

CHAPTER 8: DESIGNING AN ESL PROGRAMME FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN IKAGENG: A SYNTHESIS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, all the factors that were taken into consideration for the design of an ESL Programme for preschool children in Ikageng are summarized. They are discussed under the headings of the literature read on the topic, Curriculum 2005 and the situation analysis done in the preschools in Ikageng. Furthermore, the format of the ESL Syllabus (cf. Chapter 9) is motivated and discussed.

8.2 FACTORS THAT WERE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION DURING THE DESIGN OF THE ESL PROGRAMME

8.2.1 Literature Survey

8.2.1.1 *Literature Surveyed on Course Design*

After a thorough survey of the literature on course design, it was decided that a circular process of course design as proposed by Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21) (cf. Fig. 8.1) would be followed. This would include doing a situation analysis before setting any aims, organizing the content or selecting teaching methods for the course.

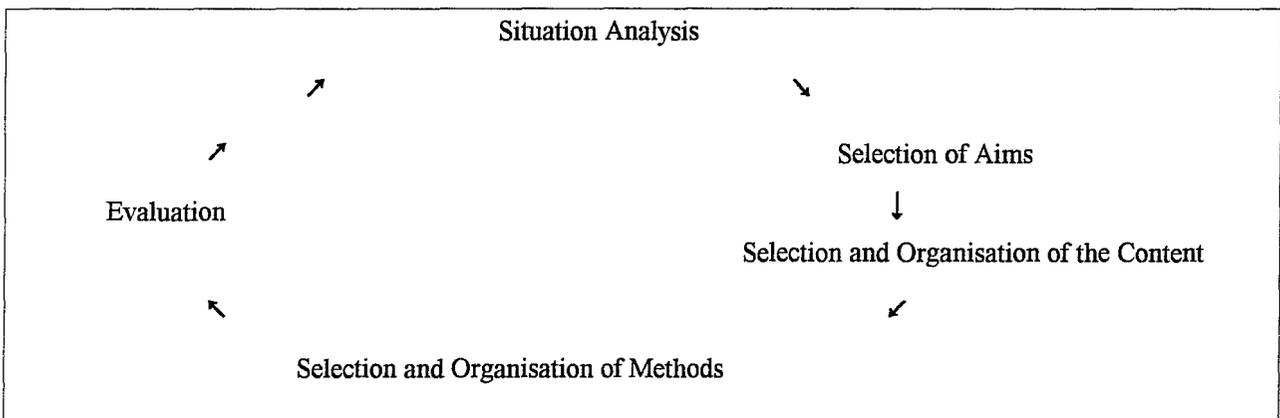


Figure 8.1 The circular model for syllabus design as proposed by Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21)

Furthermore, course design takes place on four different levels (cf. Section 2.1). In the design of the ESL Programme the first two levels of polity determination were taken into consideration, but the focus during the study and design were on the last two levels, namely that of syllabus design and the teaching-learning situation. This can also be seen in the format of the ESL Programme. It is also the reason, why it is called an ESL Programme and not an ESL Syllabus as it not merely prescribes the content to be covered in the course, but it also prescribes activities and tasks for the teaching-learning situation.

8.2.1.2 *Literature Surveyed on the Preschooler*

Psychologically the preprimary child is in a phase where he follows role models and where he struggles between two poles of initiative and guilt (cf. Section 4.2.1). He wants to attempt new things (initiative), but sometimes because of physical and cognitive limitations he fails at these attempts (at which time he experiences guilt). An ESL programme should thus challenge the child, but not above his cognitive and physical abilities.

Cognitively, the five-year-old starts to think symbolically. However, the use of language is the final and most difficult task in the development of his symbolic thought (cf. Section 4.2.2). When language teaching is the objective, then, the teaching should start with concrete objects, and from there, help the child to develop towards symbolic language.

Furthermore, some basic procedures followed by most children when they acquire a language have been identified from different studies of children's speech in the area of language acquisition (cf. Section 4.2.2). The child then refines these rules when he is exposed to further language experiences. It is during this step that the child accommodates exceptions and irregularities in his language system. The next step is an extension of the second. The child not only limits his rule-making to single words or grammatical forms, but he will also grasp the rules for combining words into meaningful sentences for adjusting speech according to the person addressed and the specific situation in which the communication takes place.

In an ESL Programme, the child should be given the opportunity and time to follow these basic procedures himself. The programme would be especially helpful in the first step (introducing the child to the rule) and the third step (extending the rule to meaningful communication).

Physiologically, the preschooler's attention span is not very long. Activities in the ESL Programme should thus be short and very enjoyable to the child, without expecting the child to sit quietly for long periods of time (cf. Section 4.2.3).

Another characteristic of the preprimary child, physiologically, is that he learns best when most of his senses are involved. Most preschoolers have a preference for a specific sense and a programme for preschoolers should cater for children with different preferences (cf. Section 4.2.3).

According to research, the memory span of a five-year-old is four (cf. Section 4.2.3). This means that the preschooler can repeat not more than four items faultlessly and in the correct order. This is important when designing activities for the preschoolers, so as not to bore or frustrate them.

Socially, play forms a very important part of the preschooler's day and is a very effective vehicle for helping them to learn. Five-year-olds are content to play by themselves for long periods of time, although they also play with other children. They also enjoy fantasy games and prefer competition games to team games. Group games would still require the arbitration of an adult as the preschooler is still largely dependent on the approval of an adult. Play should thus feature quite well in an ESL Programme for preschoolers, and the five-year-old's preferences for certain games should be taken into consideration when choosing the games (cf. Section 4.2.4).

The setting within which a programme is implemented, also plays an important role (cf. Section 4.3.1.3). It should be relaxed with emotionally warm personal links to children in which a native or near-native language model relates well to the children. The setting should allow as much incidental learning as possible during the course of the day, and should at least be a small

representation of the natural milieu. It should be attractive and play-oriented and should tempt the child to get involved and motivate him to communicate verbally in the second language. Furthermore, a setting should provide a model dialogue partner (such as a puppet) for the child which is fun to communicate with. It should consist of no more than ten children as that will ensure individual attention and instant, positive reinforcement. Lastly, a setting should allow for inconspicuous repetition of what is heard and learnt.

8.2.2 Curriculum 2005

Curriculum 2005 is now the compulsory curriculum in South Africa for all educational institutions and on all educational levels. This has a definite impact on the chosen syllabus. As has already been argued in Chapter 5, the task-based syllabus, could fit effectively within the framework of Curriculum 2005. Not only does the definition of a task correlate with the Critical Cross-field Outcomes (CO's), but in its connection to the real-world, it can also be applied within the eight different Learning Areas (LA's) that have been identified.

The task-based syllabus will need to be restructured in such a manner that all of the elements of a Learning Programme in Curriculum 2005, namely the CO's, the Specific Outcomes (SO's), the Assessment Criteria (AC's) and the Phase Organisers can be incorporated. This means that a whole new format will need to be designed for this syllabus (cf. 8.3).

8.2.3 Situation Analysis in Preschools in Ikageng

8.2.3.1 Data Gathered from the Preschools

One of the main aspects highlighted in the observation of the preschools, is the prevalent poverty in the community (cf. Section 7.2.1). This has a definite influence on an ESL programme in that the programme should not make use of expensive methods or sophisticated resources. With regard to resources, most preschools had paper, paint, and crayons available.

The preschool classes are fairly big and this should be taken into consideration when designing activities for the programme. The content and methods should be adapted to a group of 25 or more children (cf. Section 7.2.1 & 7.2.2). Another alternative is that the activities are designed in such a manner that the children work together in smaller groups while the teacher supervises them.

None of the preschools have a lot of space indoors, and most of them don't have a lot of space outdoors either (cf. Section 7.2.1 & 7.2.2). Activities should thus be planned that would not require more space per child than is available.

Lastly, an ESL Programme should not rely on rote learning and repetition alone. This method is already used in the preschools and it wasn't very effective as the children could parrot sentences in English, but they didn't know what they were saying (cf. Section 7.2.1 & 7.2.2). This also implies that more than 10 minutes per day should be spent on teaching English as the children should be given time to process the information they receive. They should also be allowed to learn ESL with the help of most of their senses and not by only repeating words or sentences without understanding what they mean. What they learn should be given to them in a very creative and concrete manner.

8.2.3.2 *Data Gathered from the Parents*

It was quite obvious that all of the parents that were interviewed, were in favour of an ESL Programme at their children's preschools. None of them had any objections to such a programme (cf. Section 7.3.2). This is an indication that there is a definite need perceived from the point of view of the parents for the children to learn English.

The designed programme shouldn't require very costly resources (not more than R10 per month per child) as parents are not able to pay more than that (cf. Section 7.3.2). Again, it becomes clear that teaching aids and resources shouldn't be expensive.

Parents expect that an ESL programme would enhance their children's communicative competence (cf. Section 7.3.2). One of the outcomes should thus be that children should be able to communicate important information about themselves and their immediate environment in English.

Most of the parents are not proficient enough to help the children with acquisition skills at home. They also rely very much on the preschool to prepare their children for Grade 1 (cf. Section 7.3.2). The programme should thus also focus on listening, reading, writing and speaking skills with the preparation of Grade 1 in mind.

8.2.3.3 *Data Gathered from the Teachers*

All of the teachers, except one, recognizes the need for an ESL programme as part of their daily programme. Most teachers want to incorporate English into their schedule, but they don't know how to do it effectively (cf. Section 7.4.1 & 7.4.2). The ESL Programme should thus be set out in a very transparent, clear and simple manner. This will ensure that the less experienced or underqualified teacher will also have access to it.

The themes for the programme should centre around the child and his world. It should start with concepts that are very familiar to the child (such as his body) and then move to broader themes (such as the environment) (cf. Section 7.4.2).

Another very important fact is that the programme should be fun to the children. The activities should be interesting to them and the teaching methods shouldn't require them to sit quietly for long periods of time. The children need to be involved in all the materials that are presented (cf. Section 7.4.2).

The data gathered from the teachers also gave an indication of the amount of time per day that can be spent on an ESL programme in the preschools. It seems that a daily ESL programme of about thirty minutes would be practical and convenient for the teachers (cf. Section 7.4.2).

8.2.3.4 *Data Gathered from the Children*

It quickly became apparent that none of the children were even slightly proficient in English (cf. Section 7.5.1). They don't view the language as a means of communication as they get by very well in Tswana at the schools. This fact has basically two implications for an ESL Programme.

The first is that the starting level of the syllabus should be very basic. The programme shouldn't rely on any prior knowledge of communicating in English that the children may have.

Furthermore, the syllabus should guide the children from the beginning not to communicate in single words, but in simple sentences.

The second implication for an ESL Programme is that the children should be motivated, somehow by the syllabus to speak English. This means a desire should be created within them to communicate in the language. The easiest way to do this is to create a character (e.g. a puppet) who is very likeable, and interesting and who can only speak English.

Furthermore, the children don't have a very big concentration span. A single activity in the programme should never be more than 15 minutes, or the children will get bored. The syllabus should rather consist of a variety of shorter activities.

The children loved the pictures used in the story books (cf. Section 7.5.1). It would thus be advisable to include many pictures in the programme - especially during English story time. This will not only help them to place the language they hear into context, but it will be very enjoyable for them. This will motivate them to learn more English.

The focus of the programme should be on communicative competence, and specifically to pronunciation of the end sounds (cf. Section 7.5.1), so that children will be able to communicate more effectively.

8.3 FORMAT OF THE ESL PROGRAMME

First of all, it should be clear that an ESL Programme forms part of the larger Literacy Programme for preschool children. It should be regarded as an addition to this larger programme (which also includes the children's first language, cultural literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, media literacy and computer literacy (Department of Education, 1997:9)). For the syllabus to be incorporated into the larger Literacy Programme, it needs to have the same planning components. According to the Department of Education (1997:14), these are:

- Phase Organisers;
- Programme Organisers;
- The relevant Learning Areas (LA);
- Specific Outcomes (SO's);
- Assessment Criteria (AC's); as well as a
- Description of the activities.

In order to make the programme more compact, all of these elements have been organised in a grid form to indicate the work on a weekly basis. This means that the teacher will be able to see at one glance what the week's ESL teaching will consist of.

Curriculum 2005 makes use of the term "Notional Time" (Department of Education, 1997:15). According to the policy document (Department of Education, 1997:15),

Notional Time is a complex concept. It represents contact time, preparation time and other issues. It might best be seen as relative weighting of Learning Programmes within a phase. It is important not to see the Notional Time as directly relating to time-table quantities, but more as informing time-tabling in an indirect way. The general school management should reflect the Notional Time indicated in terms of staffing, organisation, management and other resources.

The guidelines given in the policy document (Department of Education, 1997:23) with regard to Notional Times within the Foundation Phase are as follows:

Life Skills Learning Programme:	25%
Literacy Learning Programme:	25%
Numeracy Learning Programmes:	25%
Flexible Time:	25%

According to this policy, 25% of the total teaching time should be spent on the Literacy Learning Programme. This has implications for an ESL Programme, as it would form part of the larger Literacy Programme.

The preschool children in Ikageng attend preschool for 6 to 8 hours per day. This means that 1½ hours of the time should more or less be spent on the Literacy Learning Programme. Half an hour of that time per day for ESL, would still leave an hour for the rest of the programme. This seems quite reasonable.

Even though the policy states that there should not be a limit on the time spent to achieve AC's, estimated times for each activity are given as part of the grid, as the short attention span of preschoolers should be taken into consideration.

The general aims or outcomes of the programme are formulated first. These aims were derived from the Programme Statement of the Literacy Programme as set out in Curriculum 2005 (cf. Chapter 9). The rest of the programme is organized in a grid form. There are 20 separate grids - one for each week of the programme. Each grid consists of the following elements:

- The week number and the specific outcomes (or aims) for the week derived from the Specific Outcomes (SO's) of the different Learning Areas in Curriculum 2005. In the grid the Specific Outcomes (SO's) and Assessment Criteria (AC) for each daily activity are also given and numbered according to their original numbers in the policy document (cf. appendix).
- The content for each week is organized under a Phase Organiser (cf. Section 5.3) and a

Programme Organiser (also known as a theme).

- The learning content is organized in terms of the specific Learning Area (LA). These are, for example, Language, Literacy and Communication(LLC) or Arts and Culture (AC). The abbreviated forms for the different Learning Areas (LA's) have been used (cf. Section 5.3). Furthermore the content is described in terms of skills (i.e. speaking, reading, listening, writing, creativity or playing games) and activities (also known as tasks in the Task-Based syllabus). Sometimes more than one skill is involved in an activity, although the skill mentioned under the heading should receive the main focus during the activity.
- The activities (or tasks), which are discussed in such a manner that they are a brief indication of the choice and organisation of the teaching methods.
- The estimated time for each activity.

8.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the different aspects that have implications for an ESL Programme for preschool children in Ikageng have been discussed. Even though it is of importance to survey the literature and to have a sound theoretical basis for the programme, it was the situation analysis made of the preschools in Ikageng that contributed very valuable information with regard to what the programme should look like and what it should contain. The survey of the literature as well as a study of Curriculum 2005 provided a theoretical and physical framework for the syllabus. However, the information gained from the preschools, parents, teachers and children provided some idea of the content and methods of the syllabus.