

CHAPTER 6

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

There is a deep concern among academics, parents, education authorities (Department of Education and Training) and employers about the deteriorating standard of English in black education...

(Nwaila, 1992:1)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The present situation in ESL primary classrooms in South Africa is assessed in this chapter. Syllabuses are designed for particular situations. The aim of this chapter is to assess the situation for which a task-based language syllabus is to be designed.

The greater part of the chapter is based on a survey of literature regarding the South African context. The present core syllabus (and the proposed outcomes-based approach) for ESL in South African primary schools as well as its implementation is examined. This chapter also reports on an investigation into the teaching of English in primary schools.

6.2 THE PRESENT SOUTH AFRICAN ESL SYLLABUS

The present primary school ESL syllabus is the Interim Core Syllabus (published in 1995). The syllabus is organised into the following components:

- principles;
- general teaching approach;

- general aims for the Junior Primary and Senior Primary Phases;
- specific aims and activities, and
- assessment.

The syllabus is based on the following general principles (Department of Education, 1995:3-4):

- existing language skills, in the form of L1 skills, should be utilised;
- all teachers should be teachers of language, because language and thought are interwoven;
- code-switching (i.e. between languages) should be accepted if it facilitates comprehension, clarification, the acquisition of the target language or deepens the understanding of the topic under discussion;
- metacognition should be encouraged and content material related to other subjects in the pupil's curriculum should be used as resource material in the ESL class;
- the four language skills should be integrated;
- language learning should be contextualised;
- interactive, problem-solving and purposeful tasks should be used;
- the ESL teacher should be a facilitator of learning;
- low levels of anxiety should at all times be striven for in the ESL classroom, and
- accuracy skills should not be overemphasised.

General aims are described in terms of successful communication for purposes of a personal, social and educational nature (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1995:4-5). The pupils should:

- *be encouraged to learn English so that they will eventually be able to meet the challenge of living in a multilingual environment.*
- *listen to and understand English as it is spoken in South Africa.*
- *speak English clearly, fluently and with increasing confidence in a variety of situations and*

for a variety of purposes.

- *establish and develop the necessary reading skills so that their ability to read and comprehend a range of materials and their ability to read for multiple purposes (for information, for enjoyment and for personal enrichment, for example) will improve steadily.*
- *learn first, to write, and then to write for an increasing variety of purposes including the purposes required by other areas of the curriculum.*
- *use English spontaneously and creatively without fear of constant correction and/or ridicule.*
- *control English structure and vocabulary and to use these in contextualised and interactive ways.*
- *experience a sense of enjoyment and achievement in their mastery of English as an additional means of communication and as a tool for learning.*
- *develop a basic awareness of social context and the ways it affects communication and to use elementary strategies for evaluating their own success in communicating.*

The integration of the four language skills is advocated from Grade 1. This means that informal reading and writing are introduced in the ESL classroom from the first school year.

Objectives for the two primary phases are organised in terms of the four language skills and grammar. These are extracts from the Senior Primary Phase (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1995:6-12):

Listening and speaking

- *In the Senior Primary Phase, pupils should continue to be exposed to all the activities listed for the Junior Primary Phase but at increasing levels of difficulty.*
- *In addition, pupils in the Senior Primary Phase should be exposed to a range of English that will better enable them to cope with subjects taught through the medium of English where applicable.*
- *Pupils at the SP level should at least be able*
 - *to discriminate between words which sound similar in fluent spoken English*
 - *to give and follow instructions*
 - *offer or accept help*
 - *to recognise the way in which the voice is used (e.g. stress, intonation) to express subtleties of meaning*
 - *to recognise that a point is being made or developed or that a conclusion is being drawn*
 - *to listen to oral presentations (e.g. lessons, talks, dramatisations, interviews) in order to distinguish main ideas and facts, and to take simple notes*
 - *to talk spontaneously and easily on a variety of topics such as their environment, hobbies,*

interests, other subjects across the curriculum, sport, news items, local interest, themes from reading matter, etc...

Reading

- *to use an English dictionary to find the appropriate meaning of words encountered in their reading. This implies being able to apply alphabetical order to the first, second, third and fourth letter of words*
- *to see the function of:*
 - *a contents page*
 - *an index*
 - *chapter and paragraph headings*
- *to respond to the features which show that a writer is:*
 - *introducing or developing a new idea*
 - *emphasising a point*
 - *illustrating a point*
 - *changing a line of thought*
 - *drawing a conclusion*
- *to read for specific purposes, for example, with a view to*
 - *distinguish fact from fiction*
 - *separating main points from supporting argument*
 - *distinguishing between statements and examples*
 - *identifying bias and stereotyping*
 - *scanning a text to extract information on a particular topic...*

Writing

- *to express themselves comfortably in such writing activities as*
 - *the keeping of diaries*
 - *writing short, informal letters*
 - *writing short descriptive or narrative composition*
 - *recording events or the results of observations or simple experiments*
 - *simple note-taking*
 - *writing required by the needs of other content areas*
- *to show an awareness that the way in which they write is affected by the purpose and audience*
- *to show elementary ability to vary sentence length and structure according to their purpose and the nature of the writing task*
- *to control the basic methods linking their ideas and developing a topic (topic sentences and paragraphing, connectives)*
- *to know how to draw the writing activity to a close...*

Grammar objectives are classified under 'Language-in-Action'

(Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1995:13-14):

- *This syllabus is concerned with developing pupils' communicative competence. Accordingly, it assumes that some understanding of the way language works is essential for all communication, whether this involves listening, speaking, reading or writing. Therefore, pupils need some knowledge of language structures to enable them to use these in different contexts and for different purposes.*
- *By the end of the Senior Primary Phase pupils should at least have*

- *an understanding of how words are formed and the ability to apply this knowledge (e.g. how to form an adjective from a noun)*
- *a reasonable control of spelling and punctuation*
- *a knowledge of the main word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) and how they are used*
- *an understanding of and reasonable accuracy in the use of tense (e.g. past, present, future) and mood (i.e. active/passive), concord and word order, especially as these enable effective communication*
- *an awareness of the similarities and differences of certain structural features of their home language(s) and the second (further) language.*

The interim core syllabus is meritorious in its description of specific activities that focus on meaning. The emphasis on error tolerance and fluency activities indicates a communicative approach to language teaching and learning. Total Physical Response methods are encouraged in the junior grades, which shows an awareness of the importance of involving the senses in learning activities for young children (cf. 2.3.1.3.3). The syllabus states that the four skills should not be taught in a linear fashion, but rather as soon as pupils show a readiness to learn them (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1994:7). Reading in English can, therefore, be introduced (albeit informally) at the same time as reading in the L1. Informal writing is also encouraged, i.e. the pupil should be allowed to express himself in written English from Gr. 1.

The following guidelines for teaching are given in the syllabus (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1995:3-4):

- *the communication of meaning is central. A desire to use the language is the major incentive for learning its structures and vocabulary. Teachers should, therefore, attempt to create situations where the pupils will be motivated to communicate with one another, with the teacher, and ultimately, with the wider community.*
- *Language should always be seen in relation to context: i.e. to purpose, audience, and circumstance. Language teaching should, therefore, not focus on the drilling of discrete items.*
- *Classroom activities should be learner-centred, interactive and meaningful to the pupils. This is best achieved through group and pair work.*
- *The teacher's role is to organise and facilitate communication between pupils or between pupils and materials.*
- *Teachers should attempt to create a climate within which pupils can use English with interest, purpose and enjoyment. Every effort should be made to create a nurturing, stress-free environment since stress, ridicule and embarrassment are known to inhibit learning.*

- *Although the control of linguistic is one of the ultimate goals of language learning, teachers should encourage the pupils to experiment with English, correcting them only when their choice or use of language is inappropriate.*
- *Teachers should, at all times, be aware of and respond to pupils' individual needs, abilities and interests.*
- *Teachers should use the opportunities which come their way to foster their pupils' awareness of the many kinds of language and ways of using them, even though these may not be specified in the syllabus. This includes awareness across language as well as within a language.*

Although verbs are used to indicate pupil activity, e.g. 'to have an understanding/awareness/knowledge..', it is difficult to measure. Some of the objectives are vague, e.g. 'pupils should have a reasonable control of spelling and punctuation'. It is not clear what is expected by 'reasonable control'. Outcomes for the purposes of language use (e.g. 'give and accept help') and skill outcomes (e.g. specific skills like spelling) are described. The teacher may, however, have difficulty in knowing what to focus on, or how to integrate these outcomes, as no examples are provided for the organisation and integration of teaching-learning opportunities.

The syllabus does not provide pupil profiles for different grades, and teachers may, therefore, select unsuitable content for different grades. The syllabus states that content should be graded by introducing the same material '...at increasing levels of difficulty' (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1994:6). This is vague, as teachers have different perceptions of what 'difficulty' is. Aspects like error tolerance, code-switching, accuracy skills and grammar teaching are included, but no guidance is given on how they should be integrated.

Although the syllabus reflects an awareness of the cross-curricular demands in English MOI schools, it does not specify concepts and vocabulary items that pupils require at certain stages in order to learn other subjects through the medium of English.

The following guidelines are given for assessment during the Senior Primary Phase (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1994:14-15):

The communicative aims of the syllabus imply that assessment should be concerned with what is successfully communicated rather than with what has been memorised and mechanically reproduced.

Listening and Speaking Assessment

By the end of the Senior Primary Phase pupils should be able to interact in a range of different social and learning contexts, using a variety of strategies to maintain communication, showing some awareness of the need to adapt their speech to suit different audiences.

Reading Assessment

By the end of the Senior Primary Phase pupils should be able to

- *read texts containing a range of vocabulary and language structures and should be able to interpret and use the information in a variety of ways*
- *discuss themes and issues in texts containing some unfamiliar language and concepts*

Assessment of Written Work

Assessment of pupils' written work should include the assessment of

- *descriptive and narrative composition*
- *writing dialogue for a specific purpose (e.g. simple informal letters, notices for the school or class information board, the type of writing required by other content areas etc.)*
- *specific skills (e.g. spelling, punctuation, paragraphing) as these impede or facilitate communication.*

By the end of the Senior Primary Phase pupils should be able to

- *write texts of two or more paragraphs, controlling familiar linguistic patterns and structures to link and sequence information and ideas*
- *express personal ideas and experiences coherently with a reasonable control of structure, spelling and punctuation.*

Assessment criteria for pupil performance at the end of grades aren't clearly delineated, and no guidance is provided for formative and summative assessment. As assessment is not integrated with aims and objectives, the teacher may not know when something is 'successfully communicated'. It is also not clear what is meant by a statement such as 'a variety of writing tasks'. As no examples are given of writing tasks that can be expected of pupils, teachers may not know what to teach or

assess.

The Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language makes use of behavioural objectives and meaning-based activities. These resemble a task-based approach to language teaching, but it doesn't provide the comprehensive specification found in the ALL and TOC syllabuses.

6.2.1 The proposed approach to education in South Africa

The South African Minister of Education announced in 1996 that an outcomes-based approach to education (cf. Chapter 1) would be implemented in stages as from 1998 in all syllabuses. This approach emphasises the 'link between the intentions and results of learning, rather than the traditional approach of listing of content to be covered within a learning programme' (Department of Education, 1997:12).

A working committee for languages published proposals for a generic syllabus for languages in March, 1997 (Department of Education, 1997:22-44). This is suggested on the grounds that a national framework for language certification should be characterised by common learning outcomes across languages. Learners' success will be measured in terms of the attainment of criteria set for a particular level. According to the working committee, the position is adopted that attainment in all languages (i.e. L1, L2 and modern foreign languages like German and French) can be described in terms of the four language skills along a single continuum of language development. This single continuum starts at 'no knowledge of the language' and ends with 'the necessary cognitive academic language proficiency to study content subjects independently at senior secondary level and beyond' (Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language, 1996:8). The assumption is that pupils can progress from, for example, 'no English' to cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in the compulsory ten years of study.

Seven specific outcomes for language teaching are suggested;

- learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding;
- learners show critical awareness of language usage;
- learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts;
- learners access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations;
- learners understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context;
- learners use language for learning, and
- learners use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations.

Three phases of language learning are recognised for the compulsory period of schooling (which is from years 1 - 9), namely:

- a foundation phase;
- an intermediate phase, and
- a senior phase.

In order to develop differentiated language programmes, outcomes for each of the phases are described according to assessment criteria and range statements (Department of Education, 1997:27), e.g.

'Learning outcome: Learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding

PHASE	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	RANGE STATEMENT
SENIOR	1. Original meaning is created through personal texts. 2. A key passage is identified and clarified. 3. Inferences are made from texts. 4. Meaning is constructed through interaction with other language users. 5. Ways in which construction of meaning varies according to cultural, social and personal differences are identified. 6. Ways in which context affects meaning and understanding are identified. 7. Writer's/speaker's point of view is critically reflected on. 8. Reasoned arguments about interpretation and meaning are developed. 9. Discourse is sustained.	At this level learners create a wide range of texts of different kinds. Learners also interact with and respond to a wide range of texts. Interaction with other language users takes place with a wide range of audiences from both familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

An integrated approach is evident in the description of outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements.

What is of concern is the apparent assumption that all languages are learnt in the same way and for the same purposes. If this is the case, it can be assumed that the core syllabus for languages will not incorporate findings of SLA studies in any way. Kilfoil (1996:11) expresses concern because the function of the pupil's home language in his general development is ignored in the proposed approach, i.e. the pupil uses the L1 for meaning-giving, but other languages are mainly used for recoding. Vygotskian theory (cf. 4.3.4) stresses the importance of language and thought that influences pupil development. It would be idealistic to assume that L2 learners always think in the L2. The fact that SLA involves recoding, the creation, flexing or restructuring of culturally different concepts, and the learner's use of L1 and L2 for different purposes is not addressed. Given the constraints of the South African situation, it is doubtful if pupils can progress from 'no English' to achieving CALP in ten years. A further concern is the use of the term 'single continuum', as it

may create the impression that pupils learn in a linear way.

The proposed approach is, however, in line with task-based language syllabuses. This is evident from the integration of learning processes and products (Department of Education, 1997:22-44.). Aims are stated in terms of specific outcomes which are graded for the foundation, intermediate and senior phases. Assessment criteria provide evidence that the outcomes have been achieved through demonstrated pupil behaviour. Range statements indicate the scope, depth, levels of complexity and parameters of achievement. The integration of outcomes and range statements provides the teacher with support about what is expected of pupils.

The implementation of the ESL syllabus in South Africa is discussed next.

6.3 THE ESL CONTEXT IN SOUTH AFRICAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

6.3.1 Primary school pupils in South Africa

Cultural differences and groupings have been emphasised to such an extent in past South African history and apartheid education that the education of many pupils has suffered as a result. A separate law for Bantu Education (1953), which divided educational structures into racially and culturally diverse groups, caused deep-seated resentful attitudes towards education authorities and structures. As a result, Desai (1994:24) claims that 'education has virtually come to a standstill for most learners in this country'. Owing to these and other factors, many South African black pupils have not attended school at all during their school-going years or have had erratic attendance patterns (Maseko, 1994:12-13; Badat, 1994:15). Some pupils enter school after the normal age of six or seven, e.g. a child of ten may only be in the third school year. Many pupils, therefore, do not experience stable contact with teachers during the first years of learning English. Pupils often have no model for English until

they reach the age of ten or older. The implications of this state of affairs for English MOI schools are far-reaching. Although many black pupils have limited English proficiency, they are mostly instructed through the medium of English (Lemmer, 1993:159). In reality, they are faced with an almost impossible task; pupils who are already too old for their grade, learn through a language they have little or no contact with outside school. Although the situation varies greatly from urban to rural schools, many black pupils never seem to overcome the initial backlog. Results at the Grade 12 exit level show that the highest pass rate in 1993 in the eight regions of the former Department of Education and Training was 48,7% (Department of Education and Training, 1993) (cf. 1.2).

Socio-economic deprivation and the lack of parent involvement are also mentioned by Le Roux (1994:28) as factors that contribute to high failure rates. An estimated 41,1% Blacks were unemployed in 1995, as opposed to 6,4% Whites (Central Statistical Service, 1995:10). Blacks are estimated to have undergone only an average of 5,53 years of schooling as opposed to the 11,2 years for Whites by 1991 (Central Statistical Service, 1995:6). Smith and Le Roux (1993:46) point out that many black children are deprived of adequate social support systems due to socio-economic, socio-political and socio-demographic inadequacies. Parental structures are fragmented and often incomplete. Little stimulation and support is found for exposure to the L2 outside the school. As black parents are often themselves educationally deprived, they don't stimulate language development in their children through activities like storytelling or reading. The debilitating effects of poverty typical of squatter camps and deep rural areas are described by Deacon and Parker (1993:127) as follows:

In the Maputaland region...the majority of the rural population are excluded from schooling, and those included are subjected to a foreign curriculum.

They report that less than 30% of all children from the

Maputaland region in KwaZulu Natal finish three years of schooling. The result is a spiral of no education, poverty, a breakdown in familial relationships, illiteracy, innumeracy, a feeling of community powerlessness and failure. It can be assumed that similar conditions occur in other deep rural areas.

Two groups of ESL pupils can be distinguished in South Africa, namely those who attend English MOI schools and those who take English as a subject only. Beliefs about ESL among parents and pupils of especially English MOI schools are often conflicting and complex. Jeevanantham (1993:169) says that primary school pupils in South Africa are initially largely unprejudiced towards ESL, except if strong parental views influence pupils' beliefs. Kritzinger (1984:31), Prinsloo (1987:26), Chick (1992:30-31) and Nwaila (1992:6) cite evidence that many Blacks in South Africa perceive English to be superior, as far as prestige value and status are concerned, to other languages. According to Van Dyk (1993:187) and Klein (1994:27), most black parents opt for English MOI schools, rather than the various indigenous languages in South Africa. Their insistence on English MOI schools does not, however, go unchallenged. Rossell (1990:29-36), Desai (1994:24) and Klein (1994:27) report a growing desire among South African parents to maintain mother-tongue instruction, as English is sometimes seen as a remnant of colonial oppression. This group wants to learn ESL as a subject only.

The same dichotomy exists regarding the variant of English to be learnt. Nwaila (1992:2-8) reports on a study to establish what variant of English black teachers and pupils prefer. No less than 92,9% of black teacher respondents preferred Standard British English, against 56% of the pupils. Although not a single teacher respondent and only 2,3% of the pupils claimed that they did not want to learn what Nwaila calls 'Educated Black English', there is no doubt that Black English has become pidginised to the extent that significant deviations regarding grammar and pronunciation are evident (Nwaila, 1992:2-9). He reports, however, a growing desire among leading black academics to

acknowledge Black South African English as a distinct and valid variety used by a liberated people. As there are few resources in the indigenous mother-tongues, it is impractical to maintain L1 instruction in all eleven official languages of South Africa. For the time being, at least, English serves as the lingua franca in teaching (ANC, 1992:30), and it is the language most teachers prefer to use if they cannot use the L1.

An important factor that seems to influence attitudes is the inability of many English MOI pupils to understand classes in English. This often leads to failure anxiety and raised affective filters, not only towards English as a language but all learning. The learning that does take place is often blocked by feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, that in turn lead to high drop-out rates. Desai (1994:24) calls the English MOI policy in South Africa 'deeply disabling' and reports that much of the pleasure and purpose in black pupils' learning seem to disappear with the transition to English in the fifth school year. Chick (1992:34) expresses the concern (raised in the Main Report of 1990 after an investigation into the crisis in black schools) that the current situation in many black schools is as follows:

The children are likely to be alienated by what they learn, and only dimly perceive the implications and linkages between the concepts they are presented with.

Because pupils often do not understand what they have to learn, they memorise materials and thus create the impression that real learning has taken place. Poor comprehension is often due to the fact that black pupils lack concepts that are required by a predominantly Eurocentric syllabus (Nwaila, 1992:2).

It is clear that pupils in English MOI schools are often not able to learn other subjects through the medium of English. This may partly be ascribed to the fact that they are not adequately prepared for the concepts and vocabulary required in other subjects. A framework established at Lincoln school in Kathmandu,

Nepal for English MOI classes may be mentioned here as a possible solution to this problem.

Stribling and Thurstone (1993) suggested a framework for an English MOI school in Nepal, to enable pupils to obtain enough academic language experience so that the diverse language groups can function socially and academically in English.

The teachers of specific content-areas were consulted to establish the core content necessary to enable pupils to learn effectively. Pupils were categorised into eight levels for each of Grades 1-5 and Grades 6-11 that indicated their English proficiency, namely:

- enter with no English;
- receptive vocabulary (do not respond to direct questions - the silent period);
- basic survival English (receptive and one-word responses);
- basic conversational skills (use learned vocabulary with many gaps in communication; not literate in English);
- adequate social (conversational) and task-oriented skills (with errors, decode written symbols; can write dictated items and simple sentences);
- use language to exchange information, feelings, and extract meaning from simple written texts (about three years below grade levels in reading; can write short paragraphs);
- threshold level of proficiency (can separate social communication from advanced academic literacy), and
- near English fluency and literacy (nearly working up to grade level, ability to make inferences, draw conclusions, and express themselves formally; can meet most academic writing needs with some errors).

Table 11 represents Stribling and Thurstone's ESL elementary curriculum, indicating concepts and vocabulary that Lincoln pupils need at certain stages to learn other subjects. The aim of their course is to assist the pupil in advancing from whatever

Description of Performance	Enters with no English	Receptive Vocabulary (does not respond to direct questions - the Silent Period)	Basic Survival English (receptive and one-word responses)	Basic Conversational Skills (using learned vocabulary with many gaps in communication; not literate in English)	Adequate Social (Conversational) and Task-Oriented Skills (with errors, decodes written symbols, can write dictated items and simple sentences)	Uses Language to Exchange Information, Feelings, and Extract Meaning from Simple Written Texts (about three years below grade levels in reading; can write short paragraphs)	Threshold level of Proficiency (separates social communication from advanced academic literacy)	Near English Fluency and Literacy (nearly working up to grade level, ability to make inferences, draw conclusions and express themselves formally; can meet most academic writing needs with some errors)
Reading			Or 1-5 1. Recall major facts	Or 1-5 1. Recall facts 2. Identify characters, setting 3. Read sight words 4. Match pictures to words	Or 1-5 1. Number words 1-10 2. Color words 3. Retell stories 4. Distinguish reality, fantasy 5. Predict outcomes 6. Identify moods, main ideas, story problem 7. Read sight words 8. Match pictures to words Or 3-5 1. Alphabetize by 1-2 letters 2. Suffixes -s, -ed, -er, -est	Or 1-5 1. Use context for meaning 2. Multiple meanings 3. Draw conclusions, infer 4. Read and follow directions Or 3-5 1. Read numbers 100-100,000 2. Read dates 1975 3. Prefixes: un-, dis-, re- Or 4-5 1. Skim and scan for information	Or 1-5 1. Use context for meaning 2. Multiple meanings 3. Draw conclusions, infer Or 3-5 1. Read numbers 100-1,000,000 2. Prefixes: ex-, pre-, 3. Suffixes: -ly, -ful-, -ment-, -ion-, -tion-, -can 4. Signal words	Or 3-5 1. Signal words
Writing		Or 1-5 1. Write his/her name 2. Write letters, numbers 1-10	Or 1-5 1. Write numbers 1-100 Or 2-5 1. Copy words	Or 1 1. Copy words, numbers Or 2-5 1. Copy words, sentences 2. Dictate simple stories 3. Write the date	Or 1 1. Copy words, sentences Or 2-5 1. Write sentences	Or 1-5 1. Complete grade worksheets given oral directions 2. Dictate stories Or 2-5 1. Write descriptive paragraphs 2. Mechanics: begin, end, punctuation 3. Write narrative paragraphs	Or 1-5 1. Write simple short stories Or 3-5 1. Mechanics: comma, apostrophe, quotations	Or 4-5 1. Short report writing related to classroom content topics
Mathematics			1. All none, some, few, many, more, less	1. More than, less than, greater than, fewer than	1. Odd, even 2. Addition vocab 3. Subtraction vocab 4. Multiply, divide 5. Oral story problems	Or 4-5 1. Estimate, measure, round on, average, area, volume 2. Oral story problems	Or 4-5 1. Read, solve story problems	
Social Studies				1. Community 2. Landforms 3. Cardinal points 4. Maps, directions, keys	1. Civilization, history, society 2. Government, laws 3. History, century 4. Agriculture 5. Industry 6. Settler, trader, explorer, conqueror, inventor	1. Climate 2. Environment 3. Habitats 4. Globe, hemisphere, equator, poles		
Science			1. Five senses	1. Health 2. Basic food groups 3. Classifying animals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, insects	1. Scientific process, observe, hypothesize, experiment, predict, conclude		1. Energy 2. Light, heat 3. Electricity 4. Solid, liquid, gas	1. Earth, planets, space 2. Revolve, rotate
Study Skills			1. Classify	1. Classify 2. Compare/contrast alike/different	1. Compare/contrast 2. Dictionary and glossary use 3. Read diagrams and charts 4. Understand a time line	1. Compare/contrast	1. Cause/effect (if-then) Or 4-5 1. Maps, scale, grid	1. Cause/effect (if-then) 2. Notetaking 3. Making diagrams

TABLE 11: Lincoln School, Elementary ESL Scope and Sequence

his entrance level to the level at which he would be able to learn successfully.

To accomplish this, the teachers and programme developers decided to extend 'the concept of progressing developmental levels and different skill areas to include academic cognitive language skills for reading, writing, English, social studies, science, and study skills' (Stribling & Thurstone, 1993:30) through the twelve year schooling period. Language learning tasks are structured around the core concepts in preparation for the other subjects, e.g. words like 'all, none, some' are addressed in language classrooms to equip pupils with the concepts and words necessary for Mathematics classes on the Basic Survival English level.

The most significant feature of the Lincoln syllabus is the calculated inclusion of concepts and vocabulary that prepare the pupil for English MOI classes so that the pupil is almost on L1 grade level by the end of the seventh school year. A similar scheme may be adopted for South African English MOI classes, because pupils can be prepared for content in other subjects in a planned and focused manner. The incorporation of content-specific tasks and vocabulary in task-based language syllabuses should contribute to raising the proficiency level of pupils who learn through English MOI, and reduce failure anxiety. Although anxiety is a multi-faceted problem, the inadequate preparation of pupils for the concepts they need to master remains a major problem in English MOI schools (Stribling & Thurstone, 1993:30). Dreyer (1995:288) reports that anxiety regarding English use seems a major problem for Afrikaans-, Setswana- and Sotho-speaking students. She partly ascribes this to negative feelings about ability and proficiency.

A factor that has to be considered in South Africa is the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom. Although it is often assumed that urban pupils have more exposure to English speakers, this is not necessarily true in townships where pupils

have no contact with English outside the classroom. The vernacular is almost always used in rural areas. De Villiers (1991:100) reports on a study to determine pupils' exposure to English. She reports that almost 50% of the pupils didn't read English texts for more than four hours per week and they wrote English less than two hours per week. A third of all the boys indicated that they never read English and almost half of them wrote English between 0-2 hours per week. Almost half of all pupil spoke English only in the classroom and then only between 0-2 hours per week. Television watching was the only activity that 47% of all respondents engaged in outside the classroom for more than two hours per week. Pupils watched movies rather than news, sport or educational programmes. Kotzé (1982:229-239) reports similar results.

Classes are often multilingual and multicultural. The pupil's mother-tongue is often regarded as an obstacle to L2 acquisition, but there is a growing awareness that the ESL learner comes to the classroom with certain linguistic strengths which he has gained from learning his mother-tongue (Krouse, 1990:5). Lemmer (1993:152) expresses concern that pupils' struggle with academic concepts and terminology in English may be misinterpreted as culturally determined. Davey (1993:138) says:

Second-language users who are struggling to cope in a multicultural school environment, may not be displaying limited language proficiency, intellectual inferiority, or recalcitrance that is 'typical' of the group to which they belong. On the contrary, they may be battling to come to terms with the cultural elements that are inherent in a language that contains a universe of meaning and action that is foreign to their personal experience and to the experience of the social group.

Dreyer (1996:294-305) reports on a study of the learning styles of Afrikaans, Setswana/Sotho and English-speaking students. She

points out that Afrikaans-speaking students seem the most intolerant of ambiguity of all the students (cf. 2.3.1.3.2). A significant result is that most Afrikaans, Setswana/Sotho and English-speaking students exhibited a field-dependent style. Field-dependent students usually prefer course content to be structured. The Setswana/Sotho group showed preference for a concrete-sequential style as well as well-structured lesson plans and unambiguous instructions regarding worksheets or assignments. Dreyer (1996:302) emphasises the importance of identifying analytic and holistic learners, because they act differently in the language classroom. She reports results that differ significantly for Afrikaans-speaking and Setswana/Sotho-speaking students. Whereas the former are more holistic learners who prefer communicative, interactive and creative tasks, the latter tend to be analytic learners who dislike excessive amounts of input in the classroom and prefer detail-oriented tasks (e.g. applying discrete grammar items).

Dreyer (1996:302-303) also points out that there is a correlation between learning style and learning strategy. She indicates that Setswana/Sotho speakers do not often use compensation strategies (e.g. using synonyms or guessing), which she ascribes to their preferred concrete-sequential learning styles. Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995:312) report that black students prefer to 'learn with others', a finding supported by Kemp (1993:165). Dreyer (1996:302) reports that Setswana/Sotho speakers employ memory, social and affective strategies more than Afrikaans and English-speaking groups do.

There seem to be marked differences regarding learning styles and strategies between language groups in South Africa. These differences should sensitise the ESL teacher to the fact that not all children learn in the same way. Dreyer (1996:305) warns against labelling groups, and suggests that teachers should actively assist learners to flex their styles and strategies.

Lemmer (1993:168) describes content selection as a determining

contributor to English proficiency. It is, therefore, necessary to determine the content used in primary schools.

6.3.2 A survey of teaching in some South African primary schools

The themes and topics used in South African classrooms are relevant to the syllabus proposed in this study. The teaching methodology followed in these classrooms at present is likewise important to this study. To determine these, a survey was undertaken in 130 primary schools. In 1996, 260 student teachers of the Potchefstroom College of Education were requested to report on their observations in ESL classrooms during their annual three-week teaching practice period. These students ranged from first to fourth year. They were required to fill in an observation form (cf. Addendum 6) in which they reported on the themes and topics used in classes, as well as on the teaching practices followed. The observation took place in 123 schools in the North West Province, and 37 schools in the Free State, the Northern Cape and Gauteng. A panel of five expert ESL teachers were requested to verify the students' observations.

6.3.2.1 Themes and topics used in some South African primary schools

The survey shows that the following themes and topics were used in more than 90% of all classes:

Grade 1	Greeting
	Days of the week
	Toys
	Parts of my Body
	Seasons
Grade 2	Meals
	Days of the week
	Months of the year
	Wild animals
	Pets
	A party
	The circus
Grade 3	When I am big
	Pets
	Wild animals (zoo)

	Parts of my Body
	Friends
	Health
	Fantasy
	School
Grade 4	Insects
	Traffic
	Seasons
	Pollution
	Magic/monsters/ghosts
	Camping
	The Post-Office
	Food
	The farm
	Shopping
	Sports
	Holidays
	The circus
	Sleep
	Transport
	Health (dentist/in the hospital)
Grade 5	Leisure
	Holidays
	Seasons
	Pets
	Special Days
	Conservation
	Shopping
	Time
	Travelling
Grade 6	Health (in the hospital)
	Animals (zoo)
	Conservation
	Road safety (accidents)
	Shopping
	News events (Olympic Games)
	Mysteries (ghosts)
	Homes (our house)
	Transport
	Media (television, movies)
	Special days
Grade 7	Homes (our house)
	Special days
	Conservation
	Animals (pets and wild animals)
	Travelling
	Road safety (accidents)
	Transport
	Ghosts

The following themes and topics were encountered in a few schools. They did not occur very often, and show originality on the part of some teachers:

Grade 4	The news bulletin, Going to high school
Grade 5	Inventions, Living in a city, Advertising, Drugs Self-esteem, News events (Olympic Games)
Grade 6	Manners, Leadership, Materials
Grade 7	Death Penalty, Machines (robots)

It is clear that many themes and topics recur in primary schools. Students reported that pupils did not seem to enjoy the themes and topics that recurred often. While it is accepted (and indeed desirable) that content is recycled on higher levels of sophistication, some themes are over-used. The reteaching of themes or topics for seven years or more may explain why many pupils find ESL classes uninteresting (cf. 2.3.1). A theme like 'Accidents' cannot be revisited too often before repetition becomes inevitable. In itself, the repetition of content is not undesirable, but a theme like 'Pets' recurs almost every year and the pupil exhausts personal experience long before the seven years of primary schooling is over. A theme like 'Health' may generate many topics, but topics like 'Going to the Dentist' are over-used. Few teachers seem to recycle themes and topics successfully. Although themes like 'Materials', 'Inventions', and 'Conservation' indicate an awareness of other subject content, they did not recur in many schools.

Themes like 'Pollution' and 'The News Bulletin' (Grade 4) are more challenging than a theme such as 'The Post-Office'; yet all are used for the same year group, albeit in different schools. One student commented: 'Pupils don't like to learn about things they know everything about, but they want to know something about new content'. This statement reiterates the view that no learning can take place unless existing knowledge is the point of departure for the introduction of new knowledge.

A panel of five expert and experienced ESL primary school teachers were asked to verify the student teachers' observations. They agreed that the themes identified by the students appeared often in primary school ESL classrooms. They agreed that most of the themes and topics have become stereotyped, and they avoided

these, in order to make lessons more interesting. They pointed out that a theme such as 'My room' could be recycled with success, but the focus had to be adapted in the senior grades. For example, young pupils might be asked to concentrate on the description of detail, the use of prepositions, form and colour, while older pupils might focus on emotive connotations associated with 'My room', such as 'privacy' and 'security'. The panel mentioned that a theme such as 'The Circus' was often included in the senior grades, and pointed out that it should be included in the junior grades, where it is likely to appeal to pupils.

The survey also shows that teachers do not implement the syllabus adequately. This is illustrated by the following example from a Grade 4 class. An examination paper included questions like the following:

'Read the following sentences and underline the subject in red and the predicate in blue'.

Such a question requires sophisticated linguistic knowledge from the pupil. As a result of this kind of teaching practice, many pupils achieve poor marks. Such practices lead to and perpetuate bad learning experiences.

6.3.2.2 Teaching practices in some South African primary schools

Corstanje (1986), Domisse (1990:3), Chick (1992:38) and Dreyer (1995:289) report that many South African ESL classrooms are not communicative. Audiolingual practices and materials are widely used and classroom practice is characterised by rote learning, spoon-feeding and the drilling of grammatical items. Although pupils sometimes achieve high marks, they have little confidence in using English outside the classroom, because classroom practices do not develop communicative ability (Corstanje, 1986:16).

The survey depended on students' observation of classroom

activities. It did not provide a reliable assessment of these activities, however. Teachers' methodological preferences could be deduced only in general terms. Drill activities occurred widely, and more than 90% of the student teachers observed that pupils seemed to dislike these activities (be it oral or written). On the other hand, more than 80% observed that pupils seemed to enjoy dramatisation, role play and oral activities, although these did not occur as widely as drill activities. A great deal of classroom time was taken up by teacher talk, especially in some schools.

The panel of experienced teachers commented that teachers who were not fluent in English relied heavily on commercial resources and drill activities. Teachers who were unsure of themselves talked more often (estimated at as much as 80% teacher talk and only 20% pupil talk) than confident teachers. The communicative intent of the ESL syllabus was not realised in such classrooms.

6.3.3 The teacher in South African ESL classrooms

Many teachers at schools where English is MOI and teachers at schools where English is taught as a subject only are not proficient (Leschinsky, 1985:208-213; Ellis, 1987:83; Chetty, 1993:105).

Nelson (1983:142), Stoltz (1985:100), Weimann (1986:17) and Ontong (1988:141) state that teacher trainees who have inadequate proficiency undergo their training without improving their proficiency. Ellis (1987:91) reports on Zulu teacher trainees as follows:

...these trainees were found to have insufficient English language competence to function effectively in classrooms where the medium of instruction was English.

Ellis (1987:91) observed subject lessons taught through the

medium of English at schools of the ex-Department of Education and Training. These schools were usually attended by black pupils. Ellis states:

Some teachers were clearly not able to use English to communicate effectively, even in their chosen instructional styles...

Clark (1995:4) states that the exposure of pupils to English at MOI schools should in theory equip them for all their learning tasks. This does not always happen. If the teachers' proficiency is suspect, there is a marked lack of progress. Chick (1992:35) says that lip-service is paid to the notion that all South African teachers are language teachers, when in effect they don't know the language needs of their subjects. Teachers often use the vernacular instead of English for teaching. The result is often subtractive bilingualism. Pupils progress in neither the mother-tongue, nor the language of instruction. The difference in teaching time between the English MOI schools and schools that have English as subject only is significant. The L2 pupils who take English as a subject only have one hour's tuition a week in the first two school years. From the third school year the tuition time increases to three hours a week. The need for a better foundation in English for English MOI schools has led to the implementation of seven hours' tuition time per week in the first three school years. As a result, MOI pupils are exposed to instruction in English much longer than the pupils who take English as a subject only (Department of Education, 1995:1).

It seems as if teachers and learners are not always in agreement about what 'proficiency' means. Johnston (1992:75) reports that most lecturers at a South African tertiary institution expressed concern about the ESL proficiency of almost all their students. They were of the opinion that their students had poor primary and secondary education, expressed themselves poorly in English, had a limited English vocabulary and weak control of English sentence structure, suffered from a lack of exposure to English and had

poor reading and comprehension skills in English. The students, on the other hand, regarded themselves as proficient, and ascribed poor academic achievement to an inadequate grasp of terminology.

Kgame (1993:1-3) advocates that the ESL teacher should have some knowledge of the L1 of the pupils to understand why learners may have difficulty in grasping some of the structures in English. For example, the progressive tenses are often over-used by black speakers of English. There is no difference in the structure of the simple present (and past) and present (and past) progressive tenses in Sesotho. The Sesotho expression *Batlang udula Berea* (Batlang lives in Berea) is often translated into English as 'Batlang is living in Berea'. The over-use of the present progressive tense may be ascribed to mother-tongue transfer. If the language teacher is aware of this, steps can be taken to counteract transfer. Adendorff and Savini-Beck (1993:247) point out that the number of vowels in Zulu differs from that in English. Zulu has only five vowels versus the twelve of English. Afrikaans also has some phonological features that do not occur in English, e.g. guttural consonants. English also has phonological features unique to it, such as stress and slur, that many South African ESL learners find difficult to master.

Maseko (1994:12) says that most teachers are generally underqualified (cf. 1.2). Almost 30% of the of primary school teachers of the ex-Department of Education and Training are described as 'unqualified'. They have a Grade 10 or lower qualification and no professional qualification (Department of Education and Training: 1992). A further 48% of primary school teachers of the ex-Department of Education and Training are described as 'qualified', but they have Grade 12 or lower plus two years' professional training; in practice this means that many of these teachers left school after Grade 10 and completed only a two-year teachers' diploma. Thus almost 78% of all these teachers do not possess a three-or four-year diploma or degree.

Demotivating factors in South Africa place further strain on teachers. Njini (1994:106-107) describes factors that demotivate Zimbabwean teachers. Many of these are similar to the South African situation:

- poor educational backgrounds;
- a lack of reading materials (especially in rural areas);
- poor infrastructure in rural areas;
- lack of relevancy of in-service-training programmes, and
- culturally-based bias towards younger lecturers from whom they must learn.

Ncala (1986:65) identifies teacher attitude as the single most important variable in successful teaching. Morrow (1994:30) and Makosana (1994:40) argue that many South African teachers are suffering from a low morale due to years of politicised teaching environments. Teachers also have few resources. Morrow (1994:30) says that 'restoring a culture of teaching will require conceptual innovation - the kind of innovation which will not only change teachers' understanding of their professional responsibilities but imaginatively reconstruct the practices of teaching and the institutions of learning'. Sam (1994:54) says that the inequalities that exist between resourcing for urban and rural schools needs to be addressed on the short term.

Flanagan (1994:55) points out that the teacher may well be the only literate adult many of the pupils in rural areas know. As there are too many children in one class though, the teacher cannot pay individual attention to pupils and there are seldom enough available books for all. Although there is a myriad of teaching materials available for ESL teaching, few text books and resources reach rural schools (especially farm schools) where they are most needed (Flanagan, 1994:55). Few books and resources have the needs of specific communities in mind. According to Flanagan (1994:55), the tendency among teachers to rely on text-books leads to 'mechanical pedagogical practices'.

Even if syllabuses are specific and supportive, teachers need to be skilled in their implementation. Souter (1989:73) and Bull (1990:124-130) say that many South African teachers have an inadequate grasp of syllabus implementation. Stoltz (1985:100) and Weimann (1986:17) suggest that teacher training does not prepare teachers to implement syllabuses.

It is clear that there is a need for in-service-training (INSET) programmes. Schofield (1993:60-76) reports on previous attempts to launch INSET programmes among ex-Department of Education and Training teachers and subsequent disappointing results. He reports resistance to INSET programmes and ascribes this resistance to the following factors:

- individual teachers are identified, removed to attend courses and upon their return to schools they find that other teachers are reluctant to accept new ideas, and
- most current INSET courses involve a 'quick-fix' solution of one course with no attention to prior needs analysis, joint decision-making processes with teachers and follow-up courses.

Flanagan (1994:55) says that thousands of rural primary school teachers in South Africa have never been exposed to any kind of INSET programme. She adds:

These teachers rely heavily on their personal schooling for modelling and on their initial training. Removed from other teachers and other classrooms, they are unable to conceptualise alternative pedagogies in any practical sense. Thus thousands of primary school teachers have no knowledge of progressive methodologies or of how to create an effective teaching and learning environment in their classrooms.

Henning (1993:78-96; 1994:203-208) proposes an INSET programme that enables underqualified teachers to improve their

qualifications, partly through formal instruction and partly through evaluation of their teaching practices. She reasons that in this way culturally attained knowledge that is not always recognised as a valid contributor to qualifications, is included.

6.4 CONCLUSION

An assessment of the South African situation in primary schools reveals particular areas of concern. These need to be considered in the development of an ESL syllabus.

The current Interim Core Syllabus does not provide enough guidance to ESL teachers to enable them to implement it successfully, as it does not describe all aims and objectives in terms of measurable behaviour. The absence of pupil profiles makes it difficult for teachers to select appropriate themes and topics. As only broad objectives are provided for the Junior and Senior Primary Phases, it is not clear how content should become progressively more challenging within a year, or even from one year to the next (within a phase). Assessment guidelines are vague. Although it is stated that teachers should assess formatively and summatively, no criteria for such assessment are provided.

An Outcomes-based approach to education ties in with task-based approaches. A task-based syllabus for ESL in primary schools has the potential to provide extensive support and guidance regarding classroom practice. In this way it may assist teachers in managing teaching and learning effectively.

The realities of ESL in South Africa have to be taken into account in syllabus design. Socio-political and socio-economic factors have contributed to irregular school attendance, poor language development and educational deprivation associated with poverty. Many pupils may lack the stimulation and growth associated with rapid language development, yet attend English MOI schools. Because they are not proficient in English, they

have difficulty in coping with the medium of instruction and they achieve poor marks.

A syllabus for ESL should, therefore, include the ways of thinking, reporting information, investigating etc., concepts and vocabulary necessary for pupils to be able to understand other subjects taught through the medium of English. A programme similar to that of Lincoln school (cf. Table 11) may present a suitable solution.

Diverse and complex beliefs and attitudes about ESL are evident among many parents. Some parents feel that learning English is prestigious, but others may see it as detrimental to the advancement of indigenous languages. These attitudes may influence pupils as far as the motivation for learning English is concerned. A syllabus needs to consider affective factors that can promote ESL. Affective outcomes should be included in the syllabus, e.g. motivating pupils to read, gaining confidence in using English, showing respect for users of other languages, indicating an awareness of English as a language of international communication, etc.

Most pupils' exposure to English is insufficient. Many pupils also live in multi-linguistic communities in which access to English is limited. The greater part of their exposure to English is likely to be to written language. Reading demonstrates the ways in which language functions as communication in various contexts. It is, therefore, a useful way of extending pupils' exposure to English. Their interests have to be considered in the selection of reading materials recommended in a syllabus.

Although there are marked differences regarding learning strategies, many pupils indicate a preference for structured learning-teaching opportunities. The importance of flexing learning strategies has been pointed out by various authors. A syllabus may contribute to this through the inclusion of learning strategy outcomes.

The survey indicated an over-use of themes and topics in many ESL primary school classrooms. There is also evidence that many unsuitable themes and topics are selected for the grades in which they are used. A syllabus, therefore, needs to present teachers with a generic profile of the pupils in a grade, so as to provide information regarding their capabilities, interests and needs. Examples of suitable themes and topics may direct themes and topic selection.

Classroom practices in many classrooms are not conducive to the development of communicative skills. Teachers may lack the knowledge or confidence to teach communicatively. A syllabus should, therefore, guide and direct classroom activities.

As many teachers are poorly qualified, a syllabus cannot be too sophisticated or difficult to implement. Teachers often rely heavily on the syllabus for direction. This necessitates a syllabus that provides sufficient support by means of examples of teaching-learning opportunities.

A proposed framework for a task-based language syllabus should adhere to the following requirements:

- it should reflect a sound theoretical basis;
- the needs of its intended users, i.e. the pupils and the teachers, should be accommodated;
- the constraints of its contexts should be planned for;
- it should adhere to generally accepted principles of syllabus design, and in particular, task-based language syllabus design, and
- it should be presented in a clear, unequivocal and integrated manner so as to make the management of day-to-day teaching easy.

Such a framework is proposed in Chapter 7.