The Present EL Curriculums Status Quo Un-fit to Meet 21st century Learners' Needs En Masse. How to Make it Contemporary?

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ABSTRACT: It is either through research, surveys, or even field experience that teachers, educationists, and all those related to the field of education, whether directly or indirectly, feel that the current English Language Curriculum (ELC) which is still being taught at primary as well as secondary schools in Jordan and ,almost in most of the Arab countries today, is certainly no longer fit to meet today's learners' needs. The present study , thus, attempts to highlight the myriad factors and reasons that are essentially beyond the in-appropriateness of the current English language curriculum which is still in effect in our schools. It also investigates its non-positive impact on the entire teaching-learning process as a whole. The study , in addition, postulates that it has become outdated and should be, if not changed , modified and updated to suit and meet the unlimited needs and aspirations of the learners of the new millennium. It ,hence, proposes multi-dimensional modifications that can be provided in two fundamental forms, the first of which is to make a completely new curriculum ; while the second is to bring into effect some extra-curricular activities and/or aspects that are based on the latest teaching methodologies and approaches, making use of the contemporary prospects such as the social media and social applications or platforms.

Introduction

In fact, the mere notion of change in the English language curriculum is not exclusive or ad hoc to the students, but it is actually a mutual desire of both the students as well as the teachers .The students or the English language learners (ELL) believe that the present curriculum does not supply them with the necessary life skills that enable them to meet the future challenges. And, the teachers also feel the urgent need to develop a curriculum that is actually based on authentic learning tasks and activities. They ,one can say, share the insight that the English language curriculum that they look forward to have should include 21st century skills ,which are highly concerned with creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication of students.

The Rationale of the Study

The study virtually aims at finding out the most relevant and crucial factors that are responsible for the in-appropriateness of the existing English language curriculum for the 21st century learners. It also seeks to propounds the most efficient means that could be effectively

super-induced to update the status quo of the present curriculum so that it consequently empower the 21st century students to tackle the presumptuous challenges of the future.

The Study

First and foremost, the English language curriculum in its present status quo is incontrovertibly inadequate to stimulate any interest of any kind in both the teachers as well as the learners alike, a factor that certainly leads to an utter failure of the teaching-learning process en masse. In other words, there tends to be a sort of lack of interest on the part of both the learners and the teachers. And, the teaching-learning process does lack fulfillment and mutual interaction between the teachers and the students.

Another more important factor is that " today's education does not keep up with the current global social and technological changes that are taking place in the way we live and work", according to Jan Herrington (2010), who suggests that one of the solutions is " to provide authentic-learning situations to students where they can apply their knowledge of concepts, principles and facts to a variety of contexts in the real world".

Teachers, educationists, policy-makers, and all those concerned with bringing about a highly efficient learning on the part of the students should be aware enough of the fact that the current curriculum is no longer apt to provide the learners with life skills to meet future challenges. Besides, the interests of the students are also represented by their preferences and their global mindedness, through which their interest is to be involved in working out a certain problem related to either the society or the school. This must inspire those in-charge of curriculum preparation to develop a curriculum that is based on authentic learning tasks and activities. This is certainly for the purpose of enhancing 21st century skills --- creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication of students, and giving them chances / opportunities to apply what they have learnt in solving real world problems, which will be a great asset for them to use in the future, whether in work or in life.

One more highly significant fact that curriculum designers ,,education experts ,and even instructors cannot repudiate and must take into consideration that learners in general and English language learners in particular do possess diverse interests and aptitudes. And, therefore , a uniform curriculum with water tight schedule and strategies will surely smother the budding talents and potentials, if not frustrate the learners and constrain the learning process in general. It should, hence, be   inevitably established and realized that all learners do have different interests, tastes, aptitudes and habits as well as backgrounds. They, as a result, should not be dealt with or even given the same kind of treatment or content in a standardized way as per the given syllabus for the simple reason that one aspect may not suit all.

The English language curriculum in the present education system is, unfortunately, prescribed by high authorities and enforced on the schools and teachers, a factor that will definitely curb the innate needs for learning, inquisitiveness , and leads to irreversible outcome

relating to the learning-teaching process altogether. This tacitly means that the whole curriculum should be so devised and designed in such a way as to take care of the various needs of the learner , whether cognitive, pedagogic, interactive, or self-realizing. Yet, close observation of what has been really taking place in our schools for the past three decades or so is that the teaching of English language is undeniably teacher-centered , a tedious process in which the learner is merely a passive receptor of what his/her teacher imparts in the classroom. Thus, no actual learning occurs on the part of the students. This is, rather, known as passive learning, which is, according to Leon Ho (2019), mostly considered as a one-way effort from the learner. She continues to explain that "in this style of learning, the learner is expected to assimilate information from the facts and details presented and absorb knowledge passively". Kimberley Tierney (2020) , moreover, explains how passive learning restricts and curbs the learning process to the following effect: "this method primarily relies on convergent learning, meaning there's a single answer to the question at hand. Traditional tests and quizzes evaluate students' understanding of concepts learned through passive methods"

This ,however, should not be the desired kind of instruction that 21st century learners look forward to. Being in the end of the second decade of the century, it becomes mandatory that the high authorities of education in the country should cultivate certain programmes ,through which the quality of education in general, and English language curriculum in particular ,should be improved, implemented, and even translated into a changed reality for the students. Otherwise, the status quo of the present curriculum, the classroom environment and the pedagogical processes can never ever be learner-centered and are primarily based on rote-learning.

It is necessary to know that, in recent decades, many countries have brought about comprehensive " Curricular Reforms" that have credibly articulated a real desire to move away from a relatively narrow set of cognitive skills and subject areas, seeking formally to achieve the desire to develop competencies that value the modification and application of learning. Of course, these reforms have been more than dire and both globally and locally called for due the tremendous advancements in the field of technology ,especially the wide spread of the internet-based applications ,such as the Facebook, twitter, you-Tupe, ,etc. It's actually through such means of communication that the development and unlocking of the imagination, creativity and critical thinking of the learners will be smoothly taking place in learning.

Randall Davis (2006) discusses the realistic impact of technology to the following effect, " Over the past several decades, technology has become a fixture in many homes around the world, and its influence has permeated into all facets of our lives, including educational settings". He, further, considers it as a phenomenon that has been " hailed by many as the wave of the future in which language instruction will be driven by new advances in computers, the Internet, and mobile technologies". This has been an inevitable step according to an article published on a web-site belonging to British Columbia and entitled, " Curriculum Overview: Education for the 21st Century", in which it's stated that "Today we live in a state of constant change. It is a technology-rich world, where communication is instant and information is immediately

accessible". The article continues to say that the way the learners interact with each other personally, socially, and at work has changed forever; and that knowledge is growing at exponential rates in many domains, creating new information and possibilities. This is the world our students are entering.

Thus, the English language curriculum should be flexible, broad and inclusively reflective of any diverse local and/or global culture and knowledge. It should also provide a variety of learning experiences to students that help them meet their curricular as well as extra-curricular goals. It should ,ultimately, tend to make use of learning materials beyond the textbook, resorting to the local culture and local resources in teaching, especially during the early years.

It should, moreover, be notified here that when developing the curriculum in general ,and the English language curriculum in particular, the experts will have to dwell and draw much of the knowledge and principles on the existing pillars: the philosophical, sociological and psychological , and the cultural foundations. On one hand, it is true that the four foundations of curriculum will have to stand the test of time and therefore knowledge must emanate from them, while on the other hand, the unshaken argument over qualifying technology as a foundation of knowledge cannot retain that same status due to a variety of reasons, the most significant of which are: longevity, capacity, borderless, inclusivity and the influence it has over people and events across the globe.

The question that raises itself ,then, is how can we go about integrating technology into our classrooms? It can have a huge impact on whether a technologically-driven classroom succeeds or not ,but doing so will undoubtedly lead to bringing about a sort of permanent learning on the part of the students, and certainly a the gh level of satisfaction in their teachers. The article of British Columbia mentioned above asserts the essential impact of personalized learning to the following effect:

> Personalized learning focuses on enhancing student engagement in learning and giving students choices — more of a say in what and how they learn — leading to lifelong, self-directed learning. Students and teachers develop learning plans to build on student's interests, goals, and learning needs. Involving students in reflecting on their work and setting new goals based on their reflections allows them to take more control of their learning. Personalized learning also encompasses place-based learning, where learning experiences are adapted to the local environment or an individual context.

The concept of personalized learning has been has been supported by Dweck, C. (2009) who has talked of two Mindsets model that features two types of mindsets — the fixed and the

growth mindset. The concept of growth mindset , according to Dweck, promotes the idea that intelligence can be developed when a greater sense of free will, sense of learning through criticism and persistence in the face of setbacks is accentuated, where learners experience real life situations while embracing a challenge. Such features will definitely make the learning experience more authentic and real; and definitely will appear as one of the essential features in formulating a curriculum to fulfill future needs. However, the features of growth mindset, as it has been stated by Dweck, must be evident in every curriculum design. Thus, these aspects of growth mindset must be well embedded and linked to the planned activities well in line with the curriculum intent.

This will require a technology-based learning for it is only through technology as the biggest assistant of collaborative content planning that authentic learning will be highly effective. When using digital tools to create modern curriculum for schools, teachers can easily look forward to innovative ideas and share with each other and collaborate on final curriculum plans.

It should ,therefore, be confirmed and taken for granted that with the collaboration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the newly updated curriculum and academic content will assuredly increase accessibility of opportunities for the English language learners to make the path of connection with the outside world. It will, in addition, help to open a world of possibilities for educators to demonstrate the value of positive values, growth of humanity, and responsibilities towards the nation in a wider life context by connecting students interests to real world experience and creating active learners. Teachers, as facilitators, will have to learn a big deal of new resources and techniques and apply support mechanisms for making a curriculum, which focus on various learning styles, knowledge, skills, that are evaluative for children and young adults as they grow and enter the workplace.

Schools as well as the teachers should help the students explore their instinctive potentials and imprint on their minds that knowledge is a means to service of mankind and this is the most holistic goal of individuals. The curriculum and its contents should be so designed in such a way as to help the learners understand their cognitive nature and explore their potentials to live a blissful life through meaningful services to their communities and capacity-building of their own.

Besides , schools and their managements, should be both trained and encouraged to show initiative ingenuity in designing individual curricula as per the prescribed syllabus. Cognitive skills along with love of the environment should be supported. This will necessarily lead to the whole of education system having more than a mission to realize in the future of the learners.

In conclusion, the role of technology in education in general and in English language in particular is inevitable today for the vast opportunities it provides and the undeniable advantages

it bestows on the learners. These benefits are more emphatically seen in the way it helps the students in the learning process, creates innovative products and opportunities for extended learning. It is up to the school administrators to provide opportunities and motivate teachers to venture into the wide expanse of prospects that technology provides for teaching and learning in order to make it fit to meet the 21st century learners.

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