

The Effect of Explicit Negotiated Syllabus on Developing Speaking Ability and Affective Variables

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ABSTRACT

History of language teaching methodologies is characterized by variety of syllabuses equal to the number of teaching methods. Following the ups and downs in teaching methods, syllabuses have had the same destiny. In line with the humanistic trend in this arena, whole learner involvement received prime significance to the extent that many favor negotiated syllabus in language teaching and learning; however, empirical findings are not rich enough to have strong claims in this respect. To this end, this study was an attempt to explore possible corollary among application of the negotiated syllabus, development of learners' speaking ability and modification in their attitudes and motivation towards EFL learning. To do so, a sample of 54 subjects was selected through the administration of the KEY English Test (KET) and an oral interview. They, then, were randomly divided into two groups; one experimental and one control. The experimental group received the treatment based on the negotiated syllabus. The control group, however, was exposed to conventional speaking instruction as the teacher decided. To collect required data, six instruments including: the KET, oral interviews, the Attitude-Motivation Test Battery, a speaking test and a written protocol were employed. The data were triangulated from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The findings revealed that there was a slight difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control group in the posttests. The post-*ad-hoc* interview showed statistically significant difference between groups, while the post-*ad-hoc* speaking test indicated slight difference between the participants' mean scores. Contrary to the expectation, the participants' attitudes and motivation did not change significantly as a result of the treatment. Believing that the nature of the target traits (i.e. speaking ability and affective factors such as attitude and motivation) is not much amenable to quantitative research, the issue was triangulated from the qualitative perspective. To this end, a written protocol was also sought from the participants so that they could report their ideas on both development of speaking ability and change in their attitudes and motivation. The respective data analysis revealed roughly contradictory results. They totally claimed improvement, or at least positive impression of developing speaking ability and positive attitude and motivation towards language learning in the light of employment of the negotiated syllabus.

Keywords: *Syllabus- Negotiation- Speaking Ability- Attitude & Motivation*

Introduction

Syllabus and curriculum are sometimes used interchangeably. However, the former is a well-ordered arrangement of lists of materials supposed to be taught in a particular language course, while curriculum is a more comprehensive process covering the former. Rodgers (1989) says that "curriculum is a far broader concept and is all those activities in which children engage

under the auspices of the school (p.26)" and "it also includes specifications for providing inputs to syllabus design and for measuring outcomes of syllabus-based instruction (p.28)". Focusing on syllabus, Breen (2001) suggests four principles of organization for defining syllabus:

- The kind of skills and knowledge which a specific syllabus should be focused upon.
- The content of the syllabus should be selected.

- The way the content of the syllabus should be subdivided.
- The way the content of the syllabus should be sequenced.

To this end, ten major and common types of syllabuses that may be used in different language situations can be traced in the pertinent literature.

1. *Structural or Formal Syllabus* which focuses on the structures (usually grammatical) and form of the language, "in which the product, grammatical items complexity and simplicity are of significance" (Mohsenifar, 2008, p.5). Also Kaur (1990) refers to this syllabus as traditional syllabus which focuses on language form and considers structural patterns as the "basic units of learning" (p.14).

2. *Notional-Functional Syllabus* is concerned with focuses on the functions and notions. To this end, Tarey (1988) states, "the content of language teaching is the collection of the functions [that are] performed when language is used, or of the notions that language is used to express" (p.2).

3. *Situational Syllabus* is based on how language is used in different situations. Schulz (1983) believes "Language is always used in a social context that influences meaning and therefore uses a series of situations that the learners are most likely to encounter when traveling abroad" (p.2).

4. *Skill-Based Syllabus* in which the primary focus is that learners develop some skills that help them to use language.

5. *Task-Based Syllabus* in which the learners are usually given specific activities or tasks to use language communicatively.

6. *Content-Based Syllabus* aims at "teaching specific information and content using the language that the learners are also learning" (Mohsenifar, 2008, p.7).

7. *Process Syllabus* addresses "teaching and learning and particularly the possible interrelationship between subject matter, learning and the potential contributions of a classroom" (Kaur, 1990, p.14).

8. *Procedural Syllabus*, contrary to structural syllabus, is the syllabus in which the focus is on meaning rather than form, as "the tasks and activities are planned in advance the learner is preoccupied with understanding, relating or conveying the message and copes in the process as well as

he can with the language involved" (Kaur, 1990, p.15).

9. *Multi-Dimensional (Mixed) Syllabus*: It supports the use of a combination of different syllabuses in each part of our teaching program.

In line with this developmental trend, more recently, Gourlay (2005) has favored Negotiated syllabus.

10. *Negotiated Syllabus* is a kind of process-oriented and learner-centered syllabus in which, according to Rabbini (2002), the focus is on the specification of learning tasks and activities that students will learn or undertake during teaching and learning course. Following the advent of communicative method, negotiation became very important. Riddle (2000) suggests the negotiation of meaning in which the learners interact with each other and with instructor. Mulholland (1991) also mentions that negotiation is a kind of conversation which includes some rules of conversation but it has a narrow range of speech acts, procedure rules and defined goal. The following are some of the suggested negotiation acts:

- The speaker expresses ideas about the subject
- He discusses it
- Adjusts or omits the ones which are not acceptable to the majority
- Ranks the matters and subjects
- Formulates the finishing proposal
- The hearer proposes, suggests or argues
- Analyzes the criteria used by the participants
- Considers the acts which are not used by others
- Learns about other's ideas
- Learns the time of supporting and refusing.

In addition, communication and negotiation help us to move outside our limited venue. According to Blackman (2000), during negotiation in the classroom we learn how and when to inject a new variable in order to create more learning. Also, Cheon (2003) proposes that negotiations tend to increase input comprehensibility through language modifications such as simplifications, confirmation, clarification requests or recasts. They provide learners with an opportunity to receive input that they have made comprehensible

through negotiation and provide them with an opportunity for inter language modification and comprehensible output.

Negotiated syllabus is divided into two types: *Explicit Negotiation*: Teachers directly negotiate with learners and ask their ideas about diverse aspects of the teaching program. Gourlay (2005) considers procedural negotiation as a means of making teachers' implicit interpretation of the syllabus and students' learning agendas explicit. *Implicit Negotiation*: Teachers indirectly negotiate with learners and try to know their ideas about content, methodology, evaluation of the course to include learners in the syllabus design. Breen and Little John (as cited in Gourlay 2005) believe that "teacher's interpretation of a syllabus and reasons for classroom decisions are usually covert and learners' own interpretations of what is done and how it relates to their own learning are the focus of overt consideration" (p.211)..

Negotiated Syllabus and Speaking Skill

As an oral mode of communication, speaking is of crucial significance in the process of language teaching and learning. Chastain (1976) believes that one of the roles of speaking in language classroom is to use it as a vehicle for participating in class activities. If learners can speak the language in class and use it to express themselves, the class becomes an example of using language to function in a social situation. Learners should be able to convert their thoughts to an oral message in the second language within the range of material they have learned. He argues that learners should be able to negotiate meaning through second language, and negotiation of meaning in classroom communication situations requires that language students develop appropriate communication strategies.

The Problem and Purpose

Though many different syllabuses have been suggested and applied by lots of teachers in different language classrooms, teaching foreign language has witnessed ups and downs. The real problem, in fact, is whether negotiated syllabus can cast any light on the dilemma of language learning and teaching on one hand and learners' affective factors on the other. To address this issue this study investigates the effect of explicit

negotiated syllabus on developing EFL speaking ability. It also examines the extent to which it can modify learners' attitudes and motivation towards EFL learning.

Therefore, the problem and purpose of this study are jointly realized in the form of the specific questions as follows:

Research Questions

1. Does explicit negotiation with learners on the aspects of teaching program have any significant effect on developing speaking ability?
2. Does explicit negotiation with learners on the aspects of teaching program have any significant effect on their attitudes and motivation towards EFL learning?

Method

Participants

Fifty-four Iranian male intermediate-level EFL learners participated in this study.

Materials

Six sets of materials were employed for the purpose of this research.

1. *The Key English Test (KET)*: Before the treatment, the Key English Test (KET) was administered to make sure of learners' language ability and their homogeneity levels.
2. *An Oral Interview (as pretest)*: An oral interview was conducted by two interviewers in order to evaluate learners' speaking ability and make sure of the reliability coefficient of the instrument employed through inter-rater reliability estimation (Farhady, Jafarpur and Birjandi 1994).
3. *Attitude-Motivation Test Battery*: An Attitude-Motivation Test Battery adopted from R.C. Gardner (2004) was administered before and after the treatment to both groups.
4. *An Oral Interview (as posttest)*: An oral interview as posttest was conducted to measure the course achievement and compare the results with those of the first interview.
5. *A Speaking Test*: A speaking test as a posttest was developed and administered based on the treatment objectives.
6. *A written Protocol*: A written protocol was employed to ask learners to report their ideas on

the development of speaking and change in their attitudes and motivation towards EFL learning.

Design

This study was based on "quasi-experimental" design. Two groups, though not randomly selected from the population, were randomly assigned as experimental and the other as the control group. The pretest was administered before the treatment and posttest was administered after the treatment. This study was also based on "qualitative-quantitative" approaches in research, given the nature of the trait. It means that besides the quantitative data analysis, the researcher employed a written protocol whose data was collected and analyzed qualitatively.

Procedures

a. Selection of the samples

In order to select homogeneous participants, the Key English Test (KET) was employed. After administering the test, 54 participants whose scores ranged between 1 Standard Deviation (SD) above and below the mean scores were considered almost homogeneous and chosen to take part in the study.

b. Administration of the pretests

1. Administration of the post attitude motivation questionnaire

Before the treatment, the pre attitude-motivation of questionnaire was administered to measure participants' attitudes and motivation towards learning English.

2. Administration and Reliability of the Interview (as pretest)

In addition to the KET, an oral interview was conducted and rated by two independent raters to primarily and specifically measure the participants' speaking ability prior to the treatment. The mean scores of the interviewers were used as the basis for decision making. Inter-Rater reliability coefficient proved that the instrument was reliable enough. The interview was scored based on the scales of testing speaking skill adopted from Farhady, Jafarpur and Birjandi (1994, p.239), in which five components: accent, structure, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency were measured.

Treatment

Both experimental group (EG) and control group (CG) attended an English language course which lasted for 14 sessions (1 hour and a half a day, three days a week) including administering pretest and posttest and pure treatment sessions.

The experimental group received the treatment based on the negotiated syllabus, but the control group was exposed to conventional speaking instruction as the teacher decided.

Administration of the Posttests

3. Administration and Reliability of the Speaking Test (as posttest)

At the end of the treatment period, a speaking test comprising 25 items was administered to the two groups to check the progress of participant's speaking during the course. Of course, the reliability coefficient of the test was checked prior to final administration.

4. Administration of post attitude-motivation questionnaire

After the treatment, the attitude-motivation questionnaire was administered to measure the change in participants' attitudes and motivation towards learning English.

5. Administration and Reliability of the Interview (as posttest)

Finally, the oral interview was conducted by two independent raters to measure participants' speaking ability after the treatment. Inter-rater reliability coefficient proved that the instrument was reliable enough.

6. The Written Protocol

In order to draw a comprehensive conclusion, qualitative approach was also pursued. Thus, a written protocol composed of six general, open-ended questions extracted the Attitude-Motivation Questionnaire was employed so that the participants could express freely their views about negotiated syllabus. For convenience and ease of interpretation, however, frequency analysis of the mapped concepts was run.

Results and Data Analysis

1. Prior to the treatment

As table 1 shows, the participants' mean

scores; 56.19 and 56.07, and the respective standard deviations (i.e. 5.06 and 6.53) are not remarkable.

As table 2 shows, the Levene F of .24 has a probability of .62. Since the probability associated with F-value is higher than the significant level of .05, it can then, evidently, be concluded that both groups enjoyed homogeneous and non-significant variances; something supported by the t-observed value of .075 being lower than its critical value at 52 degree of freedom, i.e., 2.

Besides, two raters rated the pre-interview of the students. The inter-rater reliability for the rater 1 and rater 2 on pre-interview is .54 ($P = .000 < .05$). The inter-rater reliability coefficient is statistically significant.

As table 4 shows, the participants' mean scores; 81.02 and 75.32, and the respective standard deviations (i.e. 7.53 and 10.89) is remarkable.

As table 5 shows, the Level F of .72 has a probability of .39. Since the probability associated with F-value is lower than the significant level of .05, it can then, evidently, be concluded that the groups enjoyed slight variances; something supported by an independent t-test run to

compare the mean scores of the groups. Clearly, the t-observed value of 2.19 is higher than its critical value at 52 degree of freedom, i.e., 2.

Based on these results it can be concluded, however, that there is a slight difference between the experimental and control groups mean scores on the pretest of interview. Such a difference might originate from the nature of, and unavoidable rater errors in, the measurement. Two independent raters did the scoring so as to make sure of the reliability and sound decision making.

2. Post-treatment process

Roughly, similar steps to those taken prior to the treatment were followed after the treatment to test the hypotheses. Table 6 shows the reliability index of the speaking posttest, which is .70.

To test the first hypothesis, the following statistical analyses were run.

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of speaking posttest.

As table 7 shows the participants' mean scores; 87.30 and 85.41, and the respective standard deviations (i.e. 6.74 and 7.00) are not remarkable.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Apriori Attitude-Motivation Questionnaire

	GROUP	Group Statistics			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
QPRE	EXPERIEMNTAL	25	56.1976	5.06657	1.01331
	CONTROL	29	56.0769	6.53732	1.21395

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test of the Apriori Attitude-Motivation Questionnaire

QPRE	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.241	.625	.075	52	.941	.12070	1.61135	-3.11271	3.35411
Equal variances not assumed			.076	51.464	.939	.12070	1.58129	-3.05318	3.29458

Table 3: Inter-Rater Reliability of the Interview (as pretest)

R1Interview1	R2Interview1
Pearson Correlation	.543**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	54

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the Interview (as the pretest)

GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EXPERIEMNTAL	25	81.0200	7.53116	1.50623
CONTROL	29	75.3276	10.89829	2.02376

But as displayed in Table 8, the Levene F of .26 has a probability of .61. Since the probability associated with the F-test value is higher than the significance level of .05, it can be concluded that the experimental and control groups enjoy homogeneous variances.

An independent t-test was also run to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups' mean scores on the posttest of speaking to probe whether negotiation with students on the aspects of teaching affect their English speaking ability. The t-observed value is 1.003 (Table 8). This amount of t-value is lower than its critical value at 52 degrees of freedom, i.e. 2.

Evidently, there is not any significant difference between the experimental and control groups mean scores on the posttest of speaking. Thus, the findings failed to reject the null-hypothesis as negotiation with students on the aspects of teaching does not have any significant effect on their speaking.

To test the second hypothesis, the following statistical analyses were run:

Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of the posteriori attitude-motivation questionnaire.

As table 9 shows the participants' mean

scores; 57.69 and 57.11, and the respective standard deviations (i.e. 4.97 and 6.44) are not remarkable.

As it is displayed in Table 10, the Levene F of .92 has a probability of .34. Since the probability is associated with the F-test value higher than the significant level of .05, it can be concluded that the experimental and control groups enjoy homogeneous variances.

An independent t-test was also run to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups' mean scores on the posttest of attitude and motivation questionnaire to probe whether negotiation with participants on the aspects of teaching affect their attitude and motivation towards EFL learning. The t-observed value is .36 (Table 10). This amount of t-value is lower than its critical value at 52 degrees of freedom, i.e. 2.

Based on these results it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the experimental and control groups mean scores on the posttest of attitude and motivation. Thus the null-hypothesis as negotiation with students on the aspects of teaching does not have any significant effect on their attitude and motivation towards EFL learning can't be rejected.

Table 5: Independent-Sample t-test of the Interview (as pretest)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.726	.398	2.197	52	.033	5.69241	2.59100	.49318	10.89164
Equal variances not assumed			2.256	49.789	.028	5.69241	2.52277	.62476	10.76007

Table 6: Inter-Rater Reliability of Speaking (as posttest)

R1PostSpeaking	R2PostSpeaking
Pearson Correlation	.702**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	54

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Speaking (as posttest)

GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EXPERIEMNTAL	25	87.3000	6.74846	1.34969
CONTROL	29	85.4138	7.00774	1.30130

Table 8: Independent-Sample t-test of the Speaking Test (as posttest)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.262	.611	1.003	52	.320	1.88621	1.88019	-1.88667	5.65908
Equal variances not assumed			1.006	51.336	.319	1.88621	1.87485	-1.87711	5.64953

Based on the Pearson Correlation, the inter rater reliability index was estimated to be .70, indicating a moderate reliability index.

As table 12 shows the participants' mean scores; 84.98 and 79.43, and the respective standard deviations (i.e. 7.12 and 12.02) are remarkable.

It should be noted that the experimental and control groups are not homogeneous in terms of their variances. As displayed in Table 13, the Levene F of 5.19 has a probability of .027. Since the probability is associated with the F-test value is lower than the significant level of .05, it can be concluded that the experimental and control groups do not enjoy homogeneous variances.

An independent t-test was also run to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups mean scores on the posttest of interview. The t-observed value is 2.09 (Table 13). This amount of t-value is higher than its critical value at 46 degrees of freedom, i.e. 2.01.

Given the t-value measure with unequal va

riances in the second row of table 13, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups mean scores on the post-interview.

Results from the Written Protocol

Through employing the written protocol as a mechanism suggested by Macaro (2001), among others, the most common concepts or major themes mapped in an answer to each question are presented in terms of frequency as follows, though the data could also be analyzed qualitatively:

Q1: What is the effect of explicit negotiated syllabus on language learning?

Mapped Concepts	Percentage
Expressing their ideas	%30
Involvement in making decisions	%36
Motivation to see English movies and learn more	%70
More interaction between teacher and learners	%60

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics of the Posteriori Attitude-Motivation Questionnaire

GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EXPERIEMNTAL	25	57.6920	4.97652	.99530
CONTROL	29	57.1131	6.44758	1.19729

Table 10: Independent-Sample t-test of the Posteriori Attitude-Motivation Questionnaire

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.925	.341	.365	52	.717	.57890	1.58702	-2.60569	3.76348
Equal variances not assumed			.372	51.421	.712	.57890	1.55696	-2.54621	3.70400

Table 11: Inter-Rater Reliability of the Post-interview

R1Interview1	R2Interview1
Pearson Correlation	.703**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	54

Table 12: Descriptive Statistics of the Interview (as posttest)

GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EXPERIEMNTAL	25	84.9800	7.12899	1.42580
CONTROL	29	79.4310	12.02358	2.23272

Table 13: Independent-Sample t-test of the Interview (as posttest)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.196	.027	2.020	52	.049	5.54897	2.74684	.03704	11.06089
Equal variances not assumed			2.095	46.476	.042	5.54897	2.64914	.21799	10.87994

Q2: What is the effect of explicit negotiated syllabus on different language skills?

Mapped Concepts	Percentage
Learning words and conversation	%75
Positive effect on reading	%30
Significant effect on speaking	%80
Slight effect on grammar and writing	%40

Q3: What is the difference between explicit negotiated syllabus and other syllabuses?

Mapped Concepts	Percentage
No anxiety and more comprehension	%75
More effective than other teaching syllabuses	%60
More learning	%70
More eager to involve in class	%65
More motivation	%80
Not boring	%75

Q4: What do you think if the learning period is different?

Learners believed that if the period of instruction was longer, they would have more time to learn materials better and they would have more opportunity to see more movies and talk about different subjects.

Q5: What is the effect of explicit negotiated syllabus on self-confidence?

Mapped Concepts	Percentage
Positive effect on confidence	%75
Expressing ideas without fear	%70
No shy to speak	%80
No anxiety	%82
More learning	%85
Being relaxed in class	%73

Q6: What is the effect of explicit negotiated syllabus on learners' speaking ability?

Mapped Concepts	Percentage
Very effective on speaking	%85
Mutually interactive	%80
No fear and anxiety to speak and to make mistake	%80
Good interaction between teacher and learners	%73
To speak fluently	%90
To improve speaking	%83

Discussion and Conclusions

There were many researchers who supported the effect of explicit negotiated syllabus on developing learners' speaking ability and their attitude and motivation. Gass (2003) says that through focused negotiation work the learners' attention will be on the discrepancy between what they know about second language and what the target language really is. Also they will attend to those areas of second language on which they have no information. She believes that negotia-

tion or interaction causes learning and has positive effect on production. Besides, negotiation of syllabus and learning materials with learners can help them to be autonomous and independent. According to Allwright (2005), the learners should decide what to learn and how to learn. This causes students to be confident in the learning environment, and motivates them to speak.

Contrary to quantitative analysis, qualitative data (a written protocol) showed that the explicit negotiated syllabus was very helpful in the development of language in general, and learners' speaking ability and their attitude and motivation, in particular.

Regardless of statistically non-significant findings, qualitative analyses of the data support the fact that negotiated syllabus is more promising and effective in both cognitive and affective dimensions. Cognitively, majority of the participants claimed that the syllabus:

- Brings about more learning,
 - Fosters conversation and word learning,
 - Fosters comprehension, and
 - Facilitates fluency in speaking.
- On the other hand, it affectively:
- Improves intrinsic motivation,
 - Fosters interactions between teacher and learners,
 - Reduces learning anxiety,
 - Lessens boredom,
 - Builds confidence,
 - Creates relaxed learning atmosphere.

The findings of this research revealed that explicit negotiated syllabus has an effect on learners' speaking and their attitude and motivation, though statistically not meaningful in certain respects; a claim can be made on the basis of the free-responses expressed in an answer to the open-ended questions of the written protocol. But it should be mentioned that explicit negotiated syllabus can be useful and effective in teaching-learning programs, because it causes learners to be more involved in language teaching and to be more autonomous and independent in their learning as supported in the written-protocol.

Pedagogically this study entails that negotiated syllabus can give learners opportunity to be

involved in teaching-learning program. When they are given opportunity to be involved in material selection and decision making, they try to look for relevant resource materials and they can select them based on their own needs and interests. Teachers can also suggest some leads into the subject-matter, examples, analogies, and case studies through which to further learners' involvement. Syllabus designers may also be helped to reconsider and enrich the course/s they develop.

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