLL, for example countable/uncountable nouns, determiners and pronouns, question forms, prepositions of place/time and space, adjectives and adverbs, conjunctions, imperatives, present/future/past forms of tenses and modal verbs.

8. Selection of methods, procedures and techniques: describe the appropriate practical procedures for the primary classroom including those recommended here in the theoretical framework.

9. Teaching outcomes: describe a selection of receptive, productive, interaction and mediation skills after each stage of the FLL plus a set of “learning to learn” skills.

10. Forms and criteria for assessment and evaluation: describe and list forms and criteria of global and continuous assessment of YL’ progress.

The optimal English syllabus for YL should be practical in use and include: description of the target language level, selection of course books, selection of extra materials, number of teaching hours, description and aims of the course, selection of content (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, topics, receptive and productive skills, interaction and mediation skills); description of the desired results. The practical framework should define the four competencies that are developed by YL through the study of a FL: linguistic, strategic, communicative and culture categories.

Syllabus design, implementation and evaluation in the primary schools should constitute an open process. Everyone involved should know the purpose of every activity, the materials and procedures to be used, the definition of success and the consequences of failure. Another implication is that each syllabus supports the primary classroom in providing stability and uncertainty, familiar and unknown, safe and challenging lessons for “young minds”. The final implication is that syllabus development is a process, not an event, while FL education is a lifelong cycle between the formal school setting (primary school, home) and the future work place.

5.2. *Syllabus implementation – implications for teachers*

The professional work of teachers for YL involves a number of activities including syllabus use. To support novice teachers (or refresh the more experienced) in this demanding task, the idea is to train teachers in syllabus implementation. The results of the project indicate that syllabus implementation for YL may be prepared at the four following levels:

1. The course syllabus with a focus on levels and goals for a particular language course planned for the whole year or semester.
2. The syllabus unit with a focus on objectives and areas recommended for a few weeks or months.
3. The syllabus guide with a focus on the teaching cycle recommended for a week of teaching YL.
4. The lesson plan with a focus on actions and procedures recommended for a day of teaching YL.

Another implication is that teachers can develop stages to improve syllabus implementation in the following way:

Stage 1: Identification of the purpose of the target language course and of the selected syllabus: considering YL’ needs; analyzing teaching conditions; analyzing materials and resources; considering time assigned for the course; listing objectives for this particular course.

Stage 2: Development of learning objectives (a list of skills, abilities and facts that YL should understand per lessons). These objectives can be developed with the help of a course book and a syllabus guide that serve as the springboard for more detailed lesson planning.

Stage 3: Division of the semester course into modules: comparing the number of lessons recommended in the syllabus with the amount of class time in the semester; considering the content in terms of quality, time and quantity; structuring the course to lessons and considering the school calendar.

Stage 4: Development of the school year calendar: studying the school calendar; calculating the impact of holidays on learning; planning tests and projects; describing learners' responsibilities and involvement in learning (policy on participation); planning forms of interaction with parents; planning time and forms of reflection and action research; planning workshops and conferences for self-development.

Different countries have different needs. Therefore, teachers make independent and personal decisions in a FL primary classroom. The principles concerned with understanding YL and their development, language and its role in society and human understanding should be always included in teacher training syllabuses. The most essential skill in this context is the translation of this knowledge into real preparation of lessons. A FL teacher can be a (co)author, a director and an evaluator of syllabuses: he/she designs (or selects) a foreign language syllabus, implements it in the primary classroom, and evaluates its effectiveness (cf. Stec, 2009:51-60).

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