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**AN ASSESSMENT OF BOOK -1- (RECD) FOR  
THE FIFTH GRADE OF THE PRIMARY STAGE  
FROM THE SUPERVISORS' AND TEACHERS'  
POINTS OF VIEW**

**A THESIS  
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FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Significance of The Study

The teaching process is based on four essential pillars: syllabus, method, teacher and learner. A syllabus is of great importance. It is the central axis around which everything else revolves (Herring, 1996:36).

The organization of a teaching syllabus is compared to the planning of an industrial process. This analogy depicts the role of the syllabus designer and the importance of the syllabus in the teaching process.

In recent years, the need for a new syllabus of English as a foreign language (henceforth , EFL) has become more acute due to the inadequacies of structuralism (Al-Jumaily, 2002: 33ff), the developments in multi-media (telecommunication, satellite, internet, E-mail, etc.), and the political changes which have taken place in our country. Moreover, the motivation of Iraqi pupils towards English is undergoing a considerable change. At one time, English was unpopular to them. Now, it is becoming more and more attractive to them due to the increasing need for it in everyday life and in career development. It is an important means of communication in modern life. We daresay that the

status of English, especially in Iraq, has changed from “Foreign Language” to “Second Language” since the occupation of the coalition forces.

As a result of the foregoing discussion, we are in need for a syllabus which meets the pupils’ needs and demands and incorporates recent developments in our knowledge about the pedagogy of language. In this respect, Al-Jumaily (Ibid.:63) states: “The need for syllabus reform thus stems from developments of our knowledge about the nature of language and learning process ... the design of a syllabus and teaching materials must reflect these developments in our knowledge.”

In the light of the recent change in the role of English in Iraq, the need arises for a communicative syllabus that is more process-oriented than the one in current use. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:207) assert that :

The movement towards communicative syllabus is not a total revolution, but a reorientation of our work towards the needs of the students and the demands of authentic communication .

## **1.2 The Problem of the Study**

Syllabus design is a task that demands the utility of a number of principles, assumptions and human needs and wishes or demands which are dynamic, not static. It requires, according to Corder (Allen and Corder, 1975:13), cooperative efforts in which experienced teachers work together with specialists in the subject matter. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:105) highlight the idea that the task of translating a curriculum specification into materials and of translating materials into effective teaching is never an easy one. From another perspective, Hamash and Younis (1978:21) maintain that :

One of the most powerful ideas in modern curriculum-planning is the idea that planning should be done on experimental bases. One should plan, apply and then revise.

Thus, it is obvious that experienced teachers' and supervisors' points of view are vital in syllabus design.

For the sake of brevity, the problem can be summarized in the following extract:

1. Book -1- is the first book of the new series for Iraqi schools (RECI); therefore it should be assessed in order to realize its positive and negative aspects.
2. This new series (RECI) is designed according to the communicative approach (henceforth, C. A.) instead of the audio-lingual method of the previous series (NECI). Owing to the completely different orientations, this new approach is completely different from the previous one in the philosophy of teaching-learning process and syllabus design (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:156f).
3. The problem to be studied presents itself in the form of the following question:

Will the new English syllabus enable both pupils and teachers to create a reaction leading to natural communication?

The answer to such a question is best be sought in teachers who have taught the book and supervisors who have followed the application of the new materials. Such a study has not yet been carried out and this is the task of this piece of research.

### **1.3 The Aim of the Study**

This study aims at assessing the teachers' and supervisors' opinions about the new English course (RECI), Book -1- for the fifth grade of the primary education stage and making comparison between them .

### **1.4 Limits of the Study**

This study is limited to:

1. The assessment of Book -1- (RECI) for the fifth grade of the primary education stage (First published in 2002) and the accompanying books, for the academic year 2003-2004.
2. Both the supervisors and the teachers of English in four Directorates General of Education in Al-Rusafa the First, Al-Karkh the First (Baghdad Governorate), Diala and Kirkuk constitute the target population of this study.

### **1.5 Procedures**

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect data.

1. Visits and informal interviews with some elite language teachers and supervisors will be carried out to decide the broad outlines of the questionnaire.
2. An initial version of the questionnaire will be set and given to a number of specialists to examine the validity of its items and to make comments, suggestions and modifications if necessary.
3. The final version of the questionnaire will be set and dispatched to a random sample.
4. Responses to the questionnaire will be analysed and then computed using adequate statistical techniques.

## **1.6 Value of the Study**

The present study is expected to be of value especially for the educationists in the Ministry of Education to benefit from its findings. It will also be of great use to the new syllabus designers and text-book writers since it is going to provide feedback about the new text-book having in mind the fact that the new book has been applied without the necessary experimentation.

## **1.7 Definitions of Basic Terms**

To shed light on the terminologies used in this study, it is felt necessary to present the definitions of the following basic terms:

### **1.7.1 Assessment**

Assessment is differently defined by different writers. Hornby (1974:46), for instance, defined it as “Deciding or fixing the value of a property for certain purposes,” while Good (1973:4) sees it as “The process of making the official valuation of a property.” According to *MacMillan Essential Dictionary* (2003:36), assessment means “Thinking about something carefully and making a judgement about it.”

The operational definition is that assessment is a process of assembling evidence on the syllabus design for giving its value.

### **1.7.2 Primary School**

The Ministry of Education (Educational Legislation, 1989) defines a primary school as a school in which the duration of the cycle is six years covering the age group 6-11. (Ramadan, 2001:10)

### **1.7.3 Supervisors**

Supervisors are elderly teachers who have had long experience in TEFL. Their functions as set officially include visiting the English classes and reporting on each teacher; helping the teachers to employ more effective techniques, through their notes, lecturing and arranging demonstration lessons and participation in curriculum change. (Al-Chalabi, 1976:83)

## **1.8 The New ELT Course in Iraq**

According to Al-Jumaily, (Personal Communication),<sup>1</sup> in 2001, the Ministry of Education formed a committee of specialists and an advisory board to write down new text-books. The syllabus adopted was one that had been designed in the late 80s of the last century and was “shelved” for two main reasons:

1. The syllabus was heavily criticised by specialists for various reasons.
2. Iraq, at that time, was leading a Pan-Arab-Gulf-States programme to unite the ELT curriculum in all these states. The efforts ended successfully in early 1990 with the writing of the syllabuses of the pupils’ text-books, workbooks, teachers’ guides and all the supplementary materials. The actual text-book writing process was supposed to start in September 1990, but the First Gulf War brought an end to the programme and the whole material was lost in Iraq after it had been moved from the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre in Kuwait.<sup>2</sup>

In 2001, pressure from “Higher Authority” to start immediately in text-book writing and to start the application process

in 2002, forced those in charge to adopt the “scrapped” syllabus (Al-Jumaily, personal communication). Therefore, the Ministry of Education formed a committee of Iraqi specialists in ELT curriculum. The Committee<sup>3</sup> decided that the new syllabus which bears the name “Rafidain English Course for Iraq” (henceforth RECI) should base on the C. A.

The committee succeeded in putting Book 1 of the new series in use in the academic year 2002-2003 in spite of a lot of difficulties arising from the economic sanctions and embargo imposed on Iraq at that time. Some of the difficulties were the need for a foreign expert in English, and the need for native speakers to record the material on cassettes. (Al-Khazraji, personal communication)<sup>4</sup>

### **1.8.1 A Survey of Book -1- of RECI**

Book 1 of Rafidain English Course for Iraq (RECI) for fifth grade of the primary education stage, is designed on the basis of a communicative language teaching (henceforth , CLT). It begins with “Introductory Unit” in which the teacher takes three or four weeks to carry out some commands in order to train the pupils’ ears to the accurate pronunciation of some words and also to realize their meanings.

Although the prevailing approach recommended in teaching this book is the C. A., there are some other approaches or methods used in teaching some activities (an eclectic approach). In the “Introductory Unit”, the Total Physical Response is used in teaching commands. The teacher presents commands verbally, and the pupils respond physically. The audiolingual method is also used in some situations when there is no information-gap

between the teacher and the pupils, i.e., the pupils' responses are mechanical.

In addition to the Introductory Unit, there are fifteen other units. Each fifth unit reviews the four previous ones. So the units Five, Ten and Fifteen are "Review Units".

Each unit involves several linguistic activities such as short conversations, games, songs and rhymes. Reciting or performing songs and rhymes are used to reinforce the oral performance and to make the teaching material more interesting. In the C. A., the use of language (Al-Nassiri, 2001:23) is something the people enjoy, i.e., teaching with fun and games is the easiest and most effective way to teach language and encourage conversation. Therefore, the syllabus designers (Hamash, 1979a:9) should exploit or invest this principle and present situations where pupils can enjoy the language.

The main goal of this book (Darwesh et al., 2002:9) is to enable the pupils to handle the four skills of the language, i.e., they can take part in short simple social exchanges such as: greetings, introduction, expressing likes and dislikes with acceptable fluency and accuracy, to read the words, phrases and sentences that are introduced in the Pupil's Book, and write them, too.

Here, a language is an individual and a social process: therefore, it should be used as a vehicle through which speaker communicates with hearer (Allan, 1986:281). Language is not a habit-formation, but it is a means of communication. If pupils are encouraged and motivated to speak, they will produce thousands of

novel utterances that they have never heard before. Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:97) stress this view when they state that :

“Language is created by learners, not given to them”

Book -1- has plenty of misprintings, some are in the size of the first letter, in punctuation, in spaces between words or in spelling. (See Appendix 6).

Book -1- (RECI) is accompanied by two books which are not colourful:

#### 1. Teacher’s Guide-1

It is written in Arabic. The purpose as it was stated by Dr. A. A. Darwesh to the participants in the Course of English Language training leaders at the Institute for In-service training and Educational Development (Sept. 2001)<sup>5</sup> is to let or help all the teachers of English at the primary schools benefit from its instructions and information.

At the end of the Teacher’s Guide, there is a word-list of (371) words and expressions with their simplified transcription and next to them the number of the units in which they are first used. The teacher can consult this list when there is doubt in pronunciation.

#### 2. Work Book and Handwriting Manual-1

Work Book-1 and handwriting Manual-1 are unified in one book.

In addition to the books mentioned above which are considered as a core material, there are extension materials which are called “Extra Curriculum Activities”. These activities are supposed to be implemented by pupils to widen their knowledge of the language. They are related to the core material and used in conjunction with it . Therefore , teachers can :

1. urge and encourage pupils to use English outside the classroom; during the breaks, school trips and even at home.

2. encourage pupils to make-out a private dictionary named “My Picture Dictionary”. Its vocabulary is preferable to be associated with pictures. The dictionary is divided into two halves; in the first half, the words are arranged alphabetically, while in the second half they are arranged according to notions or topics (under headings such as furniture, fruit, clothes, etc.).

The course also emphasizes the importance of using incidental teaching of some common expressions used by the teacher inside the classroom “Classroom English Language” in order to let the pupils be familiar with their use in real-life situations. These expressions are for instance:

- Open your books at page .....
- Look at the picture.
- Look at me.
- Repeat after me.
- Who is absent?
- Good! Very good! Excellent! Bravo!
- Close your books.
- Write this in your copybooks.
- Just listen.
- Next, please.
- Thank you.
- That’s right. That’s wrong, etc.

### **1.8.2 The Need for a Change**

Since the early seventies of the previous century or so, huge changes in TEFL have been taking place. At the end of 1960s, there was a controversy between atomistic and gestaltic

teaching strategies. In the 1970s, the controversy was settled in favour of the latter strategy. Therefore, concentration was placed on meaning, i.e., words in contexts, not on form and minimal segments of the utterance, without losing the sight of form (syntax). Thus, CLT has become fashionable.

Accordingly, NECI was heavily attacked at the end of 1970s. This was due in part to the refutation of the habit-formation theory of language acquisition and in part to the fact that both teachers and pupils often found the required repetition boring and unmotivating and speech enjoyed a relative lack of interest. Moreover, the patterns used inside the classrooms were not always transferred outside when one was in contact with real-life situations (Larsen-Freeman, 1987:6).

As for the pedagogical aspect, in the audiolingual method, the four skills do not go together. One of the principles of this method is that the written form of language should be withheld from the pupils until they are able to use the material orally. Many experienced teachers have objected to this aspect. They have found that some pupils feel very insecure when they are forced to depend on the ear alone because they find it hard to remember all they hear inside the classroom. Therefore, they will make their own imperfect notes without letting the teacher see them and this deed will lead them to incorrect learning. (Rivers, 1980:47, 48)

During that period, a great deal of activities were made by many of the Scientific Centres of Study especially in the Gulf area to support this strategy, for instance:

1. In 1977, a seminar about English language teaching was held in Abu Dhabi and arranged by Oxford University Press (henceforth

OUP). In that seminar, Henry Widdowson of London University outlined the theoretical and philosophical bases of the C. A. Also the features of the new ELT textbooks intended for Arabic-speaking pupils were presented. That seminar was a good chance for Hamash, the chief co-author of NECI series to come into a close contact with the C. A. to foreign language teaching. (Hamash, 1979a:1)

2. A similar chance was repeated again in March, 1979 when Hamash was invited by OUP to visit Kuwait about materials written on the basic principles of the C. A. (Hamash, 1979b:1, 2).
3. In July, 1979, the Institute of Education of London University held a panel discussion about the major concepts and ideas underlying the C. A. (Hamash, 1979b:3). The panelists were Professor H. G. Widdowson, Mr. C. P. Hill and Mr. C. T. Brumfit.

Those three incidents had a clear impression on Dr. Hamash which is obvious in the designing of Books 7 and 8, especially the latter of NECI set.

Hamash (1979a:51) agrees that the Crescent Course (of Kuwait) as an applied form of the C. A. has registered a great deal of initial success and that curriculum improvement demands coordinated efforts.

Undoubtedly, the above-mentioned is an obvious hint for the necessity of the syllabus change and updating, especially when there is a consensus or semi-consensus that structuralism and the audiolingual method are inadequate for TEFL at least in foreign language situations such as that in Iraq.

Al-Bazaz et al. (1973:97) mention that the course of the fifth grade is lengthy; therefore, the teachers cover the topics quickly in order to go on with the annual plan, while others intend to spend

more time on each topic. In both situations, the pupils' benefit will be limited and their language skills will be weak and that will affect their learning in the sixth grade. Therefore, they suggest that the course should be shortened and the oral activities be given sufficient time. They also mention (p. 24) that failure in English (in primary stage) was higher than history, geography, science and Arabic and that was due to the method adopted which was based on memorization instead of comprehension. Therefore, they suggest (p. 132) the necessity of the revision of the course in order to avoid the wastage in education.

Finally, the most cogent reason for the change is that NECI was first put in use in the early 1970s and this means that the series has been applied in teaching for over thirty years and that was done in faith and with the belief that the approach was best for that time, (Al-Jumaily, 2002:30), but now everything is different. Rivers (1981:25) sides with this opinion when she says:

The curriculum must be continually reviewed in the light of present and future needs. Traditional acceptance can no longer justify the inclusion of anyone subject in the program.

All the foregoing discussions and views have paved the way for the change which came late.

## Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup>In late 1980s, Al-Jumaily was the specialist in charge of the ELT unit at the Directorate General of Curriculum and Text-books at the Ministry of Education. He was also vice-chairman and then chairman of the Iraqi National Committee for ELT.

<sup>2</sup>The decision to adopt the syllabus and to start the process was taken in a conference held in Kuwait in late March, 1990 chaired by Dr. Abdullatif al-Jumaily, Iraq and also attended by Khudhair S. Al-Khazraji. The conference also appointed Al-Jumaily General Consultant for the Course. (Al-Jumaily and Al-Khazraji personal communication).

<sup>3</sup>The Committee consists of:

- Dr. Abdul-Jabbar Ali Darwesh (Ph.D.) College of Teachers.
- Hisham Ibrahim Abdulla (M.A.) The Ministry of Education
- Khudhair S. Al-Khazraji (Dip.) The Ministry of Education

The Advisory Board consists of:

- Ayif Habeeb (M.A.) College of Education
- Firas Awad Maroof (M.A.) College of Education
- Lamia A. Al-Ani (M.A.) College of Education
- Nejat A. Al-Juboury (M.A.) College of Education for Women.

<sup>4</sup>Al-Khazraji, K. S. is one of the three authors of the text-book.

<sup>5</sup>The researcher is one of the participants in that course.

# **Abstract**

In the academic year 2002-2003, a new textbook for teaching English in Iraqi primary schools was put in practice as the first book in a new course called *Rafidain English Course for Iraq* (henceforth RECI).

This course is meant to mark a radical shift in orientation and subsequently syllabus-design and teaching methodology.

The aim of this study is to assess Book -1- of the new series from two angles : the supervisors' and teachers' points of view since they were not consulted before putting the new course in use. Therefore it is essential to find out what the teachers who have taught the book and the supervisors who have followed its application think of it, taking their viewpoints, comments and suggestions into consideration in the coming editions of the book as well as in other books of this new series.

To fulfil the aim of the study, a sample of (18) supervisors (about 70% of the population), and another of (118) teachers of English Language (5% of the population) at the primary education stage are taken randomly from four General Directorates of Education: Al-Rusafa the First, Al-Karkh the First, Diala and Kirkuk.

A questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this study to be an investigatory instrument for the supervisors' and teachers' viewpoints. The questionnaire is supplemented by oral interviews and attending classes to get a more clear picture.

The first version of the questionnaire was exposed to a jury of ten specialists in TEFL to elicit their viewpoints of the suitability of its items and in the light of their opinions, the final version was

designed and dispatched to the two independent samples mentioned above with a copy translated into Arabic to ensure full understanding of the items on the part of the participants, an act which might subsequently help to ensure the elicitation of the most dependable information.

The thesis falls into five chapters.

Chapter One which is an introduction, gives a brief account of the problem being investigated, the significance of the study, its limits, a description of the procedures used, a brief account of the new ELT course in Iraq, a survey of Book -1- of RECI and the logical need for a change.

Chapter Two commences with the theoretical background of syllabus-design, survey of literature available which is relevant to the present study.

Chapter Three deals with data collection , population, sample, the instrument of the study, a description of that instrument and the statistical means used for achieving the aim.

Chapter Four is devoted for data analysis while the last one (Chapter Five) presents a number of Conclusions drawn from the findings of the present study and a number of recommendations are put forward and finally some suggestions for further studies are drawn.

Both the supervisors and teachers agree that Book -1- of RECI is interesting for them and they have found it is interesting for the pupils, too. They have also agreed that it is of a good utility for teaching English as a foreign language with some comments on some aspects. The major drawback in this respect is, as both teachers and supervisors unanimously stated, that the course-book has been put in practice without the necessary tools for its success made available.

These include prior teacher training, the necessary teaching-aids and the availability of adequate classroom settings.

Finally , relevant pedagogical recommendations are made and suggestions for further research are put forward.