# Element of Progression in English Language Textbooks at

# Elementary Level in Pakistan: A Case Study

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**Abstract**
The curriculum policy of Pakistan (1998-2010) favours a developmental model of curriculum with notional functional syllabus and CLT as its teaching methodology. While using questionnaire and interview as their tools for research, the ELT experts criticize the curriculum as well as the instructional material provided to the learners in Pakistani Government sector schools. The present research is an attempt to incorporate computer tools to shift the curriculum-related research to scientific grounds. It is a descriptive, quantitative study. It computes the ratio of new and old linguistic items on lexical and phrase level by using Compleat Lexical Tutor as the tool for research. The quantitative analysis yields the percentage of repeated items, which turn out to be quite low for the reason that a large number of text types have not been repeated. It also shows that the representation of the lexical items does not follow a cyclic process which leads to shaky foundation of English language at learners' end. It is concluded that this abrupt introduction of new lexical items and grammatical structures in instructional materials (textbooks) poses considerable difficulty for learners to take a good grasp of English language.
**Keywords**: Curriculum, Syllabus, Elementary Education in Pakistan, textbook    analysis, ELT

## 1. Introduction
Curriculum is the overall map for the teaching and learning process of an educational programme. It has various phases of planning, implementation and evaluation. The entire system of education in fact depends upon curriculum, directly or indirectly. The importance of a suitable curriculum increases many folds when it is being designed for the language course for second language learners (Nunan, 1988; Rabbini, 2002; Richards, 2001).

Curriculum is the document describing the outline of a teaching learning process. Writing a curriculum document involves the specification of learning objectives and the objectives which the course developers and the state, directly or indirectly, want to achieve by the end of a course. The representation of this curriculum is manifested in syllabus, the syllabus being the selection and sequencing of the content (Nunan, 1988). In Pakistan, English language is being used on a wide scale, encompassing almost every aspect of life (Baumgardner, 1993). The curriculum policy (1998-2010) has tried to cope with the needs of the time. The curriculum it presents for the compulsory course of English for grades I-XII is developmental and dynamic in nature. The teaching method suggested in the curriculum document placed on the website of the Ministry of Education is Communicative language teaching, and the syllabus it suggests is Notional Functional.

In Pakistan, teaching-learning process is dependent upon the textbooks provided to the students; the concept of using some other material is a rarity in Pakistani schools. So the textbook writers and developers are supposed to write such textbooks that reflect the given curriculum comprehensively. In the present research, the relevance of curriculum to the syllabus presented in the English textbooks to the learners at elementary level, i.e., grades VI-VIII is evaluated using the software Compleat Lexical Tutor.

The curriculum suggests that the elements introduced in Grade VI should be repeated in the textbook for grade VII with a few new structures for better comprehension. Similarly, the elements presented in the

textbook of grade VIII, while introducing new elements of structure must also repeat the structures given in the textbooks of grades VI and VII. The curriculum document suggests that the element of progression is a necessity for English textbooks as shown in the Appendix II, Figure 1.1. The figure shows how one level is assumed to be dependent upon the other. The knowledge and skills to be acquired at a later level greatly overlap the ones already taught at the previous level.

## 2. Literature Review

Curriculum is the philosophical standpoint for the teaching learning process. According to Richards (2001) what to teach to learners (according to the learners' needs), under which objectives, with which teaching methods, using what kind of materials, with the selection and sequencing of content and finally the method of evaluation of a course all combine to make curriculum. A sub-part of curriculum is syllabus (Nunan, 1988), which is largely manifested through the material presented to the learners especially in those teaching-learning situations where the teacher and learner rely largely on the course material, generally a textbook. If we go for the origin of the word syllabus, it means "label" or "table of contents" (Altman & Cashin, 1992), which suggests that the syllabus is the first step in taking insight from curriculum to the dynamic phase of educational setting where instructional materials are used. However, in Pakistani schools, the educational setting is mostly dependent upon the textbooks provided to the actors of the setting.

So the syllabus is decoded through instructional material, which is the first step in giving input to the learners. The specification of a textbook has also been favoured by the experts. Cunningsworth (1995) maintains that the print material especially textbook not only helps learners to have the first interaction between them and the linguistic items and the communicative situations, but also helps inexperienced teachers to follow the textbook as a map. Pakistani curriculum has presented a developmental model for curriculum. This developmental model comprises phases or stages, called competencies, standards, benchmarks and student learning outcomes (see Appendix II, figure 2.1).

These stages show how the curriculum for English language has been developed for learners in Pakistan. Each of these four stages is linked to other hierarchically. Student learning outcomes combine to make benchmarks that further lead to standards while competencies enclose standards. The curriculum document suggests syllabus to be process-oriented, expecting far mature contribution from the student.

The study on curriculum in Pakistan and the practical realization of it through the contents provided shows that there are some discrepancies that are to be met. Ahmad (2004), while commenting on the syllabus and curriculum of social studies textbooks on elementary level, opines that lack of balance is evident in the instructional material. According to him, the social studies book has been particularly for Muslims ignoring non-Muslims. The element of bias is also there, at some point even the facts from Muslim history are distorted to give a glimpse of the 'glorious' history of Muslims. According to Asif (2001), the criticism on curriculum has been raised many times by experts. The Education Policy (2000-2010) admits that the previous curriculum has not been sufficient for the needs of the elementary level of education. Ashraf (1999) conducts her study on the curriculum-syllabus relevance on the English textbooks of Grades I-V. She concludes that the respective curriculum is not suitable according to needs of learners, teachers as well as of society. The attempts for linguistic skills especially speaking are blurry. Kronstadt (2004) also affirms the ineffectiveness of the Pakistani curriculum stating the efforts that the outer world (especially America) is doing now to promote and improve the standard of education in Pakistan by giving aid and suggestive policies to make changes in the curriculum.

Ashraf (1999) and Moeen (1992) agree that Pakistani learners have to memorize many items and less emphasis is placed on understanding and comprehension of elements of language and language skills. Similarly Gilani (1999) in her findings, while working on Islamic studies syllabus, suggests that the content level is higher than the mental level of learners. Moeen (1992) also proposes that, in the existing curriculum, some very fundamental changes are required to make it pertinent to the changes and development on international level. According to Shami and Hussain (2005), elementary education in Pakistan is divided into two stages: Primary and Middle, first stage covering five years while latter three. This paper discusses the second stage in the said hierarchy. In this paper, the term 'elementary' is taken to be equivalent to the Middle stage consisting of three Grades, i.e., VI-VIII.

The present research is carried out to observe whether the element of progression suggested in the curriculum document is reflected in the textbooks for the course of the elementary level English or not. By using Compleat Lexical Tutor, this element has been observed on lexical as well as the phrase level. The ELT practitioners suggest that the greater the frequency of repetitive structures, the better the comprehension of linguistic skills. The aim of this paper is to explore why learners find it difficult to comprehend English language and why do they feel difficulty in using different structures for communication as well as during evaluation.

## 3. Methodology

It is a descriptive, corpus-based quantitative study. Software has been applied on the data. The results produced by software are numerical and further description of the results is mainly dependent upon that numerical data. A corpus of the textbooks used in the government sector school for the teaching of English as a compulsory subject for grade VI, VII and VIII had been compiled. This corpus data was processed through a Software Compleat Lexical Tutor by Cobb (2003). This software provides an online help for ESL, ESP or EAP practitioners to work on vocabulary, reading and writing. There are various sub-parts of this software. Text Lex Compare, N-Gram and Frequency Indexer were the sub-parts of the selected software to be used on the corpus.

To find out the element of progression in the English textbooks for Grades VI-VIII, as had been suggested in the curriculum for English, Grades I-XII, presented by the Ministry of Education, the comparison had been carried out on two levels, i.e., intra-book and inter-book comparison.  The study was carried out on lexical and structural level using the Text Lex Compare in Compleat Lexical Tutor. On lexical level, two aspects had been noticed:

- What is the percentage of repeated tokens and types?
- What is the percentage of the occurrence of new items?

On structural level, the percentage values of repetition of the new phrases and shared structures were studied. The study of structural elements was also carried out by extracting five, four, three and two word concordance strings taking the percentages of the occurrence of these strings in each book by using N-Gram. Frequency Indexer has also been used on the complete notepad files for each book. The ten most frequent words in the text were extracted with the respective frequency by the help of Frequency Indexer.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

For lexical items two percentage values have been noted down for each lesson in all the three books, i.e., tokens and types. Token is the term used to denote the lexical items and type is the categorization of a class of tokens under one basic form. The extracted values show that in the textbook for Grade VI, maximum repetition of tokens is 90.04 % and the minimum is 53.19 %, whereas the maximum repetition of types is 83.62 % and the minimum is 26.81 %. These values are comparatively low in the textbook for Grade VII. However, lesson 7.19 is an exception, as it is a picture story having no text of its own thus indicating very high percentage. The range of values is 84.45-49.63 and 74.00-34.20 for tokens and types, respectively. These values for the Grade VIII textbook are 87.94-58.00 and 79.82-34.38.

At the same time, another comparison has been carried out on phrase level. Interestingly, the percentage of the repetition of phrases has been very low. The maximum values are 8.82, 11.76 and 8.46 % for all the three books, respectively. Similarly, the minimum values are 2.08, 0.80 and 0.00, 0.53 %, respectively.

The percentages show that the values for lexical level are quite greater in comparison to the phrase level. It is perhaps one reason that the learners feel difficulty in using structures as more importance is given to the lexical level rather than to the syntactic or phrasal level. Somewhat similar results have been observed in inter-book study. The tabular form values have been added in the appendix I, table 1.

The table 1 establishes the fact that the percentage of repetition of structures has been low in inter-book comparison too. Pakistani learners of English are not only the non-native to the language but the attitude to this language by teachers as well as society is also discouraging (Shamim, 2008). In such circumstances when they move from one grade to the next the problem worsens when they find altogether new structures on phrase level in the English textbooks for the respective grade with the repetition of just six percent to its maximum. This quantitative study of the lexical items and phrases shows that the results are not in accordance with the recommendations of the National policy for syllabus and curriculum of the elementary school education (2006). The lexical items are repeated frequently, but the structures are not.

In the second phase, to observe the complexity of structures, N-Gram has been applied to three files, each comprising the full instructional material for one textbook. The percentage values for five- to two-word strings have been extracted on N-Gram String Output. Complex structures do occur in the instructional material, but these structures have not been repeated throughout the material, for example, the five-word strings have been repeated only 1.01 percent in one file while the maximum value has been observed as 2.54 percent. Same is the case with four-word string. For three-word and two-word string the percentage values have been increased but still these are not satisfactory. Here it is also confirmed that the emphasis of instructional material developer is on the introduction rather than the continuation of structural elements of language. While using communicative language teaching methodology on the notional functional syllabus, it may seem reasonable not to give emphasis on the grammatical elements but in real-life situations, knowledge and comprehension of structures is an essential requirement.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In Pakistan, questions have long been raised on the issue of inadequacy of the instructional materials and the void between the proposed syllabus in the curriculum document and the existing one. Research has been carried out especially after 1980s on this and the related fields, but any quantitative study has not been carried out before. The results also illustrate that the element of progression has not been followed in developing the English textbooks for the elementary level. This trend has been noted not only in inter-book comparison but also in intra-book comparison on the structural level. The major content has comprised of new lexical items and structures. The ratio for new items is quite high, which indicates one solid reason behind the uneasiness of Pakistani learners of English, as well as a valid reason for the poor exam results. The testing and evaluation system emphasize the grammatical items rather than functional and notional elements of language; skill of memorization is viewed to be central rather than the communicative skills or four linguistic skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing).

According to Shamim (2008) problem arises due to the separate domains working in isolation having least connections to one another. Those making policies on federal level issue them to syllabus developers on the provincial level, while the evaluation mechanism, staff recruitment in schools and other related matters are tackled by district government. She also discusses that the position of English as a language in Post-colonial Pakistan has been changed from government to government. Each government, having its own policy mostly without any implementation plan, has found it difficult to work in continuation hence making the situation shoddier.

The present study concludes that there are loopholes between the actual curriculum and the proposed one in the curriculum document provided by the ministry of education (2006). The document proposes the communicative syllabus for the learners with culturally rich content using the real-life functions and notions. In communicative syllabi, it is necessary to focus on the activities and tasks taking learners to a required level of skills and knowledge (Krahnke, 1987; Nunan, 1988). Communication is a process rather than a product. So the syllabus proposed by the Ministry of education is process-oriented rather than product-oriented. Whereas, the actual syllabus presented to the teaching-learning setting is product-oriented rather than process. The flow of information is always one-way in Pakistani school setting, i.e., from teacher to student; so the teacher has to carry on it; therefore, it is clearly dependent upon the capability of teacher. Such syllabus is teacher-oriented and already finished product it is a rarity that teachers use books or instructional material other than the provided textbook. Furthermore, the emphasis is given on the formal units of language, i.e., parts of speech usage, basic grammar rules and structures.

The syllabus in Pakistan from head to tail is synthetic rather than analytical. It is teacher-oriented rather than learner-oriented. The content is specified well before the start of a course. The syllabus designer draws a map from beginning to end, so text is a finished product. According to Nunan's description of a syllabus of ends, or of product-oriented syllabus (Rabbini, 2002), it is obvious that the syllabus for the elementary education in Pakistan is product-oriented rather than process-oriented. The Students Learning Outcomes in the curriculum document give emphasis to the parts of speech, basic grammatical structures and comprehension of linguistic skills, i.e., of reading and writing. While acknowledging the fact that proper facilitation has not been and cannot be provided for the listening and speaking skills. This descriptive study is significant for the instructional material developers, textbook writers, teachers and future researchers.

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**Appendix I: List of Tables**

Table 1: The repetition of token-type and token-phrases in the listed books:

| Sr. # | File # | Token % | Type % | Token % | Phrases % |
|-------|--------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|
| 01 | 6 vs 7 complete | 78.58 | 40.92 | 6.20 | 3.08 |
| 02 | 7 vs 8 complete | 79.09 | 37.76 | 4.12 | 2.24 |
| 03 | 6+7     vs     8 complete | 85.10 | 48.79 | 6.01 | 3.68 |

The percentage values of inter-book token-type and token-phrases repetition for the three textbooks.
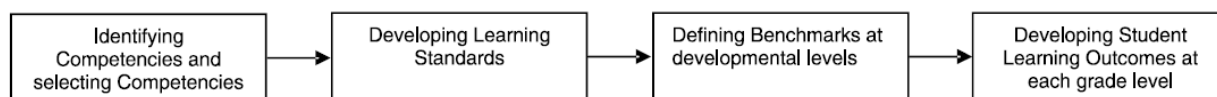
## Appendix II: List of Figures

Fig. 1.1:
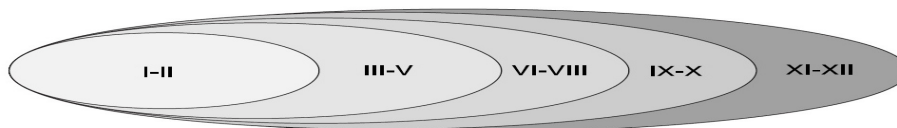


The element of progression in the textbooks for English suggested in the policy from

Grade I to XII (National Curriculum for English Language Grades I-XII, 2006, p. 4)

Fig. 2.1:



The phases proposed in the National curriculum document to teach English. (National

Curriculum for English Language Grades I-XII, 2006, p. 3).

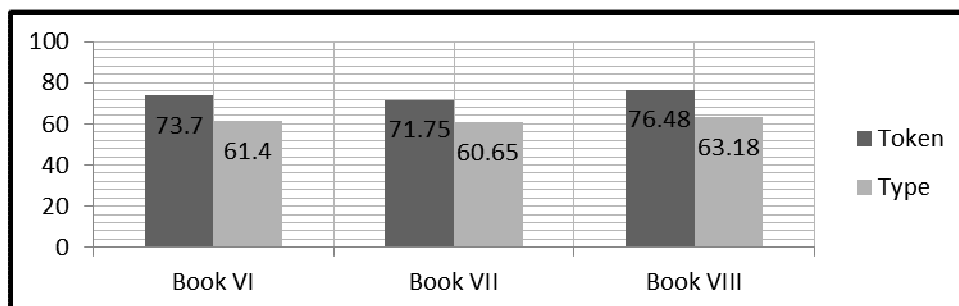## Appendix III: List of Charts

Chart 1:



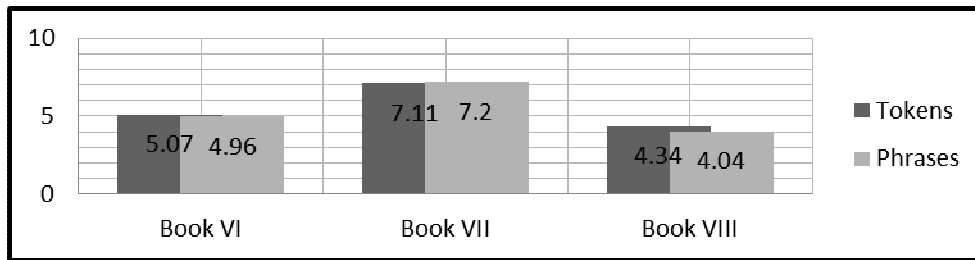Chart 1. The intra-book token-type repetition average percentage.

Chart 2:



Chart 2. The intra-book token-phrases repetition average percentage

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