

Critical Analysis and Enhancement of Undergraduate English Syllabi: Aligning Pedagogical Deficiencies with Student and English Market Needs

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Abstract

English language instruction is essential for developing language competence and job readiness skills in college students. However, in Puducherry, concerns have been raised about whether the existing English curricula adequately meet the needs of students and the demands of the job market. This research employs a qualitative methodology to critically assess the English undergraduate syllabi in Puducherry. The evaluation combines expert insights, frequent engagement with students of varying skill levels, and analysis of relevant data and surveys, with a particular focus on local unemployment rates. The goal is to determine how well the syllabi align with students' needs and the skills that employers require. The assessment identifies several key issues, including a significant gap between the syllabi's intended objectives and the actual outcomes achieved by students. Limited student engagement is observed, primarily due to the lack of personalized content, which results in insufficient development of essential language and communication skills needed for job readiness. These shortcomings have a substantial impact on the job opportunities available to college students in the region. The research suggests that integrating comprehensive language skill development into the curricula, aligning goals with measurable outcomes, and addressing the diverse needs of students could significantly enhance the effectiveness of the syllabi. These recommendations aim to improve students' readiness for the job market and, consequently, their employment prospects.

Keywords: curriculum evaluation, language proficiency, employability skills, student engagement, syllabus alignment

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

English language education plays a crucial role in preparing undergraduate students for global job markets. In Puducherry, a standardized English curriculum has been introduced across universities to address concerns related to language proficiency and employability. However, questions remain regarding its alignment with industry needs and its effectiveness in engaging students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The introduction of a common English curriculum aims to create uniformity in English language education across various undergraduate (UG) programs, facilitate the transferability of credits, and promote student mobility within the Union Territory (Santhi et al., 2017). Additionally, it establishes a standardized benchmark for English language proficiency, ensuring consistent assessment of students' language skills and competencies. The curriculum covers key aspects such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, vocabulary, and critical thinking, aiming to equip students with the necessary communication skills for academic and professional success (Amani, 2017).

1.2 What Is Known So Far

The implementation of the common English curriculum in Puducherry is informed by established theoretical frameworks, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Constructivism, and Sociocultural Theory (Shalatska et al., 2020). These approaches emphasize the development of communicative competence, active engagement in language learning, and the integration of culturally relevant materials to promote intercultural competence (Arafah, 2019; Agustina & Mukhtaruddin, 2019; Al-Tarawneh & Osam, 2019).

Additionally, the curriculum is tailored to address the language needs of different UG programs, with variations in focus depending on the discipline (Malykhin et al., 2021). This adaptation aims to ensure that students across fields of study develop relevant language skills that support both academic progression and professional aspirations.

1.3 Unknown Aspects Relevant to the Study

Despite the standardized framework and theoretical grounding, several gaps remain in the current curriculum. There is limited empirical evidence on its effectiveness in achieving stated learning objectives, particularly in enhancing students' language competence and employability skills. Furthermore, the curriculum's ability to engage students with diverse learning abilities and adapt to their needs has not been extensively examined. Another key concern is the extent to which the curriculum aligns with the language and communication

skills required by employers in various industries. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that the curriculum effectively prepares students for academic success and workforce demands.

1.4 Benefits and Challenges of Outcome-Based Education in Curriculum Development

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has gained prominence in curriculum development due to its focus on aligning educational outcomes with industry and societal needs, fostering competency-based learning, and emphasizing student achievement. One of the primary advantages of OBE is its ability to ensure that educational programs remain relevant to the evolving job market. For instance, research on OBE implementation in English language programs has shown positive impacts on graduate employability and workforce readiness (Allo et al., 2024). Additionally, OBE promotes a structured learning process through continuous feedback loops between students and educators (Ly, 2023).

However, OBE also presents challenges. Designing curricula that accurately reflect desired learning outcomes requires careful planning, and implementing rigorous assessment mechanisms to measure these outcomes can be complex. Moreover, an excessive focus on measurable outcomes may sometimes overshadow holistic education, limiting the development of critical thinking and creativity (Wibowo & Sujarwo, 2022). Therefore, while OBE provides a structured framework for curriculum development, its implementation must balance specificity with comprehensive education.

1.5 Research Questions

This study aims to critically evaluate the common English curriculum at the UG level in the Union Territory of Puducherry, addressing the following research questions:

1. How effectively does the curriculum develop language competence and employability skills for students of diverse abilities and backgrounds?
2. How well does the curriculum align with industry-required skills, and what improvements can enhance its workforce preparation?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of outcome-based education in curriculum development?
4. How does Bloom's Taxonomy influence the structure and content of educational syllabi?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Achieving Language Competence and Employability Goals

The effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving its stated objectives of developing language competence and employability skills appears to be multifaceted and context dependent. Studies indicate that there is a strong relationship between second language proficiency, language learning strategies, and employability skills, suggesting that curricula focusing on these aspects can enhance undergraduate students' preparedness for the workforce (M et al., 2024). However, the changing nature of employability skills, with a shift towards a work-oriented interpretation, implies that curricula must adapt to provide 'contextualized' training that aligns with job context and industry demands to improve career mobility and wage gains (Sung et al., 2013). Interestingly, while vocational college students exhibit moderate employability skills and self-efficacy for career development, their cognitive skills significantly predict career development self-efficacy, indicating that curricula that integrate soft skills with technical training can be effective (Omar et al., 2023). Moreover, competencies in employability skills, such as thinking and problem-solving, personal adaptability, and teamwork, are correlated with better job performance, suggesting that curricula that emphasize these skills can give graduates an advantage in the workplace (Abas & Imam, 2016). However, there are challenges to achieving these objectives. For instance, despite the recognized importance of English language proficiency for employability, there are reports of graduates being inadequately prepared in communicative competence for the workforce, as seen in the Sultanate of Oman (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). This suggests that curricula may not always effectively bridge the gap between language skills development and the demands of the job market.

2.2 Engaging Diverse Student Abilities and Needs

The curriculum's engagement with students of mixed abilities and its capacity to cater to their diverse linguistic and cultural needs is a central concern in contemporary education. The reviewed literature suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient and that curricula must be carefully designed to address the individual needs of learners, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings (Bisai & Singh, 2020). Cross-cultural instructional design frameworks and multilingual pedagogies are advocated as effective strategies for creating inclusive learning environments that accommodate and celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity (Akintayo et al., 2024; Bisai & Singh, 2020). Interestingly, while there is a consensus on the importance of inclusive and responsive curriculum design, there is also an indication that educators may lack the necessary knowledge and strategies to implement such curricula effectively. This gap highlights the need for professional development and a deeper understanding of how to leverage students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to enhance learning (Acquah et al., 2019). Moreover, the literature suggests that multilingual education strategies, particularly in STEM classrooms, can bridge linguistic gaps and improve learning outcomes, thus supporting the notion that linguistic diversity should be viewed as an asset rather than a limitation (Mouboua et al., 2024).

2.3 Aligning with Industry Language and Communication Requirements

The alignment between the curriculum and the language and communication skills required by employers varies across different

industries and regions. Studies have consistently identified a gap between the skills taught in educational institutions and those demanded in the workplace. For instance, a survey in Cagayan de Oro City found that employers require specific speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills, suggesting a need to review the English curriculum at Liceo de Cagayan University (Reyes, 2011). Similarly, the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Babeş-Bolyai University recognized the need to adapt their "Business Communication" course to better meet the changing needs of the job market, influenced by the presence of multinational companies (Zelter, 2019). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the IT industry's growth has not been matched by the educational sector's response in terms of the number of graduates and the adequacy of their language and communication skills, indicating a misalignment (Muharemagić, 2021). The aviation industry in Malaysia also highlighted the importance of English proficiency for professional communication, leading to a needs analysis to tailor the aviation English program content (Singh et al., 2021). The agricultural communications discipline in the United States has seen a more consistent alignment, with academic programs evolving to incorporate the skills and abilities desired by employers (Corder & Irlbeck, 2018). The Portuguese labour market study within the PESE project and the Malaysian manufacturing industry research both indicate that the current English skills of graduates do not fully meet employer expectations, pointing to a need for curriculum enhancement (Cunha et al., 2023; Singh & Choo, 2012). In Oman, employers identified challenges faced by graduates, including low English proficiency, which suggests that HEIs should seek feedback from the job market to improve English courses (Riyami, 2021). Lastly, in the legal field in Vietnam, there is a high demand for legal English proficiency, particularly in reading and speaking skills, which universities must address to meet employer requirements (Lan, 2022). Academic disciplines have made strides in aligning their curricula with employer needs, but there remains a significant gap in many industries and regions. Educational institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of adapting their language and communication courses to better prepare graduates for the demands of the job market.

2.4 Enhancing Curriculum for Workforce Readiness

To enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing students for the workforce, several improvements can be made. Firstly, adopting high-impact educational practices, such as first-year experiences to develop critical information literacy, collaborative community-based health projects, and unique internship experiences, can be beneficial (Wheeler & Mullem, 2021). Additionally, integrating technology, like the Qualichain platform, can optimize curriculum structure and align educational qualifications with labour market demands (Cahyadi et al., 2021). Interestingly, while the integration of technology and high-impact practices are emphasized, there is also a focus on developing soft skills and employability skills across the curriculum, as well as providing work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities (Omar et al., 2023; Srivastava & Haghi, 2024). Moreover, the personalization of education services and the development of a public health informatics (PHI) curriculum to support workforce development highlight the importance of tailoring educational experiences to meet specific industry needs (Tález & Villela, 2021; Wholey et al., 2018). In summary, curriculum improvements should include the adoption of high-impact educational practices, the integration of technology to align with labour market needs, the development of soft and employability skills, and the personalization of education services to prepare students effectively for the workforce.

2.5 Theories and Frameworks in Syllabi Design

In the exploration of relevant theories and frameworks for syllabi design, a key focus is on creating educational structures that align with desired learning outcomes and the evolving needs of students. The competency-based framework is particularly influential, as demonstrated in a study by Wessels and Roos (2009), where a conceptual model was developed to guide the design, delivery, and assessment of management accounting syllabi. This framework emphasizes the importance of aligning curriculum design with critical success factors to ensure that educational objectives are met effectively. Similarly, the outcome-based education (OBE) model is another significant approach, particularly in language teaching. Research on an OBE-based syllabus for an English course highlights how focusing on specific outcomes can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of syllabus delivery, tailoring the content to improve student engagement and success (Scholars International Journal, 2022). Additionally, the integration of educational principles such as Bloom's Taxonomy into syllabus design ensures that learning objectives are systematically structured, enhancing the clarity and focus of the educational process (Kazimi et al., 2019). These frameworks underscore the importance of a structured, outcome-oriented syllabus design that is adaptable to different educational contexts and responsive to both teacher and student needs.

2.6 Bloom's Taxonomy Influence on Syllabus Structure and Content

Bloom's Taxonomy, particularly its revised version, plays a crucial role in shaping the structure and content of educational syllabi by providing a framework that organizes learning objectives from lower to higher cognitive processes. This taxonomy guides educators in crafting course objectives that align with various levels of cognitive demand, from basic knowledge recall to higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and creation. For example, in the context of language teaching, research has shown that incorporating Bloom's higher cognitive levels into syllabus design, such as in reading materials for EFL/ESL students, can significantly enhance the depth and retention of learning. These higher cognitive tasks—like analyzing and evaluating—encourage students to engage more deeply with the material, fostering critical thinking and long-term knowledge retention (Köksal et al., 2023). Moreover, Bloom's Taxonomy helps ensure that the syllabus is balanced and proportionate across different cognitive levels, which is particularly important in disciplines like engineering, where course learning outcomes must be aligned with the appropriate level of cognitive complexity (Ahmed, 2014). By systematically structuring learning objectives and assessments according to Bloom's hierarchy, educators can create syllabi that not only meet educational standards but also support student progression from foundational knowledge to complex application and synthesis of concepts.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to critically assess the undergraduate (UG) English syllabi in the Union Territory (UT) of Puducherry. This study employs a qualitative research design to critically evaluate the undergraduate (UG) English syllabi in the Union Territory (UT) of Puducherry. By integrating expert insights, student feedback, and an in-depth analysis of curriculum documents, the study aims to provide a holistic assessment of the syllabi's effectiveness. Given the region's diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the research contextualizes its findings within the evolving landscape of English language education from 2015 to 2023.

Data collection involved multiple sources. Faculty members and curriculum specialists with extensive experience in English language teaching contributed qualitative insights into syllabus design, pedagogical challenges, and implementation issues. In addition, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with students across different proficiency levels, allowing researchers to gather firsthand perspectives on syllabus effectiveness, learning challenges, and employability concerns. To complement these findings, the syllabi were systematically reviewed, with a focus on learning objectives, content coverage, instructional methods, and assessment patterns. Employment reports and regional surveys were also analyzed to examine the correlation between language proficiency and job market readiness.

The analysis was guided by key theoretical perspectives in curriculum development and language pedagogy. The study considered Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to evaluate the extent to which syllabi promote real-world communication skills. Constructivist Learning Theory was also applied to assess whether learning activities encourage active engagement and knowledge construction. Additionally, Sociocultural Theory was used to examine how socio-economic and linguistic factors influence curriculum effectiveness. These theoretical frameworks helped in critically analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the existing syllabus structure.

A thematic analysis approach was employed to categorize data into key themes such as syllabus alignment with industry requirements, student engagement, skill development, and assessment effectiveness. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was conducted to contrast the UG English syllabi with established best practices in language education, thereby identifying strengths as well as areas requiring improvement.

The findings revealed several mismatches between syllabus objectives and actual student outcomes. Specifically, there were gaps in content coverage and skill development, with insufficient emphasis on professional writing and workplace communication. Assessment methods were found to be heavily theoretical, lacking competency-based evaluations that could better gauge students' practical language abilities. Moreover, the study highlighted employability challenges, as the curriculum did not adequately integrate practical language applications, resulting in a disconnect between graduate proficiency and industry expectations. These findings underscore the urgent need for curriculum reform. A structured approach is necessary to prioritize skill development, align learning objectives with measurable outcomes, and ensure that the curriculum better prepares students for the demands of the global job market. By addressing these gaps, English language education in Puducherry can be made more effective in enhancing both academic and professional success.

4. Results

The analysis of undergraduate English syllabi across various institutions in the Union Territory of Puducherry reveals significant gaps in both content and pedagogical approaches. Through thematic analysis, three primary themes emerged: relevance to contemporary linguistic and literary studies, alignment with local cultural contexts, and the integration of critical thinking and practical skills. The syllabi were found to be largely outdated, with a heavy reliance on canonical texts that fail to reflect the diverse linguistic landscape of Puducherry. This lack of local relevance was a recurring issue, as many syllabi did not incorporate regional literature or languages, missing an opportunity to engage students more deeply with their cultural heritage. Additionally, there was a noticeable deficiency in courses designed to develop critical thinking, analytical skills, and practical application, which are essential for students' success in both academic and professional settings. The inclusion of such skills was sporadic and often insufficient, indicating a gap between the curriculum and the needs of the modern workforce. Participants, including faculty and students, consistently pointed out the need for a curriculum overhaul that would integrate contemporary theories, regional content, and skill-based learning. These findings highlight the urgent need for curriculum reform to bridge the gap between current academic offerings and the evolving demands of society and the job market.

Mismatch Between Objectives and Outcomes: The review identifies a clear mismatch between the stated objectives of the syllabi and the actual outcomes achieved by students. Although the syllabi aim to enhance language proficiency and develop essential skills, they fall short of these goals. This misalignment raises concerns about the effectiveness of the syllabi in preparing students for their future careers, potentially hindering their employability and success in a competitive job market.

Limited Student Engagement Due to Lack of Tailored Content: Another significant finding is the limited engagement of students, which is attributed to the lack of tailored content in the syllabi. The analysis suggests that the syllabi do not adequately address the diverse needs and abilities of students, leading to decreased motivation and hindered progress in language learning. This lack of differentiation can limit students' ability to apply language skills in real-world contexts, underscoring the need for syllabi that are more responsive to individual learning needs. **Insufficient Development of Employability Skills:** The review also highlights a gap in the development of critical language and communication skills necessary for employability. The current syllabi do not sufficiently equip students with essential skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, which are highly valued by employers. This deficiency could result in significant challenges for students as they enter the job market, as they may lack the competencies needed to succeed in

professional environments. Implications for Students' Future Careers: The identified gaps and weaknesses in the syllabi have serious implications for students' future career prospects. The inadequacies in the current syllabi may lead to difficulties in competing for jobs, potentially contributing to higher unemployment rates among English graduates in Puducherry. The findings highlight the urgent need to enhance the alignment between the syllabi and the intended learning outcomes to better prepare students for successful careers.

5. Discussion

5.1 Employability Prospects: Implications of Syllabi for Future Career Paths

This study examines the extent to which the undergraduate (UG) English syllabi in the Union Territory (UT) of Puducherry equip students with the necessary language skills for employability. The research sought to answer whether the current syllabi adequately prepare students for professional communication, industry-specific language use, and overall job readiness.

Findings indicate that while the syllabi provide a foundational understanding of English, they fall short in addressing practical language applications required for various professional fields. Many students reported difficulties in professional writing, presentation skills, and workplace communication due to the theoretical nature of their coursework. Moreover, the absence of industry-specific vocabulary and communication strategies further limits their career prospects. Employers emphasize competencies such as business correspondence, negotiation skills, and technical writing, which are currently underrepresented in the curriculum.

A significant gap identified in the study is the lack of real-world exposure. Students expressed a need for opportunities to apply their language skills in practical settings through internships, collaborative projects, or industry partnerships. The findings underscore the necessity of revising the syllabi to include experiential learning components, bridging the divide between academic instruction and job market expectations. The inclusion of industry-relevant skills and real-world applications can enhance students' employability, making them competitive candidates in both local and global job markets.

5.2 Existing and Proposed Curriculum: Advantages and Disadvantages

The second research question explored the strengths and weaknesses of the current UG English syllabi and how a revised curriculum might better align with student and industry needs. The existing curriculum offers a structured approach to English language learning, covering fundamental areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. While it introduces listening and speaking components, these are not emphasized sufficiently to foster fluency. Furthermore, the syllabi aim to develop general linguistic competence but do not adequately support professional skill-building, leading to gaps between expected and actual student outcomes. Many students struggle with spoken English in formal settings, demonstrating a need for improved instructional strategies in this area.

The proposed curriculum seeks to mitigate these limitations by integrating a more comprehensive approach to language learning. A balanced focus on reading, writing, speaking, and listening will ensure well-rounded proficiency. Additionally, aligning learning objectives with measurable outcomes will provide clearer expectations for both students and instructors, enhancing assessment accuracy. Tailored content addressing diverse learner needs will further improve engagement and motivation.

Despite these advantages, implementing the revised curriculum poses certain challenges. It requires additional resources, such as updated instructional materials, technological support, and faculty training. Ensuring effective implementation would necessitate investments in professional development programs and industry collaborations. Nevertheless, the long-term benefits of an improved curriculum, better career readiness, increased student engagement, and enhanced skill development outweigh these initial hurdles.

5.3 Recommendations for Improvement

The final research question focused on identifying actionable recommendations to improve the English syllabi for UG students in Puducherry. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations aim to address the existing gaps:

- **Comprehensive Language Skill Development**
The revised syllabi should equally emphasize reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Current coursework should integrate interactive language activities, practical writing exercises, and verbal communication tasks to enhance fluency and accuracy.
- **Industry-Relevant Content**
To align with job market expectations, the syllabi should incorporate vocabulary and communication techniques specific to various industries such as business, healthcare, and technology. Collaboration with industry experts can help integrate relevant content, making the curriculum more practical and employment oriented.
- **Experiential Learning and Practical Application**
Hands-on learning opportunities such as internships, case studies, and role-playing activities should be embedded in the curriculum. Exposure to real-world scenarios will better prepare students for workplace demands and professional communication challenges.
- **Alignment with Employability Skills**
The curriculum should foster transferable skills like critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. Including structured activities such as debates, group discussions, and project-based learning can help students develop these competencies.
- **Regular Evaluation and Feedback**
Formative assessments, peer evaluations, and self-assessment tools should be incorporated to monitor student progress

effectively. Constructive feedback mechanisms will ensure continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving educational and professional needs.

- **Collaboration and Professional Development**

Regular training programs and workshops for instructors will enable them to adopt innovative teaching methodologies. Faculty development initiatives should focus on contemporary language teaching strategies, digital tools, and industry trends.

By implementing these recommendations, the UG English syllabi in Puducherry can be transformed into a more dynamic and career-focused educational framework. These improvements will ensure that students graduate with the necessary language competencies, enhancing their ability to succeed in both academic and professional domains.

6. Conclusion

In this study, a critical evaluation of the common English syllabi at the undergraduate level in the Union Territory of Puducherry is conducted. The evaluation aims to identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the existing syllabi, focusing on their alignment with the needs of students and the demands of the job market. To gather insights into the effectiveness of the syllabi, the study draws upon both professional experience and extensive interaction with students of mixed abilities. Reports and surveys related to the unemployment rate in the region serve as catalysts for this evaluation, highlighting the importance of assessing the connection between the syllabi and students' employability prospects.

The findings reveal several key issues that require attention, including a mismatch between the stated objectives and the actual outcomes of the syllabi, limited engagement of students due to a lack of tailored content, and a gap in developing the language and communication skills necessary for employability. The implications of these shortcomings are significant, as UG students in Puducherry may face challenges in securing suitable employment opportunities if the syllabi do not adequately prepare them. To address these issues, the paper proposes recommendations for enhancing the syllabi, including more comprehensive language skill development, aligning objectives with measurable outcomes, and addressing the diverse needs of students.

It is crucial to engage in detailed discussions and interpretation of the evaluation findings and proposed recommendations. This involves involving stakeholders such as faculty members, administrators, and students to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implications and to strategize the implementation of the proposed enhancements to the syllabi. By engaging in these discussions, the English department in Puducherry can utilize the outcomes of this study to improve the UG English syllabi in the region and better prepare students for the job market.

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Authors' contributions

Yadamala Sreenivasulu and Udhayachandran were jointly involved in the conceptualization and design of the study, as well as in drafting the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to its submission for publication.

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No additional data are available.

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