CRITICAL AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO FL CURRICULA: THE EPS-XG CURRICULUM VS THE 1977 CURRICULUM

Maria Tzotzou
Primary Education of Aitoloakarnania Prefecture

Abstract

A curriculum in a school context refers to the whole body of knowledge that children acquire in schools (Richards, 2012). Curricula represent the philosophy, trends, demands and conditions of their era and society. In this regard, a school curriculum aims to equip learners with values, ideals and knowledge that will help them meet the future in accordance with the philosophy and culture of their society. The purpose of this paper is to attempt a critical analysis and contrastive evaluation of two FL curricula, the 1977 curriculum[36] and the Unified Curriculum for the Foreign Languages (EPS-XG)[37], on the basis of their educational orientation, language theory and areas of knowledge as outlined and prescribed in the two corresponding official documents. There will also be further critical focus on the latest EPS-XG curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum, educational orientation, language theory, multilingualism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development includes all the processes involved in developing, implementing and evaluating language programs. In language teaching, curriculum development began in the 1960s to focus on determining what knowledge, skills, values and experiences should be provided to learners in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

There have been various definitions of curriculum drawn from the relevant educational literature. According to Eisner and Valance (1974:2), curriculum is concerned with 'what can and should be taught to whom, when, and how'.

Ross (2000:8) points out that 'a curriculum is a definition of what is to be learned'. Tyler (1949) describes curriculum as a four-step process which includes stating objectives, selection and organization of

[36] Government Gazette (FEK 270/vol. A' / 20-09-1977) in Greek. Junior High School English Language Curriculum.
[37] http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses/sps.htm

experiences and evaluation. According to Richards (2012), language curriculum development is 'an interrelated set of processes that focuses on designing, revising, implementing and evaluating language programs' while in its broadest sense, curriculum includes the philosophy, purposes, design and implementation of a whole program (Spinthourakis, 2004). Regarding the ideological bases of curricula, White (1988) makes reference to different models of curriculum representing the expression of different value systems, of divergent views and orientations on education (Tzotzou, 2013).

In light of the above, this paper attempts a critical and contrastive analysis of two curricula for foreign language (FL) learning in the Greek state schools on the basis of their educational orientation, language theory and areas of knowledge outlined in the two formal documents, the 1977 Curriculum and the Unified Curriculum for the Foreign Languages (EPS-XG Curriculum), by relying upon theoretical principles and background information drawn from the relevant educational literature. What will be especially discussed is the extent to which the two curricula represent the 'culture' of their society and era made up of different ideas, ideals, beliefs, values, assumptions and thus different trends and modes of FL learning. Furthermore, there will be a critical focus on the latest EPS-XG curriculum which is unified for all foreign languages and levels in order to draw useful conclusions about its current classroom implementation in schools.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Clarke (1987) states that there is a set of beliefs and views on the nature of knowledge and the purpose of education underlying any curriculum which can be categorized into three main orientations: those focusing on cultural heritage under the label of *Classical Humanism*, those that regard education as an instrument of change termed as *Reconstructionism* and those stressing growth and self-realization of the individual termed as *Progressivism*.

The *classical humanist* orientation to curriculum design is characterized by a desire to promote broad intellectual capacities including memorization and the ability to analyze, classify and reconstruct elements of knowledge. Knowledge is considered to be a set of revealed truths with underlying rules and regularities which should be studied and consciously mastered. Classical humanism emphasizes study, conscious understanding and controlled application of knowledge. The teacher is seen as a transmitter of knowledge and the learner's task is simply to acquire knowledge so as to be

able to control and apply it in new contexts. The classical humanist curriculum is content driven and the designer sets out to analyze what is seen as the inherent content of a subject into its constituent parts and then sequences these from what are deemed to be the simpler elements to learn to what are considered to be the more complex ones (Clarke, 1987: 5-8).

Reconstructionism emphasizes the practical aspects of education and the promotion of international and intranational understanding by focusing on the development of objectives to be achieved. A main tenet of reconstructionism is that man can improve himself and his environment and, in this regard, changes on a social, economic and intellectual level can be rationally planned for. Education is seen as a powerful agent of change and as a means of redressing the injustices of birth and early upbringing as well as of working through consensus towards a better world in which all citizens are equally valued. To this end, great focus is placed on planning, setting goals to be pursued and deliberate interventions in the education system to bring about outcomes deemed necessary. In sum, reconstructionism emphasizes the importance of planning, efficiency and rationality (Clarke, 1987: 14-15).

Progressivism promotes a learner-centered approach to education which aims to promote the learner's development as an individual with intellectual and emotional needs and as a social being. The learner is seen as a whole person rather than a disembodied intellect or a skilled performer. For progressivists, education is not seen as a process for the transmission of a set of closed truths but as a way of enabling learners to learn how to learn by their own efforts. Teachers are not instructors but creators of an environment in which learners 'learn how to learn'. Clarke (1987) states that progressivists are more concerned with learning processes and methodology rather than with predetermining learning objectives.

In light of the above, what follows is a critical reflection on the *educational orientation*, *language theory* and *areas of knowledge* included or even implied in both the 1977 curriculum and the EPS-XG curriculum in order to be able to analyze them contrastively by discussing their main similarities and differences.

3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CURRICULA

3.1. The 1977 Curriculum

3.1.1. Educational Orientation

The 1977 curriculum (Government Gazette, FEK 270/vol. A' /20-09-1977) adheres to the main *classical humanism* principles (Clarke, 1987) as it is *content-driven* (Stoller, 2004) placing emphasis on 'what' should be taught and learnt. It stresses teaching/instruction matters treating the teacher as a simple *transmitter of knowledge* and focuses on FL *rules* and *regularities*. It also emphasizes learners' *conscious understanding* and *controlled application of knowledge* by analyzing,

classifying and reconstructing grammatical, phonological and lexical items. The 1977 curriculum was a first 'real' attempt, albeit a rudiment one, at breaking down the teaching of English as a FL in Greece. It is worth noting that most curricula since 1899 up to then made reference to FL teaching mostly with respect only to the allotted teaching time whereas the 1977 curriculum really placed the teaching of English 'on the map' by making reference to the goals and content of learning English as a foreign language.

3.1.2. Language Theory

The 1977 curriculum is based on *structuralism* as it mainly focuses on *linguistic competence* (Chomsky, 1957) and *accuracy* to be achieved through the accumulative mastery of *grammatical forms* and *structures* (Chryshochoos et al., 2002). It also includes controlled language practice techniques through *drilling* (gap-filling, sentence/paragraph transformation and substitution drills), much writing, consolidation of knowledge and oral practice through *memorization* and guided *speaking drills*.

3.1.3. Areas of Knowledge

According to the 1977 curriculum, learners should acquire phonological, grammatical and lexical knowledge. Learners are taught *limited vocabulary items* and *speaking topics* related to their interests and experience, as well as *basic grammar* and *syntax*; they are asked to produce *native-like pronunciation* (English phonetics and accent) and to read a limited range of texts in nature and content. The 1977 curriculum also seeks to familiarize learners with *English culture*, *Latin letters* and *English handwriting*.

3.2. The Unified Curriculum for Foreign Languages (EPS-XG)

3.2.1. Educational Orientation

The EPS-XG curriculum comprises two educational orientations: *Reconstructionism* and *Progressivism* as defined by Clarke (1987). Regarding *Reconstructionism*, the EPS-XG curriculum embraces the principle of *international /world understanding* as it promotes plurilingualism and pluriculturalism in an attempt to enhance intercultural awareness, respect and tolerance in a globalized context. FL education is seen as a *powerful agent of change* towards achieving social welfare and solidarity by fostering learners' multilingualism /multiculturalism and thus their respect to language / cultural diversity in our multilingual / multicultural society. It places emphasis on the importance of *planning*, *efficiency* and *rationality* by making reference to materials, teaching staff, timetable, self-assessment and school equipment matters. It has been planned systematically based on the FL levels/criteria defined by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2001) and the relevant Greek and European research data (Tzotzou, 2013).

The EPS-XG curriculum aims at a *deliberate intervention* in the FL education system by planning a

unified curriculum for FL toward a more efficient FL education in Greek state schools after reflecting upon the weaknesses of previous FL curricula. It is *innovative* as it is the first unified FL curriculum in school education based on the FL proficiency levels by providing descriptions that apply to all languages across all levels of FL competence.

By relying on *Reconstructionism*, the EPS-XG curriculum emphasizes *goal setting*, that is, the desired outcomes of the curriculum, related to multilingualism, multiculturalism and effective FL communication in any sociocultural context. It aims at *social* and *intellectual change* through FL education by promoting *practical aspects* of FL education which relate to pedagogical, social, professional and international benefits. It also emphasizes the close connection of FL goals with outcomes providing a detailed list of general and specific objectives for each language proficiency level (Tzotzou, 2013).

As far as *Progressivism* is concerned, the EPS-XG curriculum adopts a *learner-centered* approach to FL teaching. It treats the *learner as a whole* and aims to provide learners with linguistic, intellectual and as well as social development. In other words, it takes into consideration the learner's development both *as an individual and as a social being*. Furthermore, it promotes learner's active role, autonomy and metacognitive ability (Littlewood, 2004) by emphasizing the *learning process* and creating a context in which *the teacher and the learner work together* (Cotterall, 2000); at the same time the teacher becomes *creator, course designer* and *decision maker*.

3.2.2. Language Theory

The EPS-XG curriculum is based on *functionalism* by promoting an *interactive view* of language (Chryshochoos et al, 2002), which includes its *meaningful use* in interaction (Skehan, 2003), *contextual learning* (Stoller, 2004), *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1971) and *fluency*. The EPS-XG curriculum favours *free language production* through simulations, communicative tasks and mediation activities focusing on meaning, information processing and actual language use with a goal of communication (Cotterall, 2000). It also favours the *negotiation of meaning* (Long, 1983) which concerns the ways learners encounter and grapple with different FL sociolinguistic and sociocultural concepts or behaviours in different contexts (Skehan, 2003). In this regard, it looks at language both as a functional instrument and as a form of social behaviour (Chryshochoos et al, 2002).

3.2.3. Areas of Knowledge

The EPS-XG curriculum aims to develop *multiliteracies* toward a holistic development of learners (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) by enhancing their linguistic, pragmatic, sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. Besides the comprehension and production of oral discourse and written speech, it includes new areas of knowledge by aiming to develop *oral* and *written mediation skills*, *oral* and *written interaction skills*, *learning* and *communication strategies* which can help

raise learners' *intercultural* and *multicultural awareness* and *competence*, their conscious ability and sense of *plurilingualism / multilingualism* and *pluriculturalism / multiculturalism* which are of paramount importance in our globalized society and modern era.

4. CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CURRICULA

To start with their similarities, both the 1977 and the EPS-XG curricula are geared toward the learners attending state/public schools. Both of them have been processed by experts or scientists of education and are *formal* as they have been approved by the body responsible for the Greek educational system for use in schools (Goodlad, 1979). At the same time, both curricula seem to lack any prior systematic *needs analysis* process to diagnose Greek learners' actual language needs before selecting their content and before formulating goals/objectives accordingly although the role of needs analysis is widely recognized and emphasized as essential to curriculum planning in the relevant education literature (Graves, 2008; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards, 2012).

Despite their above mentioned similarities, the two FL curricula differ significantly. In particular, there are major or else radical differences in their nature and content as each one of them, either intuitively or deliberately, clearly represents the philosophy, trends, demands and conditions of two fundamentally different time periods (decades) and societies.

The 1977 curriculum is purely *content-oriented*, *very brief/short* (only two pages long), and *general* (in objectives and content) whereas the EPS-XG curriculum is *goal-oriented*, *detailed, extensive* (48 pages) and *specific* in content emphasizing the *goals* and *special objectives* of the FL school program. More specifically, the EPS-XG curriculum defines goals which represent more general, societal and community concerns related to the patterns of language use in modern society as well as attitudes toward language. It also formulates objectives (as 'descriptive indices') which are specific outcomes, achievable and measurable, that guide teachers and help learners know what they are going to learn (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986). Moreover, the EPS-XG curriculum defines specific *behavioural objectives* describing intended learning outcomes that contain a condition of performance, a verb that defines the behaviour (skill or ability) itself, and the degree to which a learner must perform the behaviour according to each FL competence level (Spinthourakis, 2004). To this end, *action verbs* (e.g. suggest, explain, negotiate, recognize, produce, gather/transmit/exchange information, discuss, describe, classify, answer, ask, narrate, etc) are used to identify what the learners are expected to do in order to communicate effectively in the foreign language.

Another crucial point of difference is that the 1977 curriculum is *mono-lingual/mono-cultural/ethnocentric* (emphasis exclusively on English language and culture) in accordance with the mono-lingual/mono-cultural and ethnocentric trends of its era. It is also strictly *formal* as it

emphasizes learning grammatical forms and structures without producing meaning-focused output (Cotterall, 2000). On the contrary, in the EPS-XG curriculum there is a shift of focus, from focus on forms to focus on meaning; it is a *communicative* curriculum designed to engage learners in realistic communication contexts (Crabbe, 2007). It is also *holistic* and *pluralistic* (multilingual/multicultural) by aiming to respond to the pluralistic demands and conditions of the new era in our modern and globalized world.

The 1977 curriculum is *fixed* (teachers as implementers), *rigid* and *static* in nature based on poor and superficial planning whereas the EPS-XG curriculum is *open*, *innovative* (unified), *handy* (by linking directly FL learning at school with FL certification exam system-KPG), *flexible* (adaptable whenever necessary) and *systematically planned* based on empirical research data from various contexts (Tzotzou, 2013). The EPS-XG curriculum recognizes and encourages the role of teachers as *creators* and *decision-makers* (Graves, 1996) and not as simple implementers. It also encourages the use of technology toward a *multimodal approach* to FL learning (Jewitt, 2006) through technological tools which can increase motivation and the achievement of *learning objectives* and *strategies* (Cotterall, 2000; Crabbe, 2007; Stoller, 2004).

A further difference encountered is that the 1977 curriculum is *teacher/teaching-centered* (emphasis on what to be taught) whereas the EPS-XG curriculum holds a *learner/learning-centered* view (emphasis on what to be learnt) of FL education. The EPS-XG curriculum aims at *differentiated FL learning* by taking into account different learners' origin, needs, preferences, background and style and, hence, linking outside-classroom reality to inside-classroom language pedagogy (Littlewood, 2004). In addition, the EPS-XG curriculum lays emphasis on the needs of the society which are to be met while the 1977 curriculum simply transmits predetermined content. In other words, the EPS-XG curriculum verifies what Cornbleth (2008) points out about echo effects on curriculum policy and their dependence on the *social echoes* which result in curriculum changes regarding learning goals, pedagogical values and priorities.

5. CRITICAL FOCUS ON THE LATEST EPS-XG CURRICULUM

In this section, there will be a critical focus on the latest EPS-XG curriculum as it is currently implemented in the Greek state schools and, hence, it would be interesting to reach useful conclusions and implications about its planning and implementation.

To start with, on the grounds that the school classroom should be considered a sociocultural context with its own social systems, norms, values and dynamics which can essentially 'shape' what is possible in a language curriculum, the EPS-XG curriculum should have been more *operational* (Goodlad, 1979) by assigning to researchers to investigate in advance what actually goes on in the FL classroom in the Greek state schools in order to take action in due time.

Evaluation policies and self-evaluation matters should have been further emphasized and essentially specified in advance as well as practiced on a regular basis in order to achieve the desired educational outcomes (Nation and Macalister, 2010). In other words, as Graves (2008) points out, the EPS-XG curriculum cannot be enacted to exist efficiently without taking into consideration the relevant teaching and learning experiences because planning and evaluating are both directed at the classroom and are closely allied with it. For instance, an efficient implementation of the EPS-XG curriculum requires a revision of the old school textbooks currently used. Further changes are also needed toward a unified version of the FL material taught in the Greek state schools that will be compatible with the EPS-XG curriculum goals, content and demands (Tzotzou, 2013).

In a similar vein, a *collaborative approach* to curriculum development (Nunan, 1989) based on the quality of relationships between participants and the sharing of responsibility between the different stakeholders in the educational system (e.g. teachers, researchers, curriculum specialists and administrators) could ensure to a greater extent its successful implementation in schools. The knowledge, experience and beliefs of FL teachers should have been a necessary tool and reliable guide to classroom reality to be exploited in the best possible way by curriculum planners as the teacher is the person with the most powerful role in the classroom and his/her involvement is critical to the success of the curriculum (Graves, 2008). What is more, teacher training normally should have been a prerequisite for the EPS-XG curriculum successful implementation. To this end, a needs analysis procedure should have been preceded in two directions to investigate and record not only learners' actual language needs but also teachers' profile regarding their own training needs, their teaching experience, pedagogical views and attitudes (Tzotzou, 2013).

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the two FL curricula are characterized by striking differences regarding their ideological basis, educational orientation, language theory and areas of knowledge. The two curricula obviously represent the 'culture' of their society and era made up of different ideas, ideals, beliefs, values, assumptions and thus different trends and modes of FL learning. In other words, their content, organization and objectives differ significantly being influenced and shaped by external basic forces mostly related to society, culture, the learning theory, philosophy and the nature of knowledge (Zais, 1976).

Last but not least, the latest EPS-XG curriculum is undoubtedly characterized by plenty of 'visible' advantages regarding its goals, philosophy, nature and content which aim to respond to the philosophy, values, ideals and demands of the modern society and era. However, these advantages cannot eliminate its 'invisible' drawbacks, as stated above, basically due to some planning weaknesses and state school limitations

(Tzotzou, 2013). In any case, it is hoped that after a systematic evaluation of its pilot implementation in schools there will be curriculum improvements as appropriate in the future.

7. REFERENCES

Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.

Chryshohoos J., Chryshohoos N., & Thompson I. (2002). *The Methodology of the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language with reference to the Crosscurricular Approach and Task-Based Learning*. The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Athens: The Pedagogical Institute.

Clarke, J. L. (1987). *Curriculum Renewal in School Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. London: Rouledge.

Cornbleth, C. (2008). Echo Effects and Curriculum Change. *Teachers College Record*, *110*, 2148-2171.

Cotterall, S. (2000). Promoting learner autonomy through the curriculum: principles for designing language courses. *ELT Journal, 54*(2), 109-117.

Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crabbe, D. (2007). Learning Opportunities: Adding Learning Value to Tasks. *ELT Journal, 61*(2), 117-125.

Dubin, F., & Olshtain, E. (1986). *Course design: Developing Programs and Materials for Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eisner, E. W., & Vallance, E. (Eds) (1974). *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum*. Barkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Goodlad, J. (1979). *Curriculum inquiry: The Study of Curriculum Practice*. NY: McGraw Hill.

Government Gazette (FEK 270/vol. A' /20-09-1977) in Greek. Junior High School English Language Curriculum (in Greek).

Graves, K. (1996). *Teachers as Course Developers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Graves, K. (2008). The Language Curriculum: A Social Contextual Perspective. State-of-the-Art Article. *Lang. Teach.*, *41*(2), 147-181.

Hymes, D. (1971). *On Communicative Competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jewitt, C. (2006). *Technology, Literacy and Learning: A Multimodal* Approach. London: Routledge.

Littlewood, W. (2004). The Task-based Approach: Some Questions and Suggestions. *ELT Journal, 58*(4), 319-326.

Long, M. (1983). Native Speaker/Non-native speaker Conversation and the Negotiation of Comprehensible Input. *Applied Linguistics*, *4*(2), 126-141.

Nation, I.S.P., & Macalister, J. (2010). *Language Curriculum Design*. ESL and Applied Linguistics Professional Series. N.Y.: Routledge.

Nunan, D. (1989). Toward a Collaborative Approach to Curriculum Development: A Case Study. *TESOL QUARTERLY*, 23/*1*, 9-25.

Richards, J. C. (2012). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge Language Education.

Skehan, P. (2003). Task-based Instruction. *Lang. Teach*, *36*, 1-14.

Spinthourakis, J.A. (2004). Introduction to Key Curriculum Development Concepts. In: Ayakli, C., Karavas, K., Manolopoulou-Sergi, E., & Spinthourakis, J.A. (Eds.), *Course Design and Evaluation: Introduction to the key concepts.* Vol.1 (pp. 19-79). Patras: Hellenic Open University.

Stoller, F.L. (2004). Content-Based Instruction: Perspectives on Curriculum Planning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *24*, 261-283.

The Unified Curriculum for the Foreign Languages (EPS-XG). Retrieved on 8/16/2014 from http://rcel.enl.uoa.gr/xenesglosses/sps.htm

Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tzotzou, M. (2013). A Critical Analysis and Evaluation of the Unified Curriculum for the Foreign Languages (EPS-XG Curriculum). *ASPECTS Today*, *36*, 16-23.

White, R.V. (1988). *The ELT curriculum-Design, innovation and management*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Zais, R.S. (1976). *Curriculum - Principles and Foundations*. NY: Harper and Row, Publishers.