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The EFL Course Syllabus Offered in Geography and Environmental Science Department at Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh: Relevance and Effectiveness

Ambia Islam Rumu*

Lecturer, Department of English, Daffodil International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Original Research Article

*Corresponding author Ambia Islam Rumu

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Abstract: This paper reports on an action research which investigates the practicality of auxiliary communicative English courses offered for academic purpose in the tertiary level. The purpose is to explore the opinions of students and teachers about the effectiveness of syllabus at undergraduate level of Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh. This qualitative study studies one hundred Students of Geography and Environmental Science Department from Jahangirnagar University. Both students and teachers are given questionnaire and interviewed for the study. Through data collection, this study finds out that the learners and the facilitators consider the syllabus is not experienced enough to enrich their communication skills properly as the apprentices lack practice and do not get enough exposure from that particular one course as the syllabus is not designed analyzing their needs. This study gives recommendations to teachers to restructure their syllabus after doing a needs analysis in relation to a particular subject to make it more effective and real for the respective learners.

Keywords: Communication skills, auxiliary course, need analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching foreign language is always challenging. A well-constructed syllabus which is formed in the light of student's need can make this challenging work easy. For various reasons, such as limited and rare exposure to English as well as the quality of instruction which the students receive from the higher secondary level is far below the level that is needed in tertiary education in which most of the time English is the medium of instruction.

An EFL course therefore is included at the undergraduate level to increase the basic skills and knowledge of English to fecilitate the subjective learning.

Background of the study

The role and function of English in the present global perspective is beyond all doubt. As the language of wider communication especially due to its inevitable attachment to outer world, English has turned out of prime importance in the domain of our business, education and working language of international organization. This position and function of English in the contemporary global avenue have been steadily implanting its value in the Bangladeshi socio-economic plus educational scenario.

Though, officially English is not recognized as second language, now a days it is used for a lot of purposes. Because of inefficiency in English language and the lack of obligation on standard, the students of

Bangladesh are falling back, comparing to international community. In order to understand the subject materials, sufficient knowledge on English is necessary for a student whatever his or her background is. So this auxiliary course is getting included in the syllabus to help the students.

Statement of the problem

Syllabus is supposed to help the students in their academic purposes and in their professional lives. But in Geography and Environmental Science department of Jahangirnagar University, the syllabus of the English auxiliary course seems less relevant according to the respective subject. The syllabus does not appear to have the proper efficiency which it should have. Students face problems in their academic and professional lives as they do not get proper input from the syllabus.

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OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to study the effectiveness of the syllabus of the auxiliary English course. As a researcher, the researcher will try to find out how much helpful this syllabus is for the students in their academic life. It will also seek the answer of lacking in the syllabus if there is any.

Justification of the study

The study materials to which the students are exposed to, are all written in English. Visibly, it requires a good reading skill. Besides studying Geography is not only about the text books, it's a combination of much more things. It wants its learners to learn communication and fieldwork skill which include individual or group investigation, asking Geographical question, interviewing people, changing approach depending on subject matter, culture, values, audience, collecting information from different resources like blog, news, film, games, puzzles, history etc. Added to that presenting the geographical information verbally and in a written document (abstract, research paper, report) are also the demands. Besides these, they need to study charts, maps, graphs, statistical data presented in English and to understand the lecture of the course teachers, a good command over English is obligatory.

Research questions

Through the research work, I will try to find out the answers of the following questions:

- Do the syllabus emphasize on the four skills individually?
- What do the learners think about the syllabus and content of the syllabus?
- Do the learners think that the present syllabus is sufficient for them and is enough helpful to achieve their required skill?
- How much is this syllabus helpful to the learners for their academic purposes?

Limitation of the study

This study has some limitations which are needed to be taken care of further study. It would be better if the researcher could add more participants in the study from the students who have passed from Geography and Environmental Science department and are now in the working sector. It could have broaden the findings of the study. And along with that classroom observation would give more knowledge regarding the syllabus implementation in the class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

University of Cambridge has developed a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach to teach Geography through English. Coyles [1] idea of 4C (content, communication, cognition and culture which is sometimes referred as community or

citizenship) will be helpful to understand the lesson plan. The combination of content and activities complement both Geography and English. Teachers in CLIL approach are required to be proficient in academic language. Here teachers need to present the Geographical language along with grammatical pattern and Geographical vocabulary. That is why the classes are interactive with content-obligatory (subject specific or specialist) language. Teachers will use LOTS (lower order thinking skill) and HOTS (higher order thinking skill) to make the students skilled and capable to explain any Geographical context in English.

Bryan and Habte-Gabr [2] shed light on the Colombian education system where teaching the mainstream courses in EFL context keeping the concern on both content and language is an important matter. Based on an action research, they have studied two courses of Geographic Education at Universidad de La Sabana in Colombia which are English content based courses. The 29 learners of Population Geography and Geopolitics courses have got materials emailed to them and posted on website so that the students can go through the original English texts with sufficient time and identify key concepts. They are assigned with projects which requires presentation using technical vocabulary with detail explanation. In Geopolitics courses, learners have sessions with guest speaker in video conference which helps them to learn about different expertise from the speaker along with accustoming their ear to other accents. Besides, they are divided into small groups to develop socio-affective strategies. These implemented strategies have brought positive sign in students' learning. Their general knowledge in this two particular courses have increased and they have got more interest in researching a topic. Learners have become more fluent in using technical English and are able to produce coherent essays.

Cinthia Salinas, Maria E. Franquiz and Michelle Reidel [3] have presented a case study of a high school social teacher Ms Devila's class who teaches world Geography to the late-arrival immigrant students. The students take part in oral, written and demonstrative activities in which the teacher uses realia, graphic organizers and content based language. Learners are always presented with hands-on activities to brainstorm about any topic of Geography and then they are made familiar with the textbook definition. The course teacher also values the prior knowledge of the learners' from their school, home and community to build a strong foundation of Geographical content knowledge.

Sheelagh Deller and Christine Price [4] have written a book named "Teaching other subjects through English" where teaching English through Geography is one of the main concerns. This book gives guideline

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under CLIL approach to the language teachers for the students aged between 8-11 years. This is solely a subject-led process and subject prescribes the language need. Like an ESP course, the content is chosen with a determination to connect the academic and work activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the research provides the purpose of the research design and how the research is conducted. It gives detail information about the research method, population, information about the subjects who took part in the study, the mechanisms employed for data collection, processes of collecting the data, discussion of questionnaire and methods of analysis.

Research Design Primary research

In any research where the data is collected from direct source instead of any secondary source to get the real information is called primary research [5]. As this research aims to understand the effectiveness of the syllabus of Geography and Environmental Science Department of Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh, all the data are collected from the students and teachers who study and teach in that particular department and that is why it is a primary research.

MIXED- METHOD RESEARCH

This is an experimental research where both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to have the benefit of the strong sides of both methods. Bryman [6] provided general and specific level of explanations as a justification for mixing these methods. The combination of data collection is done based on different particular practical situations.

Subjects

The present study is carried out with 110 students who are doing their under graduate degree at Geography and Environmental Science department in Jahangirnagar University. The respondents range from students doing their second year to fourth year study. It is made sure that all of them have done the EFL course. The rationale for their selection is their availability and the fact that the participants have completed the EFL course in undergraduate program. The participants are both male and female aged between 18 to 22 years. Along with the students, five teachers have participated in the study.

Data collection

Two evaluation processes are used:

Ouestionnaire

The main aim of the study is to gather information from different informants and sources, which will feed into future decision making purposes

for the course. Questionnaire survey is relatively easy to do and can give huge amount of data quickly in a readily manner [7]. Here, the questionnaire includes 22 different items, which are used to gather student perceptions and the present learning situation of the EFL course. The questionnaire did not have any time limit. However, the subjects responded to it in 20 to 25 minutes. Likert scale is employed to get the answers and five response options were given to all questions. Piloting was done for two times before setting the questions of questionnaire. The researcher reached the participants face to face.

Semi Structured Interview

During the interview, the students were asked to feel free and relax at first. After a few minutes of causal talks, the students were reassured that it was being done to help their syllabus making better and enrich classroom activities. The students were thus made to feel free and were encouraged to take part in the whole process. They thought over the questions for a while and then gave their own opinions on the issues in question. In the interview sections, the researcher took part in lively discussions with the groups of students. The atmosphere was friendly one of a gossip kind. The purpose of the researcher was to elicit the necessary information for the sake of research from oral responses.

Sample Descriptions and Size Students

- Questionnaires were distributed to 110 students.
- Interviews were conducted with 10 students.

Teachers

The interviews are conducted with five teachers of English departments who take EFL classes in different departments including Geography and Environmental Science department. In interview the teachers were asked to focus on-

- Numbers of hours of English class
- The level of proficiency of students
- The size of their classes
- The syllabus of the EFL course
- The attitude of the learners
- The methodology they use in the class
- Emphasizing on four skills individually
- Specifying the gap between the students' achievements and objectives
- Inserting of technical terms in relation to a particular subject in that particular syllabus

Data Analysis

To conduct this study, data were collected from both the teachers and students. The present researcher reached them over mail or face to face. Teachers' data were collected in semi structured interview where they talked with present researcher.

This part is divided into three sections. In first part the responses of students' questionnaire will be analyzed. Quantitative data collected by the questionnaire survey were analyzed by SPSS V.20 and the descriptive statistics were used to find out the frequency of the responses. MS Excel 2013 were used to represent the accumulated data graphically. In second part the summary of the students' interview will be discussed and in the third part, teachers' interview will be analyzed.

Analysis of Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire has been made using Likert Scale where SD means strongly disagree, D means disagree, N indicates neutral, A goes for agree and SA specifies to strongly disagree.

General Information

The participants are aged between 18 to 22 years. Among 110 students of Under Graduate level, 46 of them are female and others are male counterparts.

Course Management, teaching methods and materials for the course

This part of the survey includes seven questions regarding course, class and materials used for this course. 79 students opined that they think the course should be four credit full course where 60.91% students are not satisfied with the number of classes and time they get in the class. Only five students strongly agree that the classes are student oriented and 65% learners stated that the facilitator does not use multimedia in class and only 2.73% students think that the materials provided to them for this course is enough rewarding to them. Finally, only one student considers that the teacher uses English as a medium of teaching and instruction in the class and related to that 80.91% opined that they are not habituated to use English for their communication in class.

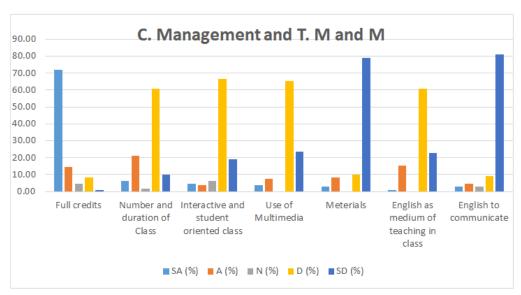


Fig-1: Course management, teaching methods and materials for the course

Practice and Application

This portion of the survey asked nine questions to the students about the drilling and exposure of the skills in syllabus. 51.82% students stated disagreement that they are not confident enough to give presentations and 61 students opine that they do not get to practice speaking with Geography related terms and vocabulary in classroom and 52.73% students do not consider the syllabus offering scope for practicing speaking skill. Only 11 students agree that they can practice listening skill using Geography related audio clip, news and 50.91% learners consider that the existing syllabus does

not give them enough opportunity to improve their listening skill. In addition with that, 49 students out of 110 opine that they cannot write the details of any map or data using appropriate Geographical terms whereas an insignificant number of students think the opposite in case of formal writing and continuing that 49.09% students reflect themselves incompetent to pick up any information from various kinds of difficult texts. Likewise, only 4 students strongly think they can mine any essential information from any Geographical data by reading and added to that only 3 students consider the syllabus giving enough exposure to reading skill.

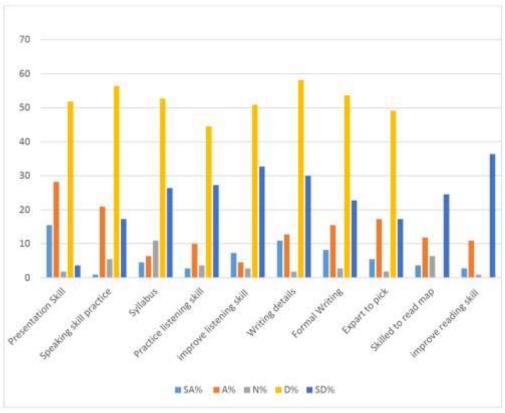


Fig-2: Practice and application

Effectiveness of syllabus

This part of the survey discusses about the feedback of the students regarding syllabus design. 66 students consider that the syllabus should concentrate more on communication skills rather than grammar and supporting this, 75.45% students suggest to emphasize more on to learn Geography related terms and

vocabulary from different resources. On the topic of assessment procedure, 71.82% students have strongly recommended to include practical examination for testing the four skills. Finally, only 5.45% students have stated their satisfaction about the syllabus whereas 61.82% learners have highlighted the requirement of doing needs analysis in designing syllabus.

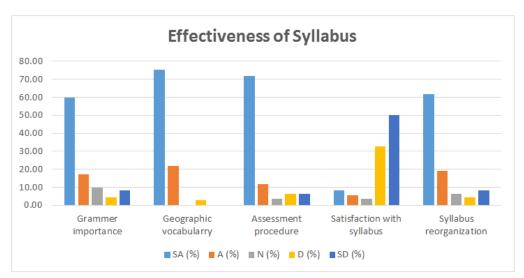


Fig-3: Effectiveness of syllabus

Students' suggestions about EFL course and syllabus:

- The syllabus should be restructured
- Involve students more into class work
- Study materials should be chosen more carefully
- Course duration should be enhanced
- · Regular class and homework should be checked
- Grammatical items should be reduced
- Smaller classes and individual attention
- More speaking practice
- Teaching should be improved

Summary of Students' Interview Findings

Ten students were interviewed for this thesis work. Summary of the findings are discussed in this section.

Students' views on the EFL course

The students have a very positive attitude towards the course. All students who participated in the interviews realized that English has the status of an international language and believed that there was no alternative to English and that is why the demand for English is increasing all over the world. They were also aware of the importance of English for the future and admitted that a) English is pre-requisite for getting good jobs b) for being successful in competitive examinations c) for career development d) for higher education e) and, in general, there are so many sectors and so many functions where English is needed. So the students think that as this course intends to improve their four skills, their attitude is positive and they are highly motivated.

Their Expectation and Reality

Students have a high expectation from this course. Up to Higher Secondary level, there is no course which concentrates only on these four skills. So they look forward to have a successful and helpful learning. Especially they want to improve their writing and speaking ability. The classroom reality is that here reading and writing is more focused rather than speaking and listening. According to them, listening is kind of ignored. The amount of practice they do for speaking and listening is not enough at all. Majority students have said that they do not find any huge difference between their ability doing the course before and after.

Class Size, Duration and Number of Classes

Students feel that class issue matters a lot in language learning. Every class is crowded with students (more than 80) and they do not get much time individually. Number of classes and class duration should be increased.

Syllabus

Students have stated that the present syllabus is kind of acceptable to them but they want change in the content of syllabus. For example, few students have said that it would be better for them if the syllabus would include some terms related to Geographical issues or they would get the chance to practice their four skills related to their subject related things (writing a report on flood situation). It would help them later in their academic lives and career as well. They have said to reduce the grammatical items and include practical life related issues. They want more tasks on their speaking and listening skills. Students also want change in their study items given in the syllabus. They want such items that will encourage them to know and learn the things rather than study.

Opinion about instructor

Students feel that it would be better if the teachers would be trained specially for language teaching. They have stated that the current level of their efficiency is okay but they need to focus more on their teaching.

Summary of the Teachers' Interview Findings *Proficiency of the Students*

Most of the teachers think that the proficiency levels of the students are not up to the mark. Though it varies to department to department. But they need to go through intensive language instruction.

Emphasizing on Four Skills

Teachers have commented that they try to emphasize on the four skills but it is not possible to emphasize on the four skills equally. They have marked many problems like class size, lack of logistic support, insufficient time. For this they usually have to more give importance in writing or speaking or reading. Listening is kind of ignored because of class reality.

Syllabus

The teachers think that the present syllabus is good for teaching some of the components but not for all. They suggest that the syllabus is too much traditional. It mainly focuses on the reading and writing part but the speaking and listening part get a little importance. There is hardly any task or practice on listening or speaking mentioned in the syllabus. They think that the syllabus of EFL courses should emphasize on skill based approach and the implementation should be more proper. One most important thing they think that it will be great if we can include a part with technical terms related to a particular subject in EFL course. It will make the learner more interested in their own subject and as well as in EFL course as they can relate both the things.

Attitude of the learners

Most of the teachers state that the attitude of the EFL learners is kind of indifferent to the course which is not negative at all. One teacher thinks that it is their fault that they cannot present the language course before the students in interesting and enjoyable way. Another teacher thinks that the learners are somehow motivated and they are curious to know and learn.

Gap between Objectives and Students' Achievement

The teachers have said that the gap is truly disappointing. The syllabus of this course aims at the improvement of four skills at a same pace. But the reality shows the different picture. They state that their writing ability is good but rest of the three skills are poor or in average state.

The Limitations of the EFL Course Class Size

Every teacher has marked the class size as a severe problem. The population of the class is so large (more than 80 students per class) that it becomes tough for them to manage the students. Because of the class size, students face problem during lecture giving and task practice. It will be better for the students if it is possible to reduce the class size. They feel that an ideal class size should be between 20-25 students for greater student-teacher interaction and better understanding of the lessons.

Duration of the Course

The majority of the teachers think that number of hours given to the English courses is insufficient. There are some departments which offer 1 year EFL course whereas some offer 1 semester (6months) lengthy course. The majority of the teacher seems happy about the length of 1 year course. But they are not happy with the number of classes per week. They comment that the number of hours of classes should be increased.

Classroom Facilities

Classroom facilities are very poor in all the departments. The teachers complain that they do not get enough logistic support like multimedia, CD player etc which are very important in EFL class. One teacher has said that he uses his personal laptop to teach 'listening' skill in the classroom.

Assessment/ Examination

Teachers have responded that the assessments taking place in the course is not sufficient. Listening assessment becomes very difficult because of class size and lack of logistic support. For speaking skill, students give formal presentation but that is not enough.

Teachers' Suggestions for the EFL course

 Syllabus should be redesigned or modified with subject related content

- Needs analysis should be done.
- Class size should be reduced.
- Duration of the course should be 1 year.
- All skills should be given similar importance in syllabus.
- Task activities should be included in syllabus to test all the skills.
- Introduction of audio materials.

Syllabus Analysis of Geography and Environmental Science Department

Title of the course

The title of the course is "English Language". So the title clearly suggests that communication skills are not the priority here to teach.

Objectives Are Not Specified

The objectives of this 2 credit course syllabus are not mentioned in the syllabus. The teachers and students are not sure of their objectives.

Skill Based Syllabus

The syllabus is centered on five skills:

- a) Listening skill
- b) Speaking skill
- c) Reading skill
- d) Writing Skill
- e) Reference Skill

No particular skill is stressed. Items which are included in the skill development are insufficient. Both in speaking and reading skill, remedial grammar is included. To improve reading and writing, techniques such as scanning, skimming are avoided. To improve listening skill, the course offers-

- Included Items in Listening Skill: Listening comprehend, listening and note taking test, note revision.
- Avoided Items in Listening Skill: Listening to phoneme words, utterances and conversations through audio visual aids in 'top down' and 'bottom up' process.
- Included items in speaking skill: Asking and answering question items, of speaking, remedial grammar test and revision.
- Avoided Items in Speaking Skill: Speaking basics, situational talks, phoneme, and stress.
- Reading in Context: Comprehension question, vocabulary, development in context, structure analysis, remedial grammar test and revision.
- Avoided Items in Reading Skill: Intensive and extensive reading, skimming, scanning, inference.
- Writing Skill: Making an outline in chronological order, process, lists, examples, comparison and contrasts, definitions, classifications, cause and effect generalization, report writing, essay writing.
- Avoided Items in Writing Skill: Topic sentence, thesis statement

- Nevertheless, the syllabus has given more emphasis on writing skill; it offers another skill named reference skill which is much more helpful for professional and academic purposes.
- Reference Skill: Using a dictionary, encyclopedia and how to use a text book.
- Avoided Items in Reference Skill: Bibliography, table of contents, index etc.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSION

In this study, there was an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the syllabus of EFL course offered at Jahangirnagar University. The findings of the evaluation have to be analyzed within the context from which they have been drawn. The result will be concluded here with the light of the research hypothesis of this study. Very first hypothesis deals with the importance of four skills in the syllabus. From the data analysis part, it is seen that though the syllabus is supposed to give emphasize on the four skills equally but it cannot give or do not give equal importance. Teachers have also admitted that there is discrimination between the practices of four skills. Second research question asks about learners' thought about the content of syllabus. Data have clearly stated that majority students want change in the content. They want more flexible, friendly and enjoyable and most importantly subject related content in the syllabus. Third question wants to know the opinion of students about how much helpful the syllabus is for them and to what extent they think that the syllabus is sufficient for them. Present researcher has got the view that most of the students are dissatisfied with the syllabus. Teachers have also commented to restructure the syllabus for the betterment of the students. The next research question deals with the amount of help the students get for their academic purposes from these syllabuses. The students have stated that the help they get from this syllabus is not enough. It would be better for them if the syllabus would be designed relating the technical terms of their particular subjects. And the last question investigates about the attitude of the students towards the course. The researcher has found that the students are highly motivated. They want to know and learn new things. They are very much eager to improve their skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

 Needs analysis of the EFL course should be more specific. Most of the time teacher and students are not asked about their needs. Many unimportant or overloading items were included in the syllabus.

- Objectives should be focused on the syllabus paper. They should be very specific and very small.
- The syllabus covers the four skills altogether. It becomes pressure for the teachers and students. Most of the time listening is avoided and reading and writing skills are emphasized. So, just two skills reading and writing in one half unit course and speaking and listening in another half unit course can be helpful for the students.
- Too many items should not be included in one syllabus. For the selection of the items, conventional items should not be given more importance rather which are more important for the students, should get the priority.
- Syllabus should some useful and practical life oriented tasks so that the students can learn the language in a process that is necessary for the present world. When designing a syllabus, teachers should keep in mind that this EFL course should also come up as an ESP/ EAP course.
- According to the teachers of EFL course, only one course is not enough for the students. So course duration should be enhanced if it is possible.

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Appendix 1

Dear Participants,

Greetings!

Hope you are well. You will find some questions below regarding your "English for Geographers" course for a study purpose. Please take a look and answer the questions. Your information will be kept confidential and will be used only for conducting the research. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Age: Year of study: 1st/2nd/3rd/4th

Here SA= strongly agree, A= agree, N= neutral, D= disagree, SD= strongly disagree

Her	Here SA= strongly agree, A= agree, N= neutral, D= disagree, SD= strongly disagree						
	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
1	It should be a full course of 4.00 credits						
2	The number of classes you get for this course is enough						
	to go through the whole syllabus						
3	The duration of 55 minutes in each class is sufficient for						
	a huge class with 70 students						
4	The classes are interactive and student oriented						
5	The teacher use multimedia to teach in class						
6	The materials given to you are fruitful enough for the course						
7	The teacher uses English as a medium of teaching and instruction in the class						
8	The learners use English to communicate in class						
9	It should give less importance to grammar and more						
	importance to communication skills						
10	It should give emphasize to learn Geography related vocabulary ,terms, proverbs from different resources like news, movie, book etc						
11	You are skilled enough to give presentation, answering						
11	questions and in interviewing						
12	You can practice speaking skill in class in real life like						
	situation with Geography related terms and vocabulary						
13	The syllabus offers you large scope of practicing your						
	speaking skill						
14	You get to practice listening skill with Geography related						
	audio clip, news etc						
15	The syllabus is designed to give enough opportunity to						
	improve your listening skill						
16	You can write in details of any map, chart, data etc using						
	appropriate Geographical terms						
17	You can perform formal writing (report writing, abstract,						
	research papers etc) with the exact Geographical						
1.0	language						
18	You are expert enough to pick up an information from						
19	any written text with various level of difficulties						
19	You are skilled enough to read any map and extract any required information						
20	The syllabus gives sufficient exposure to your reading						
	skill						
21	The assessment procedure (quiz, assignment, final						
21	examination) should include practical exam combining						
	the four skills.						
22	You are satisfied with the effectiveness and relation of						
	present syllabus to your subject.						
23	The syllabus should be reorganized after knowing the						
	demands and expectation from the students						

Now please answer the questions:

- 1. What do you think are the lacking of this syllabus and what are they?
- 2. Can you suggest something which should be included to improve the syllabus so that it can be more helpful for you to study Geography?

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Appendix 2