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# An examination of the English curriculum in Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges

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## ABSTRACT

This article is premised on the notion that the perceived lack of quality of curriculum delivery in the vocational education sector is probably due in part to a lack of understanding of the nature of knowledge in vocational education. The article outlines the nature of knowledge specified in the subject English offered in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. The study followed the English curriculum message as it starts from the production field, where new ideas are created and modified to the recontextualisation field, where curriculum designers produce written curriculum documents. The findings indicate that the designers of the National Certificate (Vocational) English curriculum followed an outcomes-based approach in its design but that the content knowledge indicated is vague and unspecified. The curriculum cannot provide a basis against which content knowledge can be selected, as it does not give prominence to grounded content knowledge of the subject. Instead, it is more concerned with the competencies of the students. An analysis of this curriculum identifies its strengths and weaknesses and helps to identify gaps in the curriculum design in at least one curriculum in the TVET sector.

## KEYWORDS

*Vocational education, National Certificate (Vocational), official recontextualisation field, pedagogical recontextualisation field, reproduction field, pedagogic device, language teaching approaches*

## **Introduction**

Reform in the vocational education sector is an ongoing process locally and globally regarding the knowledge, skills, infrastructure and pedagogy available to support and offer a curriculum that is relevant to a digitalised industry sector (Tan & Seet, 2020). The transformation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in South Africa has been well documented (Akoojee, Gewer & McGrath, 2005; Wedekind, 2008; 2010; Buthelezi, 2018). TVET in South Africa has its roots in the industrial and apartheid economic era from the 1920s to the 1970s. The history of vocational education in this country dates back to debates on issues of social order, educational inferiority and low intelligence (Badroodien, 2004). After the 1994 democratic elections, renewed enthusiasm on the part of government, researchers and the general population prevailed for giving attention to the technical colleges. These colleges were transformed into vocational education and training institutions (Akoojee et al., 2005; Wedekind, 2008; 2010). In 2007, a new national curriculum, the National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)), was introduced in TVET colleges. One of the aims of this curriculum is to serve and enhance accessibility to predominantly disadvantaged learners, and to alleviate the shortage of skilled workers in South Africa, which must be overcome if the country is to grow economically (Department of Education, 2006). Furthermore, the NC(V) was conceptualised as an alternative route into higher education. This curriculum was introduced in TVET colleges on the assumption that it would improve the quality of skilled and unskilled workers entering industry and thus contribute to a sustainable South African economy. The curriculum is described as vocational, comprising subjects that equip students with the necessary theoretical background and the practical competence to master a particular trade, or a set of technical skills, that will prepare them for employment (Houston, Booysse & Burroughs, 2010). TVET college students are then able to specialise in one of a number of streams: Hospitality, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechatronics, Engineering, Marketing, Finance, Management, Office Administration, Tourism, Information Technology, Agricultural Science, Safety in Society, or Education and Development. In addition, students enrolled for this certificate have to study three compulsory subjects, also known as the 'fundamental subjects': English, Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, and Life Orientation.

This article examines the nature of the knowledge specified in the subject English offered in the NC(V) programmes. It responds to the questions:

- What constitutes the curriculum for NC(V) English?
- What key debates about the teaching of English inform the construction of this curriculum?

English is an important language for learners to master. In South Africa, as in many other countries, English is regarded as a lingua franca, a language of power for use in and beyond the country. As a result, proficiency in English is regarded by many as a gateway to economic empowerment, for both individuals and South Africa as a whole. Moreover, English is the

language of instruction in most schools, colleges and universities, in addition to being regarded as an instrument of communication and the language of production in South Africa. Consequently, if one lacks a command of English, one may be, or at least feel, excluded and disempowered (Alexander, 1989). For Heleta (2018), recent debates about colonial education and knowledge systems support concerns about the dominance of English as a language of instruction in the education system and the way in which such dominance has been used to undermine indigenous languages and maintain structural domination. Most of the students enrolled in the South African TVET colleges study English as a second language (ESL).

Linguists Chomsky, Krashen and Vygotsky and others studied and developed theories that explain the foundation of language teaching approaches which attempt to provide a framework for the teaching of languages such as English in both foreign and second-language contexts (Zhou & Niu, 2015; Matamoros-Gonzalez, Rojas, Romero, Vera-Quinonez & Soto, 2017). In South Africa, little research has been conducted on theories of English in vocational education. An analysis of the component structure of the curriculum for the subject English in TVET seems to be important because the knowledge structure of English has become increasingly unclear. This concern about the need to understand the nature of English is also expressed by Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007), who have enquired into the continuous change in focus of the curriculum for English. They state:

... today, so significant is subject English, [that] success in it is now an important passport to many avenues of privileged life and education. Yet, ironically, given its increased importance, the nature of English is increasingly elusive, its mastery not available to many students ... a powerful invisible pedagogy often applies, such that what is evaluated as success is tacitly understood, rather than clearly articulated (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007:156–157).

This expressed concern means that while English is an important subject from both a political and an economic perspective, its content structure has been contested over the years. This has resulted in an increasing lack of clarity as to which knowledge should be specified in an English subject intended for a TVET context in particular.

This article starts by presenting a review of the literature locating English in Bernstein's (1996; 2000) fields of the pedagogic device. It considers the key debates and approaches in the production and the recontextualisation of the field of English. That is followed by an outline of the research design and the methodology of the enquiry, a thematic discussion of its findings and the implications for ESL development, and, finally, some concluding observations.

### **Locating English in the pedagogic device**

Key debates continue to ask questions about the recontextualisation and the reproduction fields of curricula to explain 'who gets what, and how' (Moore, 2013:154). Success in the

design of a vocational education and training qualification is seen to depend heavily on the nature of the curriculum and also the connectedness of the three parts of the curriculum: theory, practice and work experience (Barnett, 2006; Young, 2009). In order for quality curriculum delivery to be enhanced in vocational education, both curriculum producers and their implementers need a thorough understanding of the nature of vocational educational knowledge (Madileng, 2017). These role-players should understand how the disciplinary knowledge, practical skills and work experience are integrated into a good vocational education programme. They must also understand why and how knowledge is specified in different subjects, the pedagogy of teaching, and the assessment practices in vocational education.

The literature on this topic indicates many ways of analysing and understanding curricula (Moore & Muller, 1999; Gamble, 2006; Wheelahan, 2007). In one such view, Bernstein's (1996; 2000) pedagogic device provides a possible way of understanding a curriculum and suggests tools with which to analyse the curriculum. Bernstein (2000:6) describes a curriculum in terms of knowledge specifications, pedagogy and assessment. He argues that any curriculum is centrally concerned with the nature of knowledge and the way in which such knowledge is presented and assessed, and therefore any curriculum operates according to a set of clear principles (Bernstein, 2000). The pedagogic device explains the different levels at which knowledge is selected and distributed in different social contexts. Bernstein (1996; 2000) uses the pedagogic device to explain the social locations of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge can be authorised and distributed at different levels of power structures. For Bernstein (2000), the pedagogic device is another way to describe the relationship between 'who says it', the 'voice of membership' and 'what is said' – a way of thinking about the way social structures in the pedagogic discourse determine who gets what knowledge, and how they do so. However, the device is not a visible 'object' that we could use to see the conversion process; instead, it describes different levels of power and forms of control in the educational process that regulate the way knowledge is converted at different levels into pedagogic communication. As a result, the power struggle in procedures through which knowledge is recontextualised at different levels is not easy to see or measure (Singh, 2002).

The pedagogic device unpacks procedures through which knowledge is transformed into curricula, syllabi, lesson plans, classroom talk and online communication (Singh, 2002). For Bernstein (2000), the way in which knowledge is distributed by different people at different levels of power, and who should access that knowledge and under what conditions, demonstrates the distributive rules of the pedagogic device. The distributive rules refer to the hierarchical order in the pedagogical process between the producer of knowledge and the 'recontextualiser' of knowledge. This order includes three fields, the second of which is further sub-categorised into two additional sub-fields. The first sub-field is 'the field of production'. This refers to the social processes by which new knowledge, discourses and ideas are created and modified (usually by university academics). The second sub-field, 'the field of recontextualisation', refers to the process of selecting knowledge from the field of production. This process results in the production of pedagogic discourse. The recontextualisation process

is further broken down into the ‘official recontextualisation’ and the ‘pedagogic recontextualisation’ fields. The official recontextualising field refers to the process by which the curriculum designers make selections about the knowledge, pedagogy and assessment that will become part of the official curriculum. In this article, which examines the way knowledge is constructed in the subject English offered in the NC(V) programme at both the official and the pedagogic recontextualisation levels, it is essential to observe which language approaches curriculum designers foregrounded and/or did not prioritise when designing it. The ‘field of reproduction’ refers to the social arena where teachers engage in pedagogic and assessment practices and where evaluative rules regulate what counts as a legitimate production. However, this article does not examine the way in which the NC(V) English curriculum is transformed and implemented in classrooms.

The different social processes described by Bernstein’s pedagogic device clarify:

- the contested space between power sources such as the Department of Education and researchers as curriculum designers;
- the social nature of pedagogic knowledge;
- official and everyday knowledge; and
- the role of teachers as implementers of knowledge in the classroom and students as acquirers of that knowledge (Singh, 2002; Moore, 2013).

The contribution of each social agent in this process depends on aspects such as (but not limited to) their educational backgrounds, sociopolitical backgrounds, language backgrounds, cultural backgrounds and gender. What will finally be selected as knowledge for inclusion in disciplines and subjects, and the ways in which such knowledge is enacted and accessed by students, will depend on the level of power of different social agents involved in the knowledge recontextualisation process in determining what English knowledge is suitable for selection for the curriculum design.

Here English is used as an example to illustrate the nature of the power relations in the educational process. Accordingly, it can be said that in the process of designing the curriculum for English, language policy developers at the government level, curriculum designers and academic researchers exercise their power of authority and forms of control over the educational process of deciding what knowledge to select for inclusion in the subject to be taught.

Bernstein (2000:7) also uses the concept of classification to describe the way in which the content of different subjects is bounded and kept separate or whether the subjects’ content is subordinate to other content and is presented in an integrated form. He maintains that the space between subject boundaries determines whether knowledge is, on the one hand, strongly classified so that a subject is able to maintain its unique identity with its own internal rules and voice or, on the other, whether the space in between content is so closed that the subject loses its power of insulation and runs the risk of losing not only its identity and power, but also its distinct voice.

Strongly classified categories of discourse are those subjects that have strongly insulated knowledge between them. These could be subjects such as Chemistry and Physics. In contrast, subjects that are classified as weakly insulated have less specialised discourses, identities and voices. Bernstein (1996:27) notes that these could be subjects such as Journalism and Languages. The classification principle, whether weak or strong, gives an indication of the way or ways in which one subject may differ from another.

The above discussion shows how knowledge varies within disciplines and subjects. The work of Bernstein (1996; 2000) sheds substantial light on curriculum design processes and different knowledge structures. While no 'ideal' curriculum exists in any subject, a country needs to be clear about the kind of national curriculum it wants, and why. There should be clarity regarding the prescribed nature and emphasis of the elements of a curriculum and the manner in which such a curriculum should be implemented.

One may argue accordingly that too little research has been conducted on theories of English and English teaching in vocational education in the South African TVET context. However, research on the role of English in Anglophone West Africa led to the emergence of the approach labelled 'English for Specific Purposes' (ESP), which displayed links with vocational education or students' jobs (Kennedy & Bolitho, 1990:12). A few studies on English for academic purposes (Balfour, Mitchell, Nchindila, Seligmann & Shober, 2014; Millin, 2015) and English in the workplace (Hill & Van Zyl, 2002; Kekana, 2015), also focusing on the vocational sector, have been conducted locally and globally in recent years. In South Africa, research conducted by Umalusi<sup>1</sup> analysed the content and skills specification of English by comparing the school and the TVET college English curricula. However, the studies did not analyse English in depth according to theories about the body of knowledge in the field of English.

Challenging questions therefore remain:

- Is the NC(V) curriculum for English structured in a way that meets the demands of TVET students, and that satisfies their need to succeed in their learning and live up to the demands of the workplace?
- What constitutes the most appropriate English course for empowering students with the appropriate knowledge and skills demanded by higher and vocational education to prepare them for the workplace?

The selection of the content knowledge and skills that could be included in the curriculum for English depends on, although should not remain limited to, whether the curriculum designers prefer one of two approaches. On the one hand, they could adopt a content-based approach which foregrounds discrete grammar structures and literary studies which involve close readings of literary texts. On the other, they could instead advocate the acquisition of

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<sup>1</sup> Umalusi is the council for quality assurance in General and Further Education and Training, established in terms of the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act No. 58 of 2001.

English as social practice, which foregrounds communicative approaches such as discourse and sociolinguistic competence and multiliteracies (Madileng, 2017). Despite legitimising relations of social order, power relations are never static or stable (Moore, 2013). Rather, they are challenged, contested and negotiated when knowledge is transformed into communication for teaching and learning.

Below is a brief discussion of the teaching and learning approaches that curriculum designers foreground when they select content knowledge and skills for inclusion in the TVET subject English. Examples of specialised knowledges that evolve include approaches to the teaching of English such as ‘basic grammatical skills’, ‘grammatical competence’, ‘discourse competence’, ‘functional language systems’, ‘sociolinguistic competence’, ‘strategic competence’ and ‘multiliteracies’. Contestations between approaches to the teaching of English, however, confirm the development of new knowledges.

### *Content-based language approach*

The basic grammatical skills and the literary studies curriculum approaches are examples of the content-based language approach. Curricula that emphasise the teaching and learning of explicit and clear grammar structures by focusing on isolated and discrete language forms, present teachers with explicit content knowledge to teach in the classroom. Some theorists refer to grammatical structures as ‘basic grammatical skills’ (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007). In this study, the terms ‘grammatical structures’ and ‘basic grammatical skills’ are used interchangeably. Another approach that stresses explicit content knowledge of English is the literary studies approach, which focuses on close readings of literary texts and engagement with the literary canon (Eagleton, 1983). The content-based approach occupies a prominent space in both English as a home language and English as a second language, including writing, reading and speaking, and also in English for academic purposes.

### *Basic grammatical skills and literary study curriculum approaches*

The importance of acquiring discrete English language skills was emphasised in England and Australia in the closing years of the nineteenth century (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007). English as a subject to be taught or learned was focused on teaching basic grammatical skills and grammatical analysis, paraphrasing and the classification of words. For Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007), the design of that curriculum conceptualised the acquisition of English as a matter of mastering basic grammar skills with an emphasis on the visible and explicit pedagogy of literacy skills such as reading and writing. Children would be drilled in such things as phonics, spelling and parts of speech, and be taught to read using a range of graded readers. The study of English was limited to learning basic grammar skills in their narrowest perspective and the pedagogic style used was mainly prescriptive and proscriptive, concentrating on the use of English as a written language (Carter, 1990:70). Composition writing would come only after drills in forming letters and writing sentences (Christie, 1993; Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007).

Even in South Africa, historically, the study of basic grammatical skills was commonplace in curricula for English language learning. This kind of curriculum was introduced for both home-language speakers of English and second-language speakers when English was introduced into schools during the era of missionary education (Madileng, 2017).

Literary studies are also characterised as advocating the learning and use of the explicit content knowledge of English. Advocates of literary studies such as Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) argue for the inclusion of different literary genres such as poetry, drama, short stories and novels in second-language curricula. They argue that engaging with different literary genres enhances the acquisition of English knowledge and skills.

### *Communicative competence approach*

Canale and Swain (1980) built on Hymes' work and proposed a theoretical framework for communicative competence, one that includes four main competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic. These competencies reflect the use of the linguistic system and the functional aspects of communication.

Grammatical competence emphasises mastery of the 'language code' (Canale, 1983:7). This code includes the features and rules of language such as word formation, sentence formation, aspects of pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics. Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007) use the concept of basic grammatical skills to describe a curriculum designed to develop explicit language structures. They argue that a curriculum which describes in its design the acquisition of English as being a matter of mastering basic grammar skills will emphasise the explicit pedagogy of grammar structures such as the alphabet, spelling and parts of speech. Such a pedagogy, according to Christie (1993), although often viewed as conservative, has some merit in that it explicitly identifies spelling and grammar rules and teaches children to read simple texts, while also teaching the parts of speech.

Another competency of the communicative approach is referred to as 'sociolinguistic competence'. This competency focuses primarily on knowing how to use language appropriately in social situations. It includes knowledge of both the sociocultural rules of language use and the rules of discourse (Canale, 1983:7). Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share and the function of their interactions (Savignon, 2002:9). Sociolinguistic competence also emphasises the importance of producing appropriate utterances in different sociolinguistic contexts while considering the 'status of the participants, the purpose of the interaction and norms or conventions of interaction' (Canale, 1983:7). For Canale (1983), sociolinguistic competence – the appropriateness of utterances in actual communication – is as important as the use of correct grammar in an utterance. This competence is therefore crucial to interpreting the social meaning of utterances so far as the function and purpose of such communication and the attitudes of communicators are concerned.

Advocates of the development of sociolinguistic competence in ESL students emphasise the importance of including the principles of communication and aspects of the communication process in the curriculum (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). Hymes (as cited in Canale & Swain, 1980:17) suggests that activities and speech events that emphasise mastery of the rules of language use should be included in the curriculum. Such activities should include identifying the constitutive elements of speech events, such as description of the communication channel and the code used, linguistic description of the message, what the message is all about, the norms of interaction and interpretation, and the genre.

Another competence of the communicative approach is what Canale and Swain (1980) refer to as 'discourse competence'. Discourse competence is concerned not with isolated words or phrases but with the interconnectedness of a series of utterances, written words or phrases to form a meaningful whole text (Savignon, 2002:9). The text might be a poem, an email message, a telephone conversation or a novel. In communication, both the production and the comprehension of a language require the ability to perceive the structures of a discourse. Readers and speakers are also expected to formulate representations of meaning by referring to both previous sentences and those that follow. In both formal and informal discourse, the rules of coherence apply (Savignon, 2002). For Savignon, text coherence occurs when utterances are meaningfully put together in texts, such as those listed above. To achieve discourse competence, writers and speakers need to acquire a large repertoire of structures and discourse markers to express ideas, show relationships in time and indicate cause, contrast and emphasis (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Discourse competence has adopted some characteristics of the concept of 'functional language studies', which has its origins in the work of Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens in the 1960s (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007:182). Halliday's (1975) work focused on the ways in which the grammar of English functions in conveying meaningful messages. The study of functional grammar tries to explain the links between grammar, structure and meaning. Functional language studies adopt a functional orientation that considers language to be a social semiotic involved in the 'negotiation, ordering and structuring of experience' (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007:162). Functional language studies present English in terms of the functions of its systems, dialects and registers and its engagement with different text types or genres.

Strategic competence, also known as pragmatic competence, is another component of the communicative competence approach. Strategic competence enables second-language speakers to use their linguistic resources to convey and interpret meanings in real situations, including situations where they encounter problems due to gaps in their knowledge. Strategic competence focuses on the mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to ensure that a breakdown in communication is avoided. The curriculum includes activities in which students engage in coping strategies that are used in unfamiliar contexts, or those with constraints arising from imperfect knowledge of rules, or situations in which students are able to express aspects of fatigue or distractions (Savignon, 2002:10). Strategies included in

the curriculum relate to grammatical competence: how to paraphrase grammatical forms that one has not mastered and those that relate more to sociolinguistic competence, such as role-playing strategies, or the most appropriate manner in which to address strangers when one is unsure of their social status (Canale & Swain, 1980:30). For Savignon (2002), the effective use of coping strategies is important for communicative competence in all contexts and in most instances their effective use distinguishes highly effective communicators from those who are less able.

In addition to the competencies of the communicative approach, text-based approaches such as multiliteracies and critical language awareness also guide the design of the TVET English curriculum (DHET, 2013:42).

### *Text-based language approaches*

One text-based approach to language teaching and learning is the multiliteracies approach, which incorporates the use of multiple texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) including spoken, written, literary and other multimodal texts such as music, poetry, performance and design. The work of Street (2001) and Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, Kalantzis, Kress, Luke, Luke, Michaels & Nakata (1996) observed uses of literacy in language learning, especially in non-Western societies. These researchers argued that effective literacy teaching is enhanced by an understanding of the range of social practices that determine the choice and use of texts and modes to enhance language development. For Mickan (2017), teaching and learning a language through texts enhances the learners' understanding of language learning as a social practice.

The multiliteracies approach offers a range of verbal and non-verbal readings and subject positions. It is therefore multifaceted and includes not only visual media such as film, images and posters, but also many new literary practices enabled through digital communications media (Warner & Dupuy, 2018). By interacting with each other in social contexts and through the use of social media platforms and other electronic communications such as email, SMS, Twitter and Facebook, such variation has led to the adoption of the term 'multiple literacies' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Debates about the integration of digital technology into vocational education teaching and learning in the South African context are ongoing (Subban, 2018; Douse & Uys, 2019).

Another concept that has emerged in the literature to describe a text-based approach is critical language awareness. Critical language awareness is one of the strategies in language learning that could enhance the development of skills in critical thinking, critical literacy and critical discourse analysis. This strategy treats language learning as a site of struggle (Fairclough, 1992; Janks, 1995) where learners are shown how language positions them and how their language choices are both shaped by conventions and construct their identities. According to Janks (1995), critical language awareness is essential since it concerns itself with the 'politics of meaning'. It focuses on ways in which dominant meanings are maintained, challenged and changed.

Drawing from the discussion above, proponents of the various approaches to teaching and learning propose an integrative curriculum, one with an emphasis on preparing second-language students for effective use of the target language in different contexts. Theorists of ESL teaching and learning put forward strong ideas about these approaches, including the relative importance of the various components.

The component structure of the subject English was therefore investigated in greater depth in relation to the various language approaches in the field. The aim was to provide answers to the questions regarding what researchers and curriculum designers selected for inclusion in the NC(V) English curriculum, what an 'ideal' NC(V) curriculum would be, what the purpose of this curriculum should be, or even why NC(V) students should study English at all.

### **Research design and methodology**

As discussed above, a thorough understanding of the recontextualisation and reproduction fields of the curriculum must include an examination of the pedagogy of teaching and the assessment practices in vocational education. However, this article focuses only on analysing the nature of the subject English offered in the NC(V) programme, as outlined in the curriculum documents.

The NC(V) curriculum for English has been designed by university researchers, teacher-educators and textbook writers in the official recontextualisation field of this pedagogic device. These are representatives of the official texts elaborated on by the Ministry of Basic Education (an agent of the official recontextualisation field). Researchers and teacher educators follow the dictates of curriculum policy as formulated in the official recontextualisation field that has created contestations and controversies over the years. TVET English lecturers, like schoolteachers, are in the reproduction field and regulate pedagogic practice at the classroom level; they are not involved in the process of curriculum design. This study therefore analysed DOE's NC(V) subject, English, with a view to understanding which content knowledge and skills were selected for inclusion in the curriculum.

Document analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:448) was one method used to collect data for this study and article. The data generated were analysed qualitatively (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The English curriculum documents collected for analysis included subject guidelines for Levels 2, 3 and 4 that were prescribed to guide lecturers towards selecting content for teaching.

With its tendency for language to evolve, and considering the contestations about which content knowledge and skills to include in the English curriculum, the English teaching approaches discussed previously shed light on the way in which curriculum designers over time were guided by these approaches in making decisions about what content knowledge

and skills to include in the English curriculum offered in NC(V) programmes. This analysis therefore attempts to respond to these questions: What constitutes the curriculum for English in the NC(V) programme? How can analysis of the contestation between approaches to the teaching of English help one to examine this curriculum? Which versions of the various approaches to the teaching of English can be traced in the English NC(V) curriculum? How does the curriculum make the approach(es) explicit?

### **Analysis of curriculum statements and findings**

The English NC(V) curriculum's design is in the form of a list of outcome statements. The intended curriculum has only one subject outcome per curriculum area, with a few additional learning outcomes. The author attempted to code the intended curriculum using the approaches to the teaching of English advocated by theorists of second-language learning, discussed above. These included the 'content-based approach', the 'language across the curriculum approach' and the 'communicative approach'.

The content-based approaches, such as 'basic grammatical skills' and 'literary studies', display content knowledge such as grammar structures and literary stylistics. The features of these approaches are easily identifiable in outcome statements. However, the communicative approaches seemed to show verticality in their integration, in that competency in one element seemed dependent on the mastery of another. But the characteristics of these elements are underspecified, and they were therefore difficult to operationalise as a coding tool unless they were collapsed.

The author used the following codes to analyse the intended curriculum outcomes: generic (Gen), language structures and conventions (Gram), and literature (Lit). The generic code was used for those outcomes which integrate more than one approach to the teaching of English. For example, this outcome seems to integrate different approaches: *Students demonstrate the ability to find relevant information and details from the text.*

This outcome statement is vague and unspecified. Finding relevant information from (or in) the text might include focusing on the social meanings of the text with regard to the function and purpose of communication, in which case this forms part of sociolinguistic competence. The focus could also be on the cohesiveness of the structure of the text in the form and the coherence in meaning associated with discourse competence. In finding relevant information and details, the focus could also be on strategic competence, which covers the strategic use of words to communicate information. In general, then, the outcome statement seems to integrate more than one approach to the teaching of English and is consequently coded as 'generic' (Gen).

Other outcome statements seemed to denote elements of basic grammatical skills. For example: *Students demonstrate the ability to understand texts by identifying and explaining allusion, idioms and proverbs, denotation and connotation, origins of words, commonly confused words, abbreviations and acronyms.*

The above outcome focuses on teaching basic grammatical skills. The outcome is therefore categorised as ‘language structures and conventions’ (Gram).

The outcomes that denote literary studies were coded as ‘literature’ (Lit). These are outcomes such as the following: *Students demonstrate the ability to read, analyse and evaluate elements of creative texts (short stories).*

The above outcome focuses on a close study of the stylistics of a literary text and on the interpretation of the meaning of texts.

In trying to determine further the ways in which the outcome statements are aligned to approaches to the teaching of English, I focused on Topic 2 (Reading and Viewing) and on all three levels of the NC(V). This topic was selected in the hope that it would reveal an alignment with a variety of the codes used for the analysis and also provide a general view of the component structure of the NC(V) curriculum for English.

Reading and Viewing involves different aspects of language, such as reading to determine meaning from the text, to assess verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, analyse textual features and to assess multimodal forms of communication. The topic therefore embraces varied approaches to the teaching of English which other topics were not able to cover. Levels 2, 3 and 4 of Topic 2 (Reading and Viewing), and Subject Outcome 2.1 in particular, were used as an example to illustrate how the analysis was conducted (Table 1).

As noted in Table 1, of a total of 35 learning outcomes, 28 align to the generic code (Gen), with four outcomes aligned to literary studies (Lit) and three to grammar (Gram). This pattern is mirrored in all the outcomes in the three levels of the NC(V) programme. For example, in Topic 2 (Reading and Viewing), it was noted that:

- of 13 Level 2 outcomes, nine are generic (Gen), with two associated with literary studies (Lit) and two with grammar (Gram);
- in Level 3, eight of the 10 learning outcomes align with the generic code (Gen), with only one outcome each associated with literary studies (Lit) and grammar (Gram);
- in Level 4, out of a total of 12 outcomes, 11 are generic (Gen), with just one outcome aligned with literary studies (Lit); none of the Level 4 outcomes are aligned with grammar (Gram).

The above analysis confirms the dominance of an integrated communicative approach in the curriculum design, with only a few outcomes aligned to the content-based approach.

Few outcomes encapsulate the characteristics of explicit grammar structures, literary studies and critical language awareness.

TABLE 1: Topic 2: Reading and Viewing

	LEVEL 2		LEVEL 3		LEVEL 4	
<b>S.O. 2.1</b>	Read in order to determine meaning and make responses to the intended message		Read in order to determine meaning and make responses to the intended message		Critically read texts in order to infer meaning and make meaningful responses to the intended message	
	LO	Code	LO	Code	LO	Code
	Students demonstrate the ability to: <i>Pre-reading</i> 2.1.1 skim texts to obtain an overview of the text 2.1.2 scan texts to find specific information 2.1.3 make predictions based on questions by the lecturer 2.1.4 re-read texts to confirm information <i>During reading</i> 2.1.5 understand texts at a word level by identifying and using three strategies to determine meaning contexts, dictionary skills, word attack skills like root words, prefixes and suffixes 2.1.6 understand texts by identifying and explaining allusion, idioms and proverbs, denotation and connotation, origins of words, commonly confused words, abbreviations and acronyms 2.1.7 read, analyse and evaluate elements of creative texts (short stories) 2.1.8 find relevant information and details from the text 2.1.9 engage in extended reading for enjoyment <i>Post-reading</i> 2.1.10 demonstrate comprehension by answering questions accurately 2.1.11 summarise texts using visual representations 2.1.12 reproduce some of the text types in their own writing <i>Feedback</i> 2.1.13 respond to feedback to improve their performance	1. Gen 2. Gen 3. Gen 4. Gen 5. Gram 6. Gram 7. Lit 8. Gen 9. Lit 10. Gen 11. Gen 12. Gen 13. Gen	Students demonstrate the ability to: <i>Pre-reading</i> 2.1.1 examine the text thoroughly 2.1.2 predict content based on the title <i>During reading</i> 2.1.3 understand texts at a sentence and paragraph level with attention to the function of language structures and conventions 2.1.4 engage in extended reading for enjoyment <i>Post-reading</i> 2.1.5 distinguish between main and supporting ideas 2.1.6 identify the purpose of the text 2.1.7 demonstrate comprehension by answering questions accurately 2.1.8 create a point-form summary of texts 2.1.9 reproduce the text types in their own writing <i>Feedback</i> 2.1.10 respond to feedback to improve their performance	1. Gen 2. Gen 3. Gram 4. Lit 5. Gen 6. Gen 7. Gen 8. Gen 9. Gen 10. Gen	Students demonstrate the ability to: <i>Pre-reading</i> 2.1.1 examine the text thoroughly 2.1.2 make predictions 2.1.3 identify the purpose of the text <i>During reading</i> 2.1.4 understand texts as a whole 2.1.5 engage in extended reading for enjoyment <i>Post-reading</i> 2.1.6 navigate the internet to access texts regarding current events 2.1.7 answer questions critically and accurately 2.1.8 consider the points of view of more than one source in order to reach a conclusion 2.1.9 justify own opinion with reference to a text 2.1.10 summarise the main points of a written text by writing a precis 2.1.11 reproduce text types in writing <i>Feedback</i> 2.1.12 respond to feedback to improve their performance	1. Gen 2. Gen 3. Gen 4. Gen 5. Lit 6. Gen 7. Gen 8. Gen 9. Gen 10. Gen 11. Gen 12. Gen

In Topic 3 (Writing and Presenting), the NC(V) English curriculum statements state that students are expected to write and present correspondence texts such as letters and reports, and social media texts such as emails and notices, as well as visual descriptions such as mind-maps, timelines, tables and flowcharts. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013:10), the range of written texts produced at Level 2, for example, includes 'visual descriptions; procedural texts; classified and display advertisements; posters; formal letters; research reports; social media texts; social events invitations, and information texts'. The NC(V) English curriculum statements (DHET, 2013:10) also elaborate on the purpose of written activities in that the focus is on ensuring that students use correct language structures, grammar conventions and formats appropriate to social and academic contexts. It states:

Writing tasks in Level 2 focus on the word and sentence levels with emphasis on style, punctuation and spelling and include the following cognitive skills: explain, discuss, differentiate, compare, contrast, to prepare students for using accurate academic language in all required learning activities. (DHET, 2013:10).

The focus on the accuracy of language forms such as punctuation and spelling when engaging in the design and production of written texts is another indication of the alignment with the content-based approach. Moreover, from the curriculum statements it is evident that students of NC(V) English are not expected to produce extended essays such as argumentative or persuasive texts.

The NC(V) English curriculum uses the term 'Language and Communication in Practice' to describe Topic 4. At Level 2, this topic covers the theoretical principles of communication, such as 'principles of effective communication', 'elements of effective communication', 'barriers to effective communication' and 'categories and channels of communication' (DHET, 2013:11). This topic also covers the study and application of language structures and grammar conventions. According to the curriculum statements, the teaching of language should take place in the context of listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing and presenting. The curriculum statement indicates that the process of teaching language in social and academic contexts involves:

the introduction of language structures and grammar conventions of South African English through the texts students are expected to listen to, read and view, and the accurate use of the language structures and conventions in the production of texts through either speaking or writing (DHET, 2013:11–12).

The curriculum presents grammar as a form of language use in the context of language skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. This is aligned to some competencies that make up the communicative language approach: grammar and sociolinguistic competence.

In summary, the above analysis, especially of the subject outcomes of Topic 2 (Reading and Viewing) in the NC(V) English curriculum, confirms the dominance of the integrated

communicative approach in the curriculum design, with a few outcomes aligned to the content-based approach. Few outcomes refer to the characteristics of explicit grammar structures, literary studies and critical language awareness. The dominance of the outcome statements that integrate more than one teaching approach and are therefore coded as 'generic' confirms the integrated nature of the outcomes-based NC(V) English curriculum. Such outcome statements display the opaqueness of the intended English curriculum. A few outcome statements, however, display an alignment with the content-based approach, such as grammar structures, language conventions and literary studies. But in general, the curriculum seems to focus more on what the students can do than on what they know. For Moore and Muller (1999), such knowledge seems to be reduced to a 'voice of membership'. They argue that a curriculum that is guided by what students can do, is also regarded as context-based. Such content is broken into isolated bits of knowledge and is diluted by the context. Context-based curriculum provides students with context-dependent knowledge rather than with a body of knowledge with systems of meaning. Context-dependent approach-designed courses may fail to provide students with access to knowledge that expands their horizons; instead they may only accumulate knowledge that traps them in the world they already know while undermining grounded knowledge of English.

On the other hand, the NC(V) English curriculum claims to prepare students for the world of work by giving them opportunities to practise and model a work environment through simulation. The outcome statements for Level 3 state that at this level the focus is on preparing the students to function well in a workplace context. However, the NC(V) English curriculum design does not follow the approaches proposed by 'English for specific purposes' and 'English for academic purposes', as discussed in the literature – these reveal what English courses that are intended to improve the proficiency essential to enhanced performance in the workplace should look like. In addition, the curriculum does not seem to show consideration of the students' occupational needs, that is, it does not focus on specific skills needed for different jobs that students are trained for, nor does it seem to consider helping students to deal with the technical terms of other content subjects. The students may benefit, though, from being taught highly specialised or technical vocabulary, specific forms and functions, and the way these forms and functions interrelate to produce coherent texts in target situations. These are areas that the current curriculum statements do not cover.

## **Conclusion**

English evolves and there are continuing debates about what content should be selected for inclusion in an ideal English curriculum. The pedagogic device employed in this article helped to shed light on the knowledge structure of the subject English because it provides a way of thinking about how knowledge is produced and the schism between its production and the way it is used in the curriculum through the process of recontextualisation. Understanding the pedagogic device provides some understanding of the way knowledge is selected in the design of the English curriculum. It also offers some appreciation of those

approaches to the teaching of English that are foregrounded and/or backgrounded in its design, and of how other approaches are represented, if at all, in the NC(V) English curriculum.

The findings from this study indicate that the NC(V) English curriculum designers followed an outcomes-based approach in its design. The curriculum does not give prominence to grounded content knowledge of a subject; indeed, it is more concerned with student competencies. This points to the generic nature of this curriculum. Furthermore, the NC(V) English curriculum does not prescribe networks for the NC(V) students nor does it include the production of extended texts such as argumentative and discursive essays. This limits students' opportunities to develop writing and reading skills and to develop their vocabulary – which are essential to academic success and further studies. This article suggests that attempts to improve the quality of TVET education have to involve robust decisions about curriculum policy and also changes to its design based on models suited to the educational, economic and employment needs of students in this sphere in South Africa.

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