

**ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
CURRICULUM FOR THE FOURTH GRADE OF MIDDLE
SCHOOL, AN EVALUATIVE STUDY****Faraj Mashhad Hamdan**Tikrit University-Faculty of Islamic Sciences - Department of
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Received: Jun 22, 2024; Accepted: Jul 29, 2024; Published: Aug 24, 2024;

Abstract: The study sought to determine the quality of the English language curriculum for the fourth grade of middle school in Iraqi schools by adopting standards related to objectives, vocabulary, activities, exercises, content, and artistic direction. The study adopted the descriptive approach through the content analysis method through a form designed by the researcher. The results of the study showed: 1. The general objectives of the English language curriculum for the fourth grade of middle school are characterized by clarity and focus on the procedural form of objectives. 2. The content of the curriculum focused on adopting the objective grouping of ideas and vocabulary.

Keywords: content analysis - English language curriculum - fourth grade of middle school



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Introduction

Education is a continuous process that adopts the carrying of Science and knowledge detachments and carefully transferring them to generations in order to create a generation with a broad cultural and knowledge degree capable of shouldering the burdens of Community Development and development. working to improve the education system on a continuous basis guarantees the community tributaries of citizens armed with the latest science, in addition to beautifying them the values of society, its civilization, customs, traditions and cultural heritage. The synergy of these elements generates an educational system capable of achieving the goals and objectives of education, and the imbalance of any of them leads to the failure of the message of education and its stumbling from achieving those goals, and these pillars have represented a point of disagreement between theorists in the sciences of education through the ages, some of them have given priority to the teacher, and some of modern totalitarianism has argued that these pillars cannot be performed individually, as each of them influences and is influenced by the other. According to these considerations, advanced educational curricula capable of absorbing the elements of modernity and the outputs of scientific research and transferring them to learners represent one of the components of education that cannot be neglected. Teaching English achieves a set of educational goals and benefits, in addition to being a course related to the general goals of education, it forms the language of civilized communication between the peoples of the world, and it is the language of Science in which scientific terms are formulated. The development of Education necessarily requires the development of curricula, making them more modern and modern, which requires an analytical and evaluative view of existing curricula in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and based on these results in the development of educational curricula.

The importance of studying

The importance of this study comes from two basic levels:

Theoretical significance

Which comes from the importance of the English language and its vital, scientific and communicative necessity through what it provides to the learner of the skills and knowledge that enable him to stay up to date with the latest science outputs, in addition to the importance of building curriculum development processes according to the outputs of analyzing actual reality and comparing them with pioneering experiments, to come up with modern curricula built according to the best standards.

Applied importance

It is possible that the study represents a new research to be added to the public research library, so that students of Science and students in the fields of education and teaching methods can refer to it when conducting studies on related topics, and the research outputs can provide those responsible for developing Iraqi curricula with information derived from the analysis of actual reality so that it can be used in the development of Iraqi English curricula.

Objectives of the study

1. Determine the degree of clarity of the general objectives of the English curriculum for the fourth grade of preparatory in Iraqi schools.
2. Indicate the degree of quality of the educational content in the courses of this curriculum.
3. Determine the quality of the vocabulary of the language and the grammar employed in it.
4. Determine the adequacy of the exercises and activities approved in the said curriculum.
5. Judging the quality of the approved textbook to present this curriculum.

The problem of studying

Education in Iraq suffers from a marked decline after 2003, as the Davos index of the quality of Education showed that Iraq is one of the non-classified countries due to the low quality of education in it, which represents a real problem in a country that before this date was considered according to international classifications one of the best countries in the region in terms of Education, which requires an in-depth review of various elements within the Iraqi education system. The development of English language curricula is an important step in the development of education in general, as it is an international language of communication and the language adopted in the most important research and scientific studies internationally, and this development is not done from scratch, but based on an in-depth analysis of the current reality of the English language curriculum in Iraqi schools, and:

How good is the English curriculum for the fourth grade in Iraqi schools The following questions arise from it:

1. The degree of clarity of the objectives of the English language curriculum offered to fourth grade learners in Iraq
2. What is the degree of quality of educational content in the courses of the approved curriculum for study
3. What is the quality of the vocabulary and grammar employed in the courses of this curriculum
4. What is the degree of adequacy of the approved exercises and activities
5. What is the degree of quality of the approved textbook in the approved curriculum for study

The descriptive analytical curriculum was followed by providing an in-depth briefing on the phenomenon being studied using quantitative content analysis through a form designed for the purpose of identifying the content of the English curriculum for the fourth grade of preparatory in Iraqi schools.

Study frameworks Time: the current study was completed between 1/6/2023 and 30/11/2023. Spatial: the geographical borders of the Republic of Iraq.

Objective limits: The content of the English curriculum for the fourth grade in Iraqi schools (English for Iraq).

Terms of study

Analysis

Analysis in the language: it is stated in the intermediate lexicon: an analysis of who analyzed, and it is said to analyze the sentence i.e. between its parts and the function of each of them (1).

By convention, analysis is a type of scientific study based on expressing a point of view in one part, and linking it to the rest of the parts (2).

The procedural analysis in the current study is a process that relies on the steps of scientific research to judge the quality of the chosen method of study in the current research.

English language curriculum for the fourth grade

The researcher did not come up with a clear definition of this curriculum, so he defined it procedurally as a curriculum authored by the Iraqi Ministry of Education intended for fourth-grade students in preparatory schools in Iraq.

Orthodontic study

Issuing special detailed judgments-negative or positive-and then adding them to a brief general calendar reflecting the extent to which quality standards have been achieved. The evaluation study is defined procedurally in the current research as a study based on the method of content analysis to identify the pros and cons of the English curriculum for the fourth grade Preparatory in Iraq (1).

Previous studies

Al-Sa'il study (2) (2021) entitled: analyzing the content of English textbooks for the basic fifth grade in the light of life skills: a comparative study between Jordan and Finland. The study aimed to identify the differences and agreement between the basic fifth grade English textbook applied in Jordanian schools and its counterpart applied in Finland by adopting the standard of including life skills in each of them. The study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach through an analysis form divided into categories based on the paragraph as the main unit of analysis. The study concluded that the approved curriculum of the English language for the basic fifth grade in Finland includes life skills to a high degree, while these skills are available to an intermediate degree in the Jordanian curriculum, and the study also found that the Jordanian curriculum is more consistent with the requirements of proper pronunciation in the English language, and helps to form a conceptual surrounding the vocabulary in an easy and perceptible way by learners. The irican Study (1) (2017) is entitled: A Comparative Study between the basic education curricula in Finland and Turkey in teaching foreign languages. The aim is to evaluate the content of the curricula adopted at the basic education stage in both Turkey and Finland, and the extent to which they correspond to the goals set for the educational outputs in both countries. It is a descriptive research where it sought to explain the legal materials and school legislation in both countries, and the qualitative content analysis approach to analyze the content of textbooks in both countries, using the single book as the main unit of analysis. The study found that Finnish curricula are significantly ahead of Turkish curricula, especially in terms of teaching English and employing computer skills. Kujala's monograph (1) (2016) is titled: vocabulary aggregation for different levels of learners of English as a foreign language: textbook content analysis. The study aimed to identify the most commonly used English language books in Finnish public schools and determine the content of new words contained in the sample study books. The study adopted the quantitative and qualitative content analysis through an analysis form for five books common in Finnish schools, adopting the paragraph as the main unit of analysis. One of its results is that the analyzed books adopted the thematic grouping of vocabulary, which contributes to simplifying the learning process among learners, while semantic groupings appeared only in specific cases. A reformer study (1) (2015) entitled: analyzing the English textbook for the eighth grade in the light of values and proposing an enriching material for values in the curriculum The aim of the study

was to conduct an analytical review of the content of the English textbook for the eighth grade in Palestinian schools, and to indicate the extent of its compatibility with the standards of the Palestinian Ministry of education for intermediate education, in order to propose a model of an enriching material of the quality of moral legal materials. The study used the quantitative content analysis method through an analysis form designed by the researcher, and adopted the full lesson as the main analysis unit. The study concluded that there are shortcomings in meeting the general goals in the English language curriculum studied, and that the curriculum should include concepts of national belonging, rights and duties.

Feedback on previous studies

These studies meet in terms of seeking to analyze the content of curricula in different schools and different educational stages in a group of Arab and foreign countries, and all of them share the adoption of the method of content analysis as a method to complete their methodological requirements. While previous studies differ among themselves in the analysis criteria or benchmarks adopted in the analysis, where some studies adopted the national standards of the country in the field of study, while the AL - Sayel study (2021) adopted life skills as an analytical benchmark, and studies also differ in the selection of the unit of analysis, where three main units appeared within the previous studies (book - lesson-paragraph).

Study tools

To achieve the objectives of the current study, a special form was adopted through the following: The choice of the unit of analysis: this is related to the nature of the research and the goals it seeks to achieve, and through the specificity of the current study, the paragraph has been adopted as the main unit of analysis, so that each paragraph is considered one separate one.

Methods

Selection of analysis categories: these are the general tabulations that are analyzed in such a way as to ensure that the studied phenomenon is fully accounted for (1), and through the analysis of the objectives of the study

the following analysis categories have been adopted

Goal categories-content quality category - vocabulary category-exercise and activities category-book quality category.

Selection of analysis criteria: these are subunits that measure the degree of availability of analysis categories in the text being analyzed, during this step, the categories were analyzed and the criteria that are described procedurally are selected to be available in the curriculum

The validity of the questionnaire: through apparent honesty by presenting it to a group of arbitrators from the disciplines of education and teaching methods from faculty members at universities in Iraq and asking them to express an opinion on the occasion of the form for the current study, where the form was corrected based on the observations submitted and re-presented to them for the second time, and the final comments indicated that the form actually measures the goal for which it was developed.

Stability of the form: through the use of the arbitrators ' agreement method, by applying it by the researcher and then resorting to another researcher to analyze the same sample and calculate the coefficient of agreement between the two arbitrators according to the relationship:

$$S = 2T \div T1 \times T2$$

S: coefficient of agreement

T: number of cases of agreement

V1: cases recorded by the first arbitrator.

V2: cases recorded by the second arbitrator

The result showed that the coefficient of agreement between the two arbitrations reached (0.901), which together indicates a high stability*.

Result and Discussion

Analysis of Study Results and Answering the Questions

Main Research Question:

How effective is the English language curriculum for the fourth preparatory grade in Iraqi schools?

This question was answered by addressing the derived sub-questions as follows:

Sub-question 1:

What is the clarity level of the objectives of the English language curriculum provided to fourth-grade students in Iraq?

Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Specific objectives for the 4th grade	17	29.31%
Objectives related to preparatory stage	7	12.07%
Objectives aligned with educational policy	11	18.97%
Procedural objectives	23	39.66%

Source: Designed by the researcher based on analysis data.

From the above table, it is clear that procedural objectives are the most prevalent among the objectives included in the analyzed curriculum, with a percentage of 39.66% of the total objectives. Regarding the clarity of the objectives, they were judged by the researcher based on previous studies, and it was found that the objectives are moderately clear.

Sub-question 2:

What is the quality level of the educational content in the studied curriculum?

Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Thematic aggregation	39	67.24%
Semantic aggregation	6	10.34%
Mixed aggregation	13	22.41%

Source: Designed by the researcher based on analysis data.

The table shows that the curriculum relies significantly on thematic aggregation of content elements, which aligns with logical thinking methods among learners. The curriculum also adequately incorporates mixed aggregation, which combines thematic and semantic approaches, providing adaptability to meet learners' needs.

Sub-question 3:

What is the quality of vocabulary and grammar used in the curriculum?

Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
New vocabulary	16	27.59%
Synonyms	4	6.90%
Antonyms	6	10.34%
Difficult vocabulary	32	55.17%

Source: Designed by the researcher based on analysis data.

It is evident from the table that the fourth-grade curriculum includes difficult vocabulary at a rate of 55.17%, which reduces the overall quality of the curriculum. Ideally, difficult vocabulary should not exceed 12-15% of the total vocabulary.

Sub-question 4:

What is the adequacy level of exercises and activities included in the curriculum?

Criteria	Level
Coverage of the study unit	High
Variety in assessment methods	Medium
Consideration of individual differences	Medium

Comprehensiveness	Medium
Measurement of various cognitive skills	Low

Source: Designed by the researcher based on analysis data.

The table shows that the activities and exercises in the curriculum cover the study unit at a high level. However, regarding the variety of cognitive skills measured by these exercises, the researcher assessed them as weak, as they mainly focus on recall rather than other levels of cognition.

Sub-question 5:

What is the quality level of the textbook used in the curriculum?

Criteria	Level
Print clarity	Low
Artistic layout	Medium
Color harmony	Low
Binding quality	Medium

Source: Designed by the researcher based on analysis data.

The table reveals that the textbook used for teaching the English language curriculum is not of high quality in terms of print clarity and color harmony. The colors are dull, and often, non-harmonious colors were used. Additionally, the font used is not clear enough to make reading easy.

Study results

1-the general objectives of the English curriculum for the fourth grade are characterized by clarity and focus on the procedural version of the goals, which are those goals that can be verified in a practical way through the available scales and tests, which clearly explain the adopted educational strategies.

2-the content of the curriculum focused on adopting the thematic grouping of ideas and vocabulary, by organizing them through paragraphs or groups that converge with each other in a way that serves the subject of the lesson or the part in which it was placed.

3-the vocabulary in the curriculum was characterized by a high degree of difficulty, which corresponds to the special requirements of the superior learners, while it does not suit the lesser learners together, which is one of the disadvantages of the curriculum, the curriculum must take into account the individual differences between learners.

4-the activities included in the curriculum focus on remembering more than the rest of the cognitive levels, which is considered a shortcoming in the curriculum, the conditions for building the curriculum require diversification with the cognitive levels that mimic the educational goals set, so diversifying the levels of goals necessarily means diversification in the target student segments, which ensures the assimilation of individual differences between learners, so that each of them is able to learn according to his own capabilities.

5-the results showed weakness in the artistic output of the textbook that displayed the content in the English language for the fourth preparatory grade, which is also a negative point because the clear and well-directed book makes education easier because it motivates learners, and on the contrary, the low degree of artistic coordination of the course leads to the aversion of learners and generates negative responses to the curriculum as a whole.

Conclusion

1-the focus of the curriculum's objectives on the procedural picture indicates the adaptation of the practical curriculum to these objectives. the curricula are intended for teaching at the lower level of the educational system, namely the school. the objectives in the higher departments are directed towards the strategy, while the curricula are concerned with translating these strategies into actual procedural activities that express them.

2-the adoption of the thematic grouping helps to harmonize the curriculum internally, and also contributes to linking it with the rest of the teaching curricula scheduled in the academic year, so that the curriculum is part of an integrated system.

3-the inclusion of a large amount of difficult vocabulary in the English language curriculum indicates the failure to follow the scientific foundations in building the curricula, which requires the curriculum developers to adopt a variety of new vocabulary levels to become appropriate and revealing the individual differences between learners, the same applies to focusing on levels of cognitive goals more than the rest of the goals.

4-the failure to take into account the technical conditions in the good output of textbooks is considered one of the factors hindering the development of the Iraqi education system

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