

M.A. CURRICULUM OF TEFL IN IRAN: A SURVEY ON THE COURSES

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ABSTRACT

The M.A. level in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Iran aims at training qualified persons for teaching English at universities or institutions of higher education and also fulfilling the needs of the society regarding experts in the field of research in language teaching issues, translating different English texts into Persian or vice versa and other related jobs. The present paper is a survey on the courses presented at the Masters level of TEFL in Iran. For this purpose, the lessons in each course together with their aims and objectives were delineated first and then, the M.A. syllabus of TEFL of one of the universities was compared to it with the aim of identifying and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the university's M.A. syllabus. Furthermore, this survey aimed at finding the gaps in the proposed courses in the M.A. curriculum of Iran. The results of the analysis revealed that there are a number of deficiencies in the proposed courses and there is a need to modify the current curriculum in terms of the existing courses and lessons.

Keywords: M.A. Curriculum, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Courses, Gaps.

INTRODUCTION

The M.A. level in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Iran aims at training qualified persons for teaching English at universities or institutions of higher education and also fulfilling the needs of the society regarding experts in the field of research in language teaching issues, translating different English texts into Persian or vice versa and other related jobs.

Those who are selected for M.A. level will add to their prior knowledge about various aspects of language. Particularly they will expand their knowledge of English language. In addition, they will be acquainted with theories, methods and techniques of English language teaching at Iranian universities based on the needs of the society.

M.A. level of TEFL in Iran can be immediately initiated after students graduate from the B.A. level. Generally, this course is to a large extent theoretical and the students are required to write a thesis at the end of the course.

This paper is a survey on the courses presented and proposed at the Masters level in Iran. For this purpose, the lessons in each course together with their aims and objectives will be delineated at first and then, the M.A. syllabus of TEFL of one of the Universities which has been holding this level for several years is compared to it. The aim of this comparison is to identify and analyze the strengths

and weaknesses of the university's M.A. syllabus. Furthermore, this survey aims at finding the gaps in the proposed courses and lessons in the M.A. curriculum of our country, with the hope of raising some issues regarding how we can fill in the gaps by supplying further necessary knowledge areas in the program.

Definitions of Curriculum Development

The definition of curriculum is complex because there are many definitions of it in the field. It can be conceptualized as a list of subjects for a course to the perception of the ultimate goal of education as a whole. Curriculum can be regarded as "the grasp of the basic notions education involves as well as the structural organization every author states within this definition for the term curriculum" (Moreno, 2000: 11)

Curriculum can be defined, as an educational program which states:

- (i) "The educational purpose of the program (the ends)
- (ii) The content teaching procedures and learning experience which will be necessary to achieve this purpose (the means)
- (iii) Some means for assessing whether or not the educational ends have been achieved." (Richards, Platt and Platt 1993: 94)

"Curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational program." (Allen quoted in Nunan, 2000: 6)

"Curriculum theory encompasses philosophy and value systems; the main components of the curriculum: purposes, content, methodology and evaluation; and the process whereby curricula are developed, implemented and evaluated". (White, 1993: 19).

Johnson (1996) defines the word curriculum as all the relevant decision making processes, which generally exist in some concrete form and could be observed and described, for example; syllabuses, teacher training programs and teaching materials and resources.

Richard (Richards, 2001, p. 41) defines curriculum development as "the range of planning and implementation of processes involved in developing or renewing a curriculum". He put these processes as focusing on "needs analysis, situational analysis, planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting and preparing teaching material, providing for effective teaching and evolution" (Richards, 2001, p. 41)

Brown describes curriculum development as "a series of activities that contribute to the growth of consensus among staff, faculty, administration and students." He further explains that this "series of curriculum activities will provide a framework that helps teachers to accomplish whatever combination of teaching activities is most suitable ... that is, a framework that helps students learn as efficiently and effectively as possible in a given situation" (Brown, 1995, p. 19).

According to Howard (2007), at the university level, where we have major fields of study that encompass a collection of courses, we have the opportunity to design a coherent curriculum. Such a curriculum needed not be sequential in the traditional sense. It might be problem-based or issues-based, with students making ever-deepening inquiries into central concepts and principles.

M.A. Curriculum of TEFL in Iran

Courses

The course consists of 38 units out of which 34 units are

compulsory and 4 units is accredited to the thesis. Throughout the course it is attempted that the students gain expertise in the field of TEFL and at the same time be able to gain enough information in other fields. For this purpose from among 34 units, 28 are compulsory and 6 units are elective or optional. Regarding educational potentials, the departments are free to present up to 12 units of elective courses as compulsory ones.

Course Duration

M.A. course of TEFL can last at most three years. The units in each semester are at least 9 and at most 14 units.

Resources

Teaching and learning resources will be selected and suggested by M.A. professors from among the most recent research reports and accessible scientific journals. See Tables 1 and 2.

Description of Compulsory Courses:

Issues in Linguistics

Aim: Learning the principles and theories of linguistics.

Lesson code	Name of the lesson	Unit	Pre-requisite
01	Issues in linguistics	2	none
02	Phonology for TESOL	2	none
03	Methods of teaching a foreign language	2	none
04	Methods of research	2	none
05	Translating Islamic texts (1)	2	none
06	Contrastive linguistics and error analysis	2	01, 03
07	Teaching language skills	2	03
08	Practice teaching	2	03, 07
09	Testing a foreign language	2	03
10	Psycholinguistics	2	01, 03
11	English for specific purposes	2	03
12	Seminar (language teaching)	2	06,01,03,10
13	Discourse analysis	2	01, 10
14	Translating Islamic texts (2)	2	none
Total		28	*

Table 1. The List of Compulsory Courses in TEFL

Lesson code	Name of the lesson	unit	Re-requisite
15	Advanced writing	2	none
16	Materials preparation	2	03, 07
17	Applied linguistics	2	01, 03
18	English literature (1)	2	none
19	English literature (2)	2	18
20	Sociolinguistics	2	01
21	Literature and linguistics	2	01
total		14	*

Table 2. The List of Optional/ Elective Courses

Objectives: Exploring different theories of linguistics, morphology (definition, theory), syntax (structures of language) and semantics (types and different levels) from the point of view of Transformational Generative Grammar.

Phonology for TESOL

Aims: Learning the way of teaching pronunciation, identification, learning and producing sounds.

Objectives

- Preliminary familiarity with different articulators, phonetic transcription, and its different types, and describing sound based on their articulation,
- A thorough description of phonological patterns of Persian and English,
- Morphology and the study of Persian and English morphemes,
- Identification of different morphemes of Persian and English,
- Morphological combinations in Persian and English and their differences,
- How to use this information in teaching phonology in relation to reading comprehension skills.
- The relationship between pronunciation and dictation.

Methods of Teaching a Foreign Language

Aims: Learning various principles and theories of language teaching and their application in teaching a foreign language.

Objectives

- The analysis and exploration of principles and theories of language teaching,
- L1 acquisition and L2 learning,
- Approaches to teaching a foreign language,
- Analysis of teaching methods,
- Examining the aims of L2 learning,
- Presenting an introduction to contrastive linguistics,
- Linguistic components necessary for teaching language skills,
- Language planning and lesson plan.

Methods of Research

Aims: getting familiar with different types of research, especially research in the area of language learning.

Objectives

- Introducing different kinds of research methods in the area of Humanities,
- Introducing various statistical methods used in research related to foreign language teaching,
- Evaluating researches done in TEFL.

N.B. this course should be presented in the target language, i.e. English as most researches done in this area are written in English and the graduates should necessarily be able to make use of these researches in the original language.

Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis

Aims: Getting familiar with theories of Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis (EA).

Objectives

- The history and general theories of Contrastive Analysis (CA), patterns of contrast (phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics) and application of the results of CA to teaching a foreign language.
- The theories related to Error Analysis, EA at the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, and their practical application in teaching a foreign language.

Teaching Language Skills

Aims: Learning theories of language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing).

Objectives

- Exploring language components necessary for the macro skills,
- Analysis of communicative models related to language skills,
- Linguistic and psychological processes in listening, speaking, reading and writing,
- The ways and stages of teaching these skills.

Practice Teaching

Aims: Application of the learned theories and skills in the classroom.

Objectives

- In this lesson, students have to observe at least 8 sessions of language classes of different professors at different universities and faculties and present their observation reports to their professors in order to be discussed in the classroom.
- The professor is supposed to discuss about the generalities of teaching methods and the teaching of skills in addition to discussions about preparing lesson plan for different lessons.
- The student is required to teach in the presence of the professor and other students and under the supervision of his/her professor.

Testing a Foreign Language

Aims: Acquiring the ability to assess and evaluate different language skills based on the latest methods of testing.

Objectives

- A review of the history of testing.
- Introducing theories and principles of test-making.
- Teaching types of tests and the way of writing and evaluating various types of tests.
- Learning how to evaluate language skills.

N.B. The student is required to make tests for different language skills.

Psycholinguistics

Aims: Learning principles and theories of L1 acquisition and L2 learning.

Objectives

- The study and exploration of basics of psycholinguistics.
- Theories of learning from psychological perspective.
- Learning the first language and a foreign language.
- Factors that affect foreign language learning such as intelligence, motivation, attitude, etc.
- Different aspects of aphasia.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Aims: Getting familiar with methods and theories of teaching English language for specific purposes.

Objectives

- Knowing why ESP emerged,
- Theories in ESP,
- Teaching methods of texts written for specific purposes,
- Evaluation of the available books.

Seminar (Issues in TEFL)

Aims: Exploring issues in TEFL and reaching practical outcomes.

Objectives

- Discussion and exchange of ideas regarding the latest researches indexed in books and journals related to issues in TEFL,
- Discussion about the issues and problems of TEFL in Iran,
- Exploration of issues confronted by learners during passing their preliminary courses at the M.A. Level.

Discourse Analysis

Aims: Familiarity with different approaches to language use in various contexts (linguistic, social, etc.).

Objectives

- Deep exploration of different theoretical aspects of language use.
- Exploration of different registers in various situations.
- Exploration of language structures and lexis in different situations.
- Exploration of the findings of Discourse Analysis in language teaching.

Translating Islamic texts, 1 and 2

Aims: Learning how to translate Islamic texts.

Objectives

- Theoretical and methodological basis of translation.
- Proposing fundamental conditions and characteristics of translation and translator.
- Types of translation, regarding the goals, methods and difficulties in translation.
- Translation of Islamic texts and articles from Persian to English and vice versa.
- Critical analysis of translated texts.

- Extracting and classifying translation problems.
- Translation of appropriate Islamic texts selected by the student and approved by the professor as the course project.

Description of Optional Courses

Advanced Writing

Aims: Gaining skill in writing different genres with special emphasis on how to write thesis.

Objectives

- Writing and analyzing various professionally written articles in different genres (narrative, descriptive, explanatory, argumentative).

Materials Preparation

Aims: Preparing students for evaluating, preparing and developing materials related to the objective of lessons.

Objectives

- Exploration of methods of determining teaching objectives.
- Exploration of methods of evaluating teaching materials.
- Exploration of methods of preparing teaching materials with respect to approved books.
- Actual preparation of teaching materials as the lesson project.

Applied Linguistics

Aim: Learning the concepts related to applied linguistics.

Objective

- Discussion about different aspects of the application of linguistics in teaching a foreign language.

English Literature (1)

Aims: Learning different literary genres accompanied by the ability to interpret and criticize them.

Objectives

- Exploration of features of different kinds of poetry, story, play and article and interpretation and criticism of related samples in the classroom.
- By the end of this course students should be able to identify the aforementioned types and analyze them

appropriately.

English Literature (2)

Aims: Identification of different literary schools in addition to specific work on samples written in each school.

Objectives

- Studying samples of useful prose and poems of various literary schools, with respect to genres which contain topics by the use of which we will be able to present the students the main literary terms.

Sociolinguistics

Aims: Familiarizing students with the contrastive role of language and society.

Objectives

- Exploration of social issues from linguistic perspective.
- Studying dialects and their roles in social evaluation.
- Familiarity with major differences such as language, accent, bilingualism, idiolects, registers, and social under-differentiation resulted from language differences.

Literature and Linguistics

Aims: Familiarity with different linguistic theories with respect to the better understanding of structural, phonological, lexical and stylistic differences.

Objectives

- Expression of features of phonemes, lexis, clauses, sentence and discourse and explanation of various theories about them.
- The relationship between general features of language and the language used by writers and poets, and expression of the writers' innovation in using language.
- Exploring the style and language use of different writers and presenting samples of prose and poetry from this perspective.
- Expressing the relationship between style and writer or poet and the literary school in their language or culture.

Discussion

The M.A. program at Guilan University incorporates much of

the courses- compulsory and optional- proposed by the Ministry of Higher Education in Iran.

Table 3 shows the courses presented in this university at each semester. As is evident from the table the syllabus has much in common with the M.A. curriculum described and explained in the first part of the paper. However, there are some differences which will be explained.

Among the compulsory units in the syllabus a two-unit course of Discourse Analysis is not present. Nowadays, Discourse Analysis is one of the mostly researched areas in TEFL and having a course which deals with the theories and principles of discourse can add to Master students' knowledge in this area.

In addition, courses of Islamic translation 1 and 2 are not included in the university's syllabus. This may be due to the fact that these courses are presented at the Bachelor level to students of English Language and Literature. The omission of these courses seems logical since they are not directly related to the field of TEFL. In fact, the inclusion of them in the overall M.A. curriculum is not necessary, but since one of the main aims of the TEFL according to what is written in the Ministry's document is to train those who can also translate texts from Persian to English, the inclusion of these courses can be justified.

Regarding the order of the presentation of courses, as is shown in the table, "Methods of research" is presented in the second semester; however, in the M.A. curriculum described earlier this course is one of the first proposed

	Codes	Courses	Units
First semester	1	Issues in linguistics	2
	2	Phonology for TESOL	2
	3	Methods of teaching a foreign language	2
	4	Advanced writing	2
	5	Teaching language skills	2
Second semester	6	Psycholinguistics	2
	7	Methods of research (issues in TEFL)	2
	8	Testing a foreign language	2
	9	Literature and linguistics/ Applied Linguistics	2
Third semester	10	Practice teaching	2
	11	Materials preparation	2
	12	Seminar (issues in TEFL)	2
	13	English for Specific Purposes	2
	14	Contrastive Linguistics and Error Analysis	2
Fourth semester	15	Thesis	4
Total			32

Table 3. M.A. Syllabus of Guilan University for TEFL

ones. It seems that a change of order in the university's curriculum is more helpful to the learners since from the very first semester, the M.A. students are required to write research papers and presenting this course at the first term can provide the students with the opportunity to become familiar with the principles of conducting research in TEFL.

Another change that could be done in the order of presentation of courses is related to "Contrastive Linguistics (CA) and Error Analysis (EA)" which is included among courses in the third semester and "Psycholinguistics" which is presented in the second semester. Due to the importance of the findings of CA and EA in language teaching and their practical outcomes, it can be more useful for the M.A. students to become familiar with these knowledge areas sooner in their studies, and for this reason a modification in the order in which they are presented can be beneficial.

Furthermore, among the optional or elective courses "Advanced Writing" and "Materials Preparation" are proposed in the first and third semester and "Literature and Linguistics" and "Applied Linguistics" can be chosen at the professors' will. Other optional courses such as "Sociolinguistics" or "English Literature 1 and 2" are not included in the university's syllabus.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper was an attempt to give a comprehensive account of the courses at the M.A. curriculum proposed for the field of TEFL in Iran and compare the M.A. of program TEFL at one of the universities which holds this level to it. The analysis of the overall M.A. curriculum revealed that it has incorporated the majority of fields and sources related to the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Also, the main aims of each course were delineated in detail.

Generally, the proposed courses are complete in themselves and different universities in Iran give their own interpretations of it which are more or less similar. Of course, this program has some deficiencies, such as not giving any information about how to assess or evaluate students' achievement in any individual course. Another point of deficiency is that it is not flexible and in spite of the point made in the curriculum that it is planned based on the needs of the society; there is no indication in the curriculum

that further courses can be added to it when the demands arise. Regarding the general curriculum proposed for the M.A. level of TEFL in our country, it can be suggested that it should go under some modifications in terms of the courses included in it. Recent years have witnessed a great change in the area of TEFL with respect to the latest findings of researchers all over the world. One of these will be discussed when considering the role of CALL in teaching a language. The other major finding is related to Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT). As Van den Branden (n.d.) states, TBLT has attracted the attention of SLA researches, curriculum developers and teachers for the past twenty years. As TBLT is not well-known and practiced by most Iranian EFL teachers it seems essential to include a separate course on it for the TEFL students to familiarize them with the principles of it and issues involved in task design and its contributions to language learning.

Additionally, the M.A. syllabus of Guilan University is deficient in some aspects, the most important of which is neglecting the needs of the students in the modern world. One area which has recently received considerable attention by some universities in Iran such as Al-Zahra University is the inclusion of the course of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for their M.A. students of TEFL. The aim of this course is familiarizing students with different useful softwares and websites which can aid them in language teaching. With the advancements of technology and its significant role in the area of teaching languages, it seems to be a necessary course for the M.A. students to become familiar with CALL and be able to use it in their teaching. Therefore, the inclusion of a course dealing with CALL can be significantly practical for M.A. students of TEFL at Guilan University and many other universities.

Another important and necessary course which can be included in the university's syllabus is courses on Statistics and SPSS. These are definitely needed for the M.A. students since they are required to conduct researches and familiarity with these knowledge areas can be a great aid to them. Although presentation of these courses has not become widespread yet, there are some universities which

have included them in their M.A. programs. For instance, Sharif University of Tehran presents a two-unit optional course on SPSS with the following objectives:

- Learning basics of SPSS including data entry, variable and value labels, and file manipulation,
- Running descriptive and inferential statistics techniques- hypothesis testing,
- Writing reports.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the courses in the M.A. curriculum of TEFL Iran will be more related to the students' needs if it is modified according to the recent research findings and practice.

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