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**Students' Agency and Syllabus Design in Teaching Oral Expression
to The Second-Year Students in The ELL Department.**

Dissertation submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Didactics.

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Declaration of Originality

I, CHIKH Khaoula, hereby declare that the thesis titled “Students’ Agency and Syllabus Design in Teaching Oral Expression to the second-year students in the ELL Department” is my work, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree or qualification at this or any other university or institution.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my parents, my first and biggest supporters. I want to thank my mother “ARABI Kheira”, who was always there for me and ready to sacrifice everything for us, and my father “CHIKH Ahmed”, my first love and protector. Second, I want to express my gratitude to my lovely little sisters, my angels, who genuinely care for me, and my brothers, who show their love in their ways. I am also thankful to my friends, whom I have never regretted choosing, and to a special person who always offered help without me even having to ask. Finally, I want to thank the great teachers who supported me throughout my thesis work and helped me fall in love with this language.

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Abstract

The involvement of students' agency in designing oral language syllabi in higher education English language teaching is a crucial aspect that has significant implications for learner engagement and learning outcomes. However, EFL learners often face various challenges in exercising their agency in this process. This thesis explores the impact of involving students' agency in designing oral language syllabi in higher education English language teaching. The research uses surveys and interviews to understand how student input affects engagement and learning outcomes. The findings suggest that empowering students in syllabus design can increase their investment in course content and activities, leading to improved attendance and satisfaction. However, the study also identifies potential challenges, such as differing expectations between students and teachers. For instance, learners may want to focus more on conversational fluency and pronunciation practice, while instructors aim to maintain academic rigour and cover core grammatical and lexical components. Despite these tensions, the thesis provides recommendations for effectively engaging students in the syllabus co-construction process. This includes strategies for balancing student agency with pedagogical expertise to ensure the final syllabus meets both learner needs and institutional standards. Overall, the study highlights the benefits and complexities of empowering EFL students to play an active role in shaping the oral language curriculum.

Keywords: Student agency, Oral language, Syllabus design, Learner engagement, EFL learners.

المخلص

طية في تصميم المناهج اللغوية الشفوية في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في التعليم العالي هي جانب حيوي له آثار كبيرة على العديد من التحديات في ممارسة انخراط المتعلمين ونتائج التعلم. ومع ذلك، يواجه متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية سلطتهم في هذه العملية. تستكشف هذه الأطروحة أثر إشراك الطلاب في تصميم المناهج الدراسية اللغوية الشفوية في تعليم

اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم العالي. تستخدم البحوث استبيانات ومقابلات لفهم كيف يؤثر إدخال الطلاب على الانخراط ونتائج التعلم. تشير النتائج إلى أن تمكين الطلاب في تصميم المناهج الدراسية يمكن أن يزيد من استثماراتهم في محتوى المقرر وأنشطته، مما يؤدي إلى تحسين الحضور والرضا. ومع ذلك، حدد البحث أيضًا تحديات محتملة، مثل اختلاف التوقعات بين الطلاب والمعلمين. على سبيل المثال، قد يرغب المتعلمون في التركيز أكثر على الطلاقة التحوارية وممارسة النطق، بينما يهدف المعلمون إلى الحفاظ على الصرامة الأكاديمية وتغطية المكونات النحوية والمعجمية الأساسية. على الرغم من هذه التوترات، تقدم الأطروحة توصيات لإشراك الطلاب بفعالية في عملية بناء المنهج المشترك. وهذا يتضمن استراتيجيات لموازنة وكالة الطلاب والخبرة التربوية لضمان تلبية المنهج النهائي لاحتياجات المتعلمين ومعايير المؤسسة. بشكل عام، تبرز الدراسة فوائد وتعقيدات تمكين طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من أن يلعبوا دورًا نشطًا في تشكيل المناهج اللغوية الشفوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلاب، اللغة الشفهية، تصميم المنهج الدراسي، مشاركة المتعلمين، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة

أجنبية.

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List of **Acronyms**

EFL: English as a foreign language

ELL: English Learning Learner

CEO: Communication oral expression

General introduction

General Introduction

The traditional approach to developing course curriculums in higher education language teaching has typically been driven by the instructor. However, involving students in the syllabus design process can lead to significant benefits in their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. Educators can foster a sense of ownership and agency, leading to more effective language learning.

This research investigates the role of student involvement in creating and implementing oral language syllabi in higher education English language teaching. Traditionally, course curricula have been developed solely by instructors and academic institutions, with little input from students. However, there is a growing recognition that involving students in the syllabus design process can significantly benefit their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

The main goal of this study is to explore the extent to which students can meaningfully contribute to shaping the syllabi for their oral communication courses. The research examines the factors influencing student participation in this collaborative effort and the strategies teachers use to encourage learner agency. Additionally, the study explores the perceived benefits and potential barriers to effective student involvement in syllabus design.

To achieve these aims, three research questions have been raised as follows:

- 1- What factors influence EFL students' participation in syllabus design, featuring agency?
- 2- What strategies do EFL teachers use to encourage student participation and agency in syllabus design?

- 3- What are the perceived benefits of student involvement in syllabus design for EFL learning outcomes?

To answer these questions, some hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- 1- EFL students' perceived agency in syllabus design is influenced by factors such as their language proficiency, motivation, and prior experiences.
- 2- EFL teachers' use of participatory strategies in syllabus design positively affects student engagement and agency.
- 3- EFL teachers' use of participatory strategies in syllabus design positively affects student engagement and agency.

To address the questions mentioned earlier, a study was carried out at Saida University involving teachers and students. A mixed-method approach was used to gather data, involving interviews with the teachers and the distribution of questionnaires to second-year EFL students. As a result, the data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In the first chapter of this research, a thorough literature review is provided on the key aspects related to student agency in the design of oral language syllabi. It discusses the empowerment of learners to play an active role in shaping the curriculum and explores the challenges faced by EFL students in exercising their agency. The chapter also examines previous studies on student-centred approaches to syllabus co-construction and establishes a framework for the study's exploration of integrating student agency into the design of oral language curricula in higher education. The second chapter of this research reintroduces the core aim, significance, and structure of the study examining student agency in the design of oral language syllabi for second-year EFL learners. This methodological section provides a detailed account of the research process undertaken to fulfil the study's objectives. The chapter outlines the specific

data collection and analysis techniques employed, including survey instruments and interview protocols used to gather insights from the target student population. In the end, the third chapter has analyzed and interpreted the data collected from the target population, providing recommendations to overcome challenges faced by both teachers and students in implementing student agency in oral syllabus design.

CHAPTER ONE

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ORAL SYLLABUS DESIGN AND AGENCY

1. Students' Participation in Oral Syllabus Design and Agency

1.1 Introduction

Among the various aspects of language curriculum design, the degree of student agency and involvement in shaping the syllabus is increasingly recognized as a critical factor.

Traditionally, course curricula in higher education language teaching have been developed solely by instructors and academic institutions, with little input from the students themselves.

However, research suggests that providing learners with opportunities to actively participate in the syllabus design process can significantly enhance their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

1.1.1 EFL Students

EFL is a term used to refer to the teaching of the English language to non-native speakers in countries where English is not the primary language. According to Gürbüz and Cabaroğlu (2021), it involves acquiring and using English when it is not the native language. Nordquist (2020) confirms that EFL entails creating effective language learning courses for learners whose native tongue is not English. Didacticians emphasize instructional methods, resources, and techniques that support language learning in various linguistic and cultural situations.

Kachru (1985) explains that EFL aligns with the expanding circle theory, which divides world English into three circles: the inner circle (English native speakers), the outer circle (nations where English is a second language), and the expanding circle (nations where English is used but not widely spoken).

1.1.2 Participation in Syllabus Design

Student participation in syllabus design is increasingly recognized as essential in learner-centered education. It promotes greater engagement and personalized learning experiences.

Research by Saville, Zinn, Brown, and Marchuk in 2010 shows that involving students in

syllabus design empowers them to take ownership of their learning process, enhances their motivation, and encourages deeper engagement with course material.

This approach is based on educational theories advocating for student agency and active involvement in shaping their educational experiences, as proposed by Freire in 1970 and Vygotsky in 1978. Seeking student input on course content, objectives, and assessment methods allows instructors to customize the syllabus to better meet the diverse needs and interests of their students, as suggested by Darling-Hammond in 2006.

Studies also indicate that student participation in syllabus design fosters a collaborative learning environment, where instructors and students co-create knowledge and share responsibility for the learning process, as highlighted by Bovill & Bulley in 2011 and Bovill et al. in 2015. This collaborative approach not only enhances student engagement but also develops critical thinking skills and promotes a sense of ownership and accountability among learners, as outlined by Cook-Sather et al. in 2014.

Overall, integrating student voices into syllabus design aligns with educational principles of inclusivity, student-centred learning, and educational equity, ultimately contributing to more meaningful and effective educational experiences, as proposed by Laurillard in 2002 and Mercer in 2010. Saville et al. (2010) argue that student participation in syllabus design improves learner engagement and encourages a learner-centred approach.

1.1.3 Featuring Agency

In this context, "agency" refers to the process of empowering students to take an active role in their learning, rather than being passive recipients of information. It means enabling them to be independent, autonomous learners who can make choices and have a say in the design of their syllabus. This concept is important because it makes students feel valued and responsible for their learning.

Huang (2011) argues that agency is crucial in shaping learners' autonomy and identities in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language). It involves the learner's ability to actively participate in their education. An education that focuses on agency, according to Oxford University Press ELT (2021), helps students succeed in the classroom and prepares them for success in the real world. It gives learners the confidence to take control of their education and shape their own lives.

One important aspect of agency is self-efficacy, which greatly impacts how learners approach difficult problems. Students with high self-efficacy are proactive and willing to take risks. Additionally, learners with agency engage with the world around them and actively participate in a lifelong process of learning. The term "featuring agency" in this context highlights the extent to which EFL students actively participate in syllabus design.

1.1.4 Pre-oral expression lesson

This section indicates the study's timeline, focusing on the period preceding the start of oral expression instruction. It aims to understand the level of student involvement in creating the curriculum and their agency before taking part in activities designed to enhance oral expression abilities.

Oxford University Press ELT's (2021) article "An Introduction to Learner Agency" highlights the importance of building curricula with the student as its primary focus. Historically, the learner's voice has been largely left out of the process of developing and implementing curricula. When students are included in the syllabus design process, they are empowered to actively alter their learning experiences. Students are appreciated as co-creators of their education through this inclusion.

The author argues that when students participate in the curriculum-planning process, learning outcomes improve. Students have greater motivation, engagement, and investment in their

learning process when they have agency in creating the curriculum. By ensuring that the syllabus aligns with their needs, interests, and real-world circumstances, student participation ensures that the learning process is more meaningful and lasting.

Pakdaman et al. (2022) emphasise the use of phenomenology research to investigate the benefits of a negotiated syllabus from the perspective of undergraduate students, the results showed that the negotiated syllabus had several benefits, which could be divided into three categories: individual, educational, and psychological. Overall, the negotiated syllabus had a positive impact on students' language proficiency, increased their motivation, decreased their fear, and fostered the development of their critical thinking and learner autonomy.

1.1.5 Social Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory proposed by Jerome Bruner that emerged as a response to behaviourism, aiming to revise and refine some of its fundamental principles. According to Bruner, constructivism is a theory that holds that students create their knowledge and understanding of the world through experiences and active thinking. This stands in opposition to the conventional understanding of learning as the passive assimilation of knowledge.

Expanding on the ideas of constructivism, the notion of social constructivism has gained significant prominence in the field of education, especially in English language learning classes. This approach highlights the importance of social interaction and cooperative learning in the development of language skills, recognizing the close relationship between language acquisition and cultural context. Vygotsky believed that individuals possess both untapped potential and existing abilities, with the latter being developed through guidance from others (Crain, 2005). He stressed the importance of interacting with knowledgeable individuals to enhance learning capacity and argued that cultural language, writings, and ideas play a crucial role in promoting advanced cognitive thinking.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as proposed by Vygotsky, highlights the difference between a learner's present abilities and future abilities when given guidance (Crain, 2005). Using the ZPD, teachers in CEO English lessons determine each student's learning zone and offer structured help, reducing it gradually as students advance. This methodology not only fosters academic advancement but also empowers students to actively participate in their education, thereby fostering a sense of agency and independence.

1.1.6 Linking Agency and Social Constructivism

Students are given the chance to exercise agency by autonomously applying the knowledge and skills they have learned as they progressively require less scaffolding. This aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners develop competence through guided support that diminishes over time (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Bruner's social constructivism theory, language development is heavily influenced by interactions with classmates and teachers (Bruner, 1966). In CEO English classes, this principle is embodied through meaningful communication, discussion, and active involvement, all of which are encouraged to enhance language ability. These practices align with Bruner's assertion that learning is an active, social process.

Deci and Ryan (1995) emphasize the critical importance of supporting people's basic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. CEO English lessons cater to these needs by basing their content on the latest international business news and current events, ensuring students learn relevant and practical English for their daily work. The courses cover engaging stories and current events that impact students, replacing outdated textbooks with an archive of interactive lessons that facilitate practical and relevant learning experiences.

Expert teachers play a crucial role in this framework. Learners can schedule classes with knowledgeable instructors who provide tailored instruction, helping students maintain

motivation and engagement throughout the learning process. Each lesson is distinct, aiming to keep learners' vocabulary and expressions current.

Previous research suggests a strong link between learner agency and social constructivist principles. When the relationship between agency-driven syllabus design and these approaches is examined, it is evident that empowering students to make decisions, set goals, and take control of their educational paths enhances their engagement with the learning process (Simunich, Brooks, & Grincewicz, 2015). This approach is consistent with the social constructivist perspective, which views education as a social process, emphasizing the importance of social interactions, group projects, and knowledge creation within social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research has shown that when students have agency over their education, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with teachers and peers, promoting cooperative knowledge creation (Andrzejewski, 2009). Collaborative knowledge creation, an integral aspect of social constructivism, highlights how social interactions influence people's perceptions of the world (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Experts have noted that agency-driven methods within a social constructivist framework can lead to better learning outcomes. This is because students benefit from the diverse experiences and perspectives of their peers, in addition to actively participating in their education (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Agency-driven syllabus design can improve the depth and complexity of the learning experience by encouraging students to co-construct information through meaningful social interactions. This collaborative approach leads to a more thorough understanding of the subject matter (Bruner, 1966).

1.1.7 Cognition vs. Collective Meaning-Making

Social constructivism places more emphasis on individual cognition, while social constructionism focuses on collective meaning-making. For example, let's consider something simple like a cup. The shape of a cup suggests its function of holding liquids, and this understanding is influenced by social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In an online course, expectations are shaped by software tools and individual behaviour is influenced by group activities and texts (Jones & Asensio, 2001). Social constructivism extends constructivism by highlighting interaction over mere observation, and it sees education as a way to become part of a community of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978)

1.1.8 Learner Agency and Social Constructivism

Social constructivism focuses more on individual cognition, while social constructionism emphasizes collective meaning-making. For instance, consider a commonplace item such as a cup. Its form implies its function of holding liquids, a comprehension shaped by social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In an online course, expectations are shaped by software tools and individual behaviour is influenced by group activities and texts (Jones & Asensio, 2001). Social constructivism builds on constructivism by emphasizing interaction over mere observation, viewing education as a means of becoming part of a community of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

Learner agency and social constructivism converge through social interactions, context, and active student involvement. Designing a syllabus with a focus on learner agency aligns with the dynamic and socially negotiated nature of education. When students are involved in the creation of their learning experiences, they engage more deeply and meaningfully with the material and with each other (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a theoretical framework for understanding this process by emphasizing the importance of supporting individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, when these needs are met, learners are more likely to be motivated and engaged (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

design highlights the importance of active construction, cognition, and collective meaning-making. This approach not only fosters individual learning but also builds a community of learners who collaboratively create and share knowledge. By emphasizing interaction, social context, and active participation, education becomes a process of social negotiation, mirroring the real-world processes of knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

1.2 EFL Students' Participation in Syllabus Design

1.2.1 Transition to Learner-Centered Syllabus Design

In the past, the traditional approach to designing a syllabus was a top-down hierarchical structure where teachers held full responsibility for the educational system. This meant that they prescribed a fixed curriculum and determined the course content, objectives, and methods. These curricula prioritized specific learning objectives and were content-driven and teacher-centric, often focusing on grammar rules, vocabulary, and certain language abilities. There was little opportunity for student input or customization, as the entire process was led by the instructor's competence, resulting in passive students (Nunan, 1988).

However, educational paradigms have changed over time, and individualized learning and learner agency have become increasingly important. Emerging learner-centred models prioritize adaptability, student agency, and participation. The goal of these strategies is to match educational opportunities to students' needs, interests, and learning preferences. Over the years, various educational concepts and research have highlighted the advantages of giving students more control over their learning process. According to Dörnyei and Csizér

(2002), when students are involved in shaping their learning path, it leads to an increase in motivation. Their study found that student engagement has a positive correlation with motivation. Nunan (1988) stresses the importance of using materials that are relevant to the student's context, emphasizing that student participation ensures that the information is tailored to their needs and interests. Lastly, Breen and Littlejohn (2000) state that syllabus discussions help students develop critical thinking skills by allowing them to assess their own learning goals and methods.

As a result, the design of modern curricula now reflects the principles of learner-centred education, with an emphasis on fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-directed learning skills among students. The transition to a learner-centred syllabus design signifies a shift from a prescriptive educational model to one that is more collaborative and responsive to students' needs. This approach not only enhances motivation and engagement but also empowers students to take an active role in their education, promoting lifelong learning and personal growth (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000).

1.2.2 Benefits of Student Involvement

Involving students in the creation of the syllabus can significantly enhance their learning experience. Research by Breen and Littlejohn (2000) found that discussing the syllabus helps students develop critical thinking skills and improves their ability to assess their own educational goals and strategies. When students provide feedback on course material, it ensures that the subject matter aligns with their unique needs and interests, resulting in a more relevant and engaging educational experience.

Dörnyei and Csizér's (2002) research demonstrated that students are more motivated and engaged when they have a say in how their learning is shaped. This highlights the importance

of including student input in the creation of the syllabus to foster motivation, a sense of ownership over the learning process, and improved critical thinking abilities.

Student involvement in syllabus design has also been associated with enhanced academic performance. When students actively contribute to shaping the course content, they experience a heightened sense of ownership and motivation to excel. Smith and MacGregor (1992) observed that students who had input into their syllabi demonstrated better comprehension of course objectives and achieved improved performance in assessments. Involving students in syllabus design ensures that the content resonates with their interests, needs, and real-world context.

Hutchings and O'Rourke (2009) demonstrated that courses co-designed by students were more relevant and applicable to their lives, leading to deeper learning experiences.

Participating in syllabus design empowers students and fosters a sense of agency. Bovill and Bulley (2011) found that students who co-created their syllabi felt more in control of their learning journey, positively impacting their motivation and commitment to the course.

Collaborating on syllabus design encourages communication between students and instructors, promoting transparency and mutual understanding. Weimer (2013) highlighted that discussing learning objectives, assessment methods, and expectations during syllabus creation contributes to a positive learning environment.

1.2.3 Challenges and Barriers Faced by EFL Students in the Design Process

EFL students may encounter several difficulties when participating in creating the syllabus. Language competence issues can make it challenging for individuals to communicate their preferences and concerns in a second language. Cultural differences and a lack of familiarity with the school system may also prevent them from actively participating. Additional support

and guidance may be required for EFL students to complete the syllabus creation process effectively (Islam & Mares, 2003).

These difficulties underscore the importance of providing EFL students with sufficient tools and assistance to contribute significantly to the creation of the syllabus. Beyond language skills, lack of experience with the educational system, and cultural disparities, EFL students might face self-assurance issues when voicing their thoughts and concerns in a second language. Further impediments to their active involvement in the syllabus design process may come from the complexity of academic jargon and foreign language teaching techniques (Tomlinson, 1998).

Additional challenges could arise from the differences between the learners' local educational system and the system they are currently studying, regarding learning styles and educational expectations. These complex challenges highlight the need for specialized assistance and materials to enable EFL students' meaningful participation in the syllabus creation process (Nunan, 1988). The lack of authentic materials and opportunities for learner interaction can also present obstacles for students participating in the design process. Tomlinson (1998) emphasizes the importance of including authentic materials that reflect real-life contexts and promote learner engagement. Islam and Mares (2003), who point out issues such as the order of contents, the language used, and the presentation techniques, also note difficulties with the organization and presentation of materials

1.3 Agency in Syllabus Design

1.3.1 Empowering Learners

Using an agency-driven syllabus design empowers learners by allowing them to actively participate in determining how they learn. This approach provides students with a sense of autonomy and ownership over their education, as they can contribute to decisions regarding

the goals, content, and methods of assessment. Social constructivist theories, which emphasize the value of social interactions, context, and active student participation in the learning process, support this approach (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, research by Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) highlights the positive effects of student agency on the learning process, showing that students who are actively involved in creating their learning paths are more motivated and engaged.

According to studies, agency-driven syllabus design fosters critical thinking abilities in students by having them assess their learning objectives and approaches (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). This leads to a deeper and more purposeful learning experience. By embracing diverse viewpoints and personalized learning opportunities, these strategies create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment for all students. Thoughtful design choices and supportive teaching strategies play a crucial role in guiding learners effectively within this framework.

Moreover, learner agency allows students to take an active role in shaping their learning experiences, enabling them to pursue self-directed actions and find personal relevance in their academic endeavours. In personalized learning environments (PLEs), students play a key role in determining the what and how of their learning, co-designing their educational experiences, and transcending predefined online environments.

1.3.2 Collaborative Decision-Making

Collaborating with students to involve them in syllabus decisions can lead to a more engaging and effective learning experience. One way to achieve this is by conducting a needs analysis, which involves collecting feedback from students about their learning preferences, goals, and interests. This information can be used to develop course content and objectives that align with students' needs. Seeking feedback from students throughout the course and incorporating their suggestions into the syllabus can also enhance its relevance and effectiveness.

Another approach is co-creation, where students actively participate in designing the syllabus, contributing ideas and preferences in collaboration with the instructor. This not only empowers students by giving them a voice in their education but also ensures that the syllabus reflects their diverse perspectives and interests.

To empower students, teachers should provide them with a voice and choices in their educational journeys, allowing for personalized learning experiences. Involving students from the beginning is crucial, as their input can inform expectations, preferred methods of learning, and interesting subjects. Transparent policies, explaining course rules in detail, and allowing students to participate in decisions about late submissions, attendance, and grading, are also important. Encouraging diversified teams for decision-making and creating environments that welcome dissent and diverse perspectives through open debate can promote the exchange of viewpoints. Finding shared objectives that serve the interests of all concerned parties is also key.

To equip students with critical thinking abilities, teachers should encourage analytical thinking and urge them to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various solutions. Moral thinking should also be encouraged in addition to personal convictions. Positive risk-taking should be motivated, stressing the benefits of exploring new subjects or strategies and moving beyond one's comfort zone. Frank discussions on syllabus decisions should be held with students, and their opinions on the syllabus, evaluation procedures, and timetable should be sought.

Cook-Sather (2014) highlights student-faculty collaborations in “Student-Faculty Partnership in Explorations of Pedagogical Practice: A Threshold Concept in Academic Development.” When teachers engage students in syllabus design, it promotes agency and shared responsibility. Such partnerships enhance the learning environment. Cook-Sather, Felten, and

Bovill (2011) investigate the role that students play in co-creation. Including students in the creation of the syllabus acknowledges their autonomy and fosters a more student-centred learning environment.

1.4 Oral Expression Lessons and Agency

1.4.1 Pre-Oral Expression Phase

The agency of students during the pre-oral expression phase significantly influences the syllabus of a course. Instructors can enhance the connection between the material and activities with students' interests, needs, and competence levels by gathering feedback and preferences from students during the syllabus-building process.

To boost students' enthusiasm and engagement in oral expression sessions, instructors can allow them to voice their preferences for discussion topics, speaking exercises, and educational materials. Research indicates that giving students a voice in their learning process increases their motivation and fosters a stronger sense of ownership over their education (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002).

Moreover, collaborative syllabus development encourages active student participation in their education and creates an inclusive and participatory learning environment. This fosters student agency and ensures that the syllabus is better tailored to the diverse needs and interests of the students, ultimately enhancing the efficacy of oral expression courses.

To effectively prepare students for oral communication tasks, their agency must be considered throughout the pre-oral expression period. Teachers can gain a better understanding of students' interests, language skills, and learning objectives by involving them in the syllabus design process. This personalized and student-centred approach allows students to express their preferences for discussion topics, speaking assignments, and real-world communication scenarios, leading to increased engagement in the learning process.

Integrating student feedback and ideas into syllabus-building results in a more meaningful and relevant learning experience, tailored to each student's unique needs and interests. This collaborative approach not only promotes empowerment and autonomy but also ensures that the curriculum meets the various language and communication demands of the students, enhancing the efficiency of the pre-oral expression stage of language learning.

Studies have shown that when students are actively involved in shaping their learning experiences, it leads to increased motivation and engagement (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002).

Integrating students' preferences and interests into syllabus design enhances their sense of ownership and commitment to the learning process, resulting in improved language proficiency and communication skills. Additionally, research on learner autonomy and self-directed learning highlights the importance of engaging students in decision-making processes, fostering deeper involvement and a personalized learning experience (Benson, 2001). These findings support the notion that students' agency in syllabus design before oral expression lessons positively impacts their language learning and oral communication abilities.

1.4.2 Student's Voice and Balancing Agency with Curriculum Constraints

Valuing Student Input

A successful learning environment prioritizes the opinions and preferences of students. Research by Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) shows that students are more motivated and take greater responsibility for their education when their opinions are valued. Similarly, Benson's (2001) study underscores the importance of integrating students' interests and preferences into the educational process to enhance engagement and investment in learning. Education studies, such as those by Freire (1970), emphasize the significance of valuing student voices in establishing inclusive and equitable learning environments, that benefit all students. Teachers

can customize teaching techniques to cater to diverse needs and interests by considering students' views and preferences, fostering a purposeful and efficient learning atmosphere.

Elevating Student Voice

Educational leaders should actively listen to student feedback, collaborate with students to develop educational experiences, and value student input in decision-making processes, as highlighted in the book "Engaging Student Voices in Higher Education: Diverse Perspectives and Expectations in Partnership." This approach emphasizes the valuable insights students' perceptions offer, enhancing engagement with the material. Elevating student voice as a learning goal promotes participation in advocacy, research, policymaking, storytelling, and leadership roles in higher education, highlighting the need to integrate student feedback across various activities

Balancing Agency and Curriculum Constraints

Implementing curriculum-restricted student-driven reforms poses challenges in balancing student input with meeting academic requirements and covering mandatory content. It's crucial to integrate student-driven changes while addressing essential learning objectives, which require thorough planning and design. Logistical considerations, such as time constraints and adherence to curricular frameworks, may limit the extent of student-driven changes. Overcoming resistance from traditional educational structures and processes to student-driven initiatives requires negotiating institutional expectations and creating space for student agency in the curriculum. Providing adequate support and resources for meaningful student involvement necessitates reevaluating power dynamics and pedagogical approaches within current institutional frameworks. Educators must carefully plan and balance student agency with curricular constraints to deliver a meaningful and engaging learning experience that meets academic standards and student needs effectively.

1.5 Overcoming Challenges

1.5.1 Teacher Roles in Facilitating Student Agency

Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating student agency during syllabus design by creating opportunities for meaningful student involvement and empowerment. Firstly, they can act as facilitators, providing direction and encouragement while students participate in decision-making. Teachers foster a collaborative environment where students feel valued by promoting open communication and actively listening to their perspectives. They also act as mentors, guiding students through syllabus creation challenges and ensuring that student-driven modifications align with academic goals.

Additionally, teachers can advocate for student agency within the school by emphasizing the value of including student opinions and preferences in the syllabus design process.

Encouraging students to take charge of their education fosters critical thinking, and decision-making skills, and increases enthusiasm and engagement. Herrington and Oliver (2000) suggest a shift towards constructivist frameworks and authentic learning experiences, which aligns with empowering students in the educational process. Reeve (2013) introduces the concept of "agentic engagement," where learners actively shape their education, highlighting the importance of instructors supporting students in this endeavour.

1.5.2 Training and Support for Teachers

Enhancing teachers' ability to create inclusive and participatory learning environments requires comprehensive training strategies. Professional development programs can train teachers in student-centred instructional methods like project-based learning, cooperative learning, and differentiated instruction, encouraging active student participation. Continuous coaching and mentoring provide personalized support to teachers in implementing these strategies effectively.

Providing teachers with access to tools and resources such as formative assessment techniques, diverse learning materials, and technology integration further promotes student engagement. Encouraging a collaborative culture among educators fosters the exchange of best practices and insights on student involvement, creating a supportive professional community.

By implementing these approaches, educators can enhance their capacity to engage students effectively, resulting in a more impactful and enriching learning environment that prioritizes student agency and empowerment.

Implementing these strategies indeed offers a comprehensive framework for enhancing student engagement and learning in the classroom. Aligning goals with student needs, setting clear objectives, and addressing both surface and deep learning can create a more personalized and impactful learning experience. Active learning strategies, such as promoting student voice and choice, seeking feedback, and encouraging self-evaluation, are in line with principles of student agency and empowerment, fostering ownership and investment in learning. Incorporating high-impact practices like formative assessment, peer teaching, and timely feedback further supports student engagement and learning outcomes.

By implementing these strategies, educators can cultivate an inclusive, participatory, and effective learning environment that caters to diverse student needs and promotes meaningful engagement. A recent qualitative study conducted at Perines (2021), a public university in Chile, explored teacher students' opinions on research training and recommendations for improvements. The study revealed students' negative perceptions of their training due to limited involvement in research activities and disjointed research-related courses. To enhance their training, students suggested offering a research-related course annually, having researchers teach courses, and increasing the visibility of educational research conducted

within the university. This study underscores the importance of encouraging participation in educational research and calls for a broader perspective among university teacher educators and the academic community. Incorporating such insights can contribute to more effective teacher training programs and ultimately enhance the quality of education.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the theoretical underpinnings of student agency within the context of oral syllabus design. It provided an introductory glimpse into the concept of student agency and its pivotal role in shaping educational practices. The correlation between learner autonomy and effective language learning was explored, underscoring the importance of empowering students to actively participate in their learning journey. Moreover, the chapter examined various models and frameworks that promote student-centred approaches in syllabus design, highlighting their applicability and benefits in fostering a more engaging and personalized learning environment. By synthesizing these insights, the chapter contributes to the discourse on enhancing educational outcomes through the integration of student agency in oral syllabus design.

CHAPTER TWO

**EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF EFL STUDENTS'
PARTICIPATION IN SYLLABUS DESIGN FEATURING
AGENCY**

2. Exploring the Extent of EFL Students' Participation in Syllabus Design

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the theoretical part of this work. The current chapter is devoted to the practical part of the study. It aims to give a thorough description of the research methodology used. First, the chapter aims to describe the picked population who contributes to fulfilling this research. Besides, it presents the research tools that have been followed to accomplish this academic undertaking. Finally, the chapter illustrates the limitations that obstruct the researcher during her research journey along with the ethical issues that need to be respected.

2.2 Research Design and Methodology

The current study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods while addressing their respective limitations. By integrating techniques such as surveys and interviews, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research issue, thus enhancing the credibility and dependability of the findings. Additionally, the mixed-methods approach allows for a more thorough and nuanced analysis of a broader range of research issues by examining general patterns and trends alongside specific areas of the research topic.

Quantitative data involves measuring and analyzing numerical values within a larger population. On the other hand, qualitative data offers detailed insights into human behaviour and experiences. These two methods complement each other, and when combined, they can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and more nuanced conclusions. Researchers can enhance the validity and reliability of their study conclusions through this combination.

John W. Creswell, a prominent researcher in research methodology, emphasizes the complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative methods, highlighting the value of utilizing mixed methods to leverage the strengths of both approaches. Creswell's work supports the notion that integrating both types of data enables researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic, resulting in more robust and nuanced findings.

To deliver effective language instruction, teachers must possess a profound understanding of the experiences of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. This understanding empowers teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of their EFL students. By gaining insight into the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and challenges that EFL students encounter, teachers can create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment that promotes motivation, engagement, and language acquisition. Additionally, by being mindful of students' experiences, teachers can identify any learning barriers and develop targeted support plans that foster academic success and personal growth.

2.3 The Population

The study population encompasses second-year university students who have advanced beyond the foundational preparatory phase during their initial year of academic study. The focus of the investigation centres on their engagement with the oral syllabus, as this particular cohort is perceived to demonstrate a heightened level of maturity and readiness for active participation in the learning process. Given their familiarity with the academic module and the expectations of university-level coursework, these students are deemed to possess the requisite experience and knowledge to effectively assume the role of active agents in their educational journey. This level of familiarity and maturity is expected to contribute to a more

participatory and engaged learning environment, allowing for a deeper exploration of the oral syllabus and fostering a sense of ownership and autonomy among the student cohort.

2.4 Data Collection

Comprehensive data collection is paramount in this study, which employs a mixed-methods approach to gain a multifaceted understanding of second-year university students' experiences and engagement with the oral syllabus. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, will offer in-depth insights into the nuances of students' perspectives, while quantitative data from surveys will identify broader patterns and trends. Integrating these complementary sources will bolster the validity and reliability of the findings, informing more effective language education strategies.

2.5 Questionnaire

As a quantitative data-gathering tool, the questionnaire utilized in this study holds significant importance. By collecting numerical data from a broader sample of second-year university students, the questionnaire enables researchers to discern statistical linkages, trends, and patterns within the student body. Concerning the oral syllabus, students' attitudes, motivations, and self-reported competency levels can all be understood through these quantitative data points. The information derived from the questionnaire can aid in identifying curricular strengths and potential areas for improvement, thus facilitating the development of more specialized and efficient language teaching methods. The questionnaire's standardization ensures uniformity in data collection, enabling researchers to draw conclusions applicable to a broader student population and make insightful comparisons.

2.6 Interviews

This research project involves conducting interviews with teaching staff to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics surrounding the oral syllabus. By adopting a

multi-stakeholder approach, the study aims to examine the perspectives of teachers who are directly involved in implementing and delivering the oral language curriculum. These conversations provide insights into teachers' perceptions, teaching strategies, and the challenges they face in engaging students. The qualitative data collected from these interviews can help identify potential areas for professional development and resource allocation. Additionally, it can shed light on the pedagogical approaches that may impact students' learning experiences.

2.7 Limitations of the Study

Undoubtedly, the research journey is filled with stumbling blocks, which can make the research process daunting for the investigator who seeks knowledge. According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), a limitation is a constraint that is largely beyond the researcher's control.

Like any researcher, the researcher of this study faced some obstacles in her journey. On one hand, most studies on the subject matter are old, and recent studies are somewhat limited, especially in Algeria. On the other hand, the process of gathering data was difficult for the researcher due to the new system imposed on the student's absences. Therefore, the researcher faced the challenge of balancing her studies and collecting data from second-year students, who were her target population.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter underscores the importance of using a mixed-methods approach in the current study to gain a better understanding of second-year university students' experiences and engagement with the oral syllabus. By combining quantitative data from the questionnaire with qualitative insights from interviews with students and teachers, a comprehensive

perspective can be obtained. This approach allows for the investigation of complex lived experiences and the discovery of patterns and trends.

CHAPTER THREE
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher outlined the research methodology used. This chapter will analyse and interpret the data collected to address the primary research question: To what extent do EFL students participate in syllabus design, featuring agency, before starting oral expression lessons with their teachers?

The data for this study was gathered using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component involved administering surveys to both students and instructors to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding student agency in the oral syllabus design process. The qualitative data was obtained through focus group discussions and individual interviews, providing deeper insights into the nuances and complexities surrounding student participation. The first part has an analytical aim, as it is intended to analyze and interpret the data collected from the student questionnaire and the teachers' interviews. The second part is suggestive, aiming to provide recommendations related to the subject matter.

3.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The results of this investigation will be analysed statistically and qualitatively. The teachers' interview will be performed qualitatively, while the students' questionnaire will be answered numerically.

3.2.1 Student's Questionnaire

Section One: General Information

Question one: What is your age?

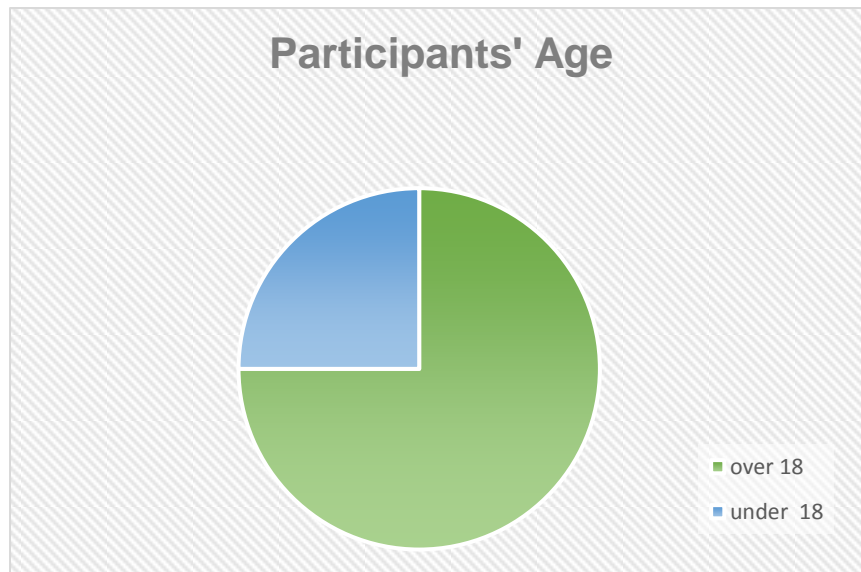


Figure 3.1 Students' Age

This pie chart illustrates the age distribution of the participants. The findings indicate that 75% of the participants, 45 out of 60 students, are over 18 years old. Conversely, 25% of the participants, 15 students, are under 18.

Question Two: What is your gender?

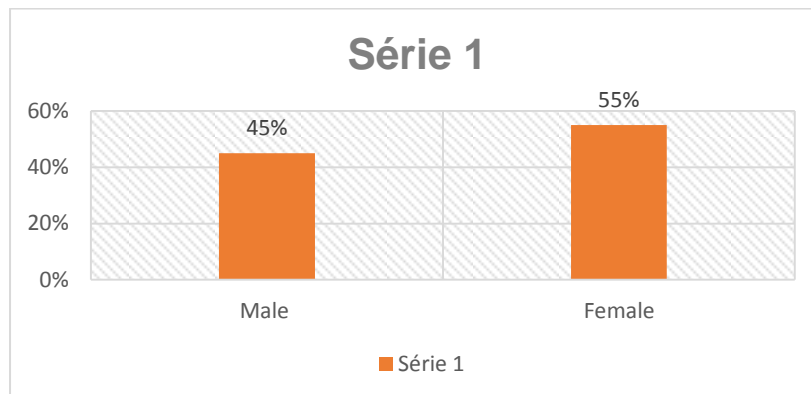


Figure 3.2. Participants' Gender

The chart above illustrates the gender distribution of the participants. It indicates that 55% of the participants are female, comprising 33 individuals. The remaining 45% of the participants are male. This suggests that females were more cooperative with the researcher than males.

Section Two: Student Agency

Question three: On a scale of 1-5, how much control do you feel over your learning outcomes?

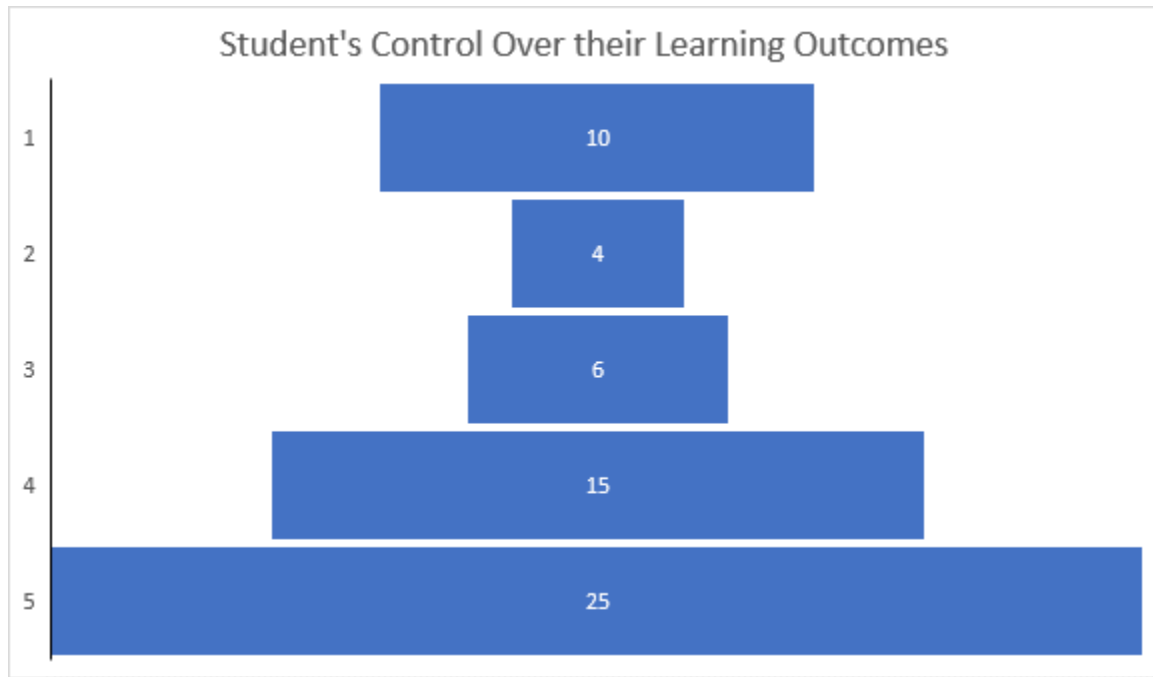


Figure 3.3. Students' control over their learning outcomes

The diagram depicted the students' perceptions of their control over their learning outcomes. Out of the 60 participants surveyed, 10 students felt they had little control (1 out of 5), 4 felt limited control (2 out of 5), 6 felt moderate control (3 out of 5), 15 felt strong control (4 out of 5), and 25 felt significant control (5 out of 5). Overall, there was a prevailing sense of agency and self-direction in their educational experiences.

Question Four: How often do you set learning goals for yourself?

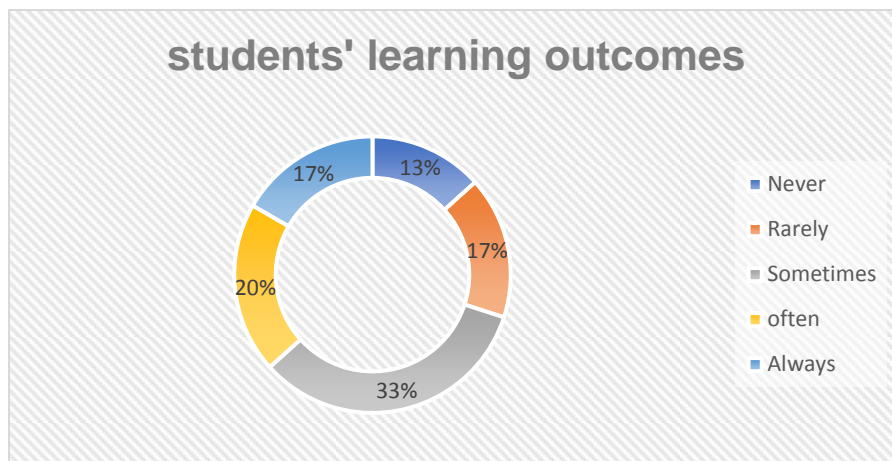


Figure 3.4. students' learning goals

The chart above shows how often 60 students set their own learning goals. At the lower end, 8 students "Never" and 10 "Rarely" set goals, indicating that a minority lacked active goal-setting. In the middle, 20 students "Sometimes" set goals, showing inconsistent practices. However, 12 students "Often" and 10 "Always" set goals, demonstrating that over a third regularly took an active role in determining their academic trajectories. The data highlights the range of student agency and self-direction within this educational context.

Question Five: What motivates you the most in your studies?

Answers	Number of students
Personal interest in the subject	20
Desire to achieve high grades	10
Future career prospects	25
Other	5

Table 3.1. The key motivating factors

The table displays the motivating factors for 60 students in their studies. 25 students cited "Future career prospects" as their main motivator, while 20 chose "Personal interest in the subject." Additionally, 10 selected "Desire to achieve high grades," and 5 chose "Other" motivators, suggesting context-specific factors shaping their educational pursuits.

Question Six: On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your overall motivation in your CEO classes?

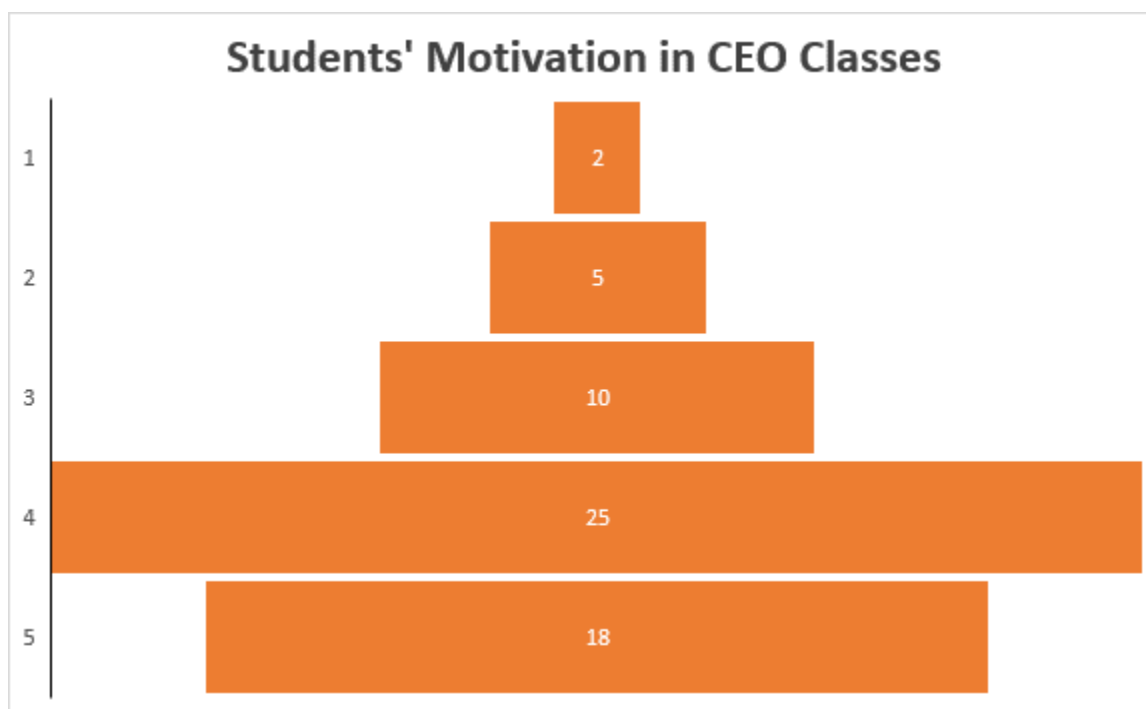


Figure 3.5. Students' motivation in CEO classes

The chart depicts the motivation levels of 60 students enrolled in CEO classes, rated on a scale of 1 to 5. Two students rated their motivation as 1 out of 5, while five students rated it as 2 out of 5. Ten students rated their motivation as 3 out of 5. The majority, 25 students, rated their motivation as 4 out of 5. Additionally, 18 students gave the highest rating of 5 out of 5. This data indicates that the CEO classes are effectively engaging and motivating most of the students, with a significant proportion experiencing high levels of motivation.

Question Seven: Can you share an experience where you felt highly motivated to learn?

Many participants shared their experiences. These experiences can be summarised as follows:

- Achieving high grades
- Teacher's positive feedback
- Sense of accomplishment

- Peer influence and social belonging
- Family support

Section Three: Syllabus Design

Question Eight: How satisfied are you with the current syllabus design in your CEO classes?

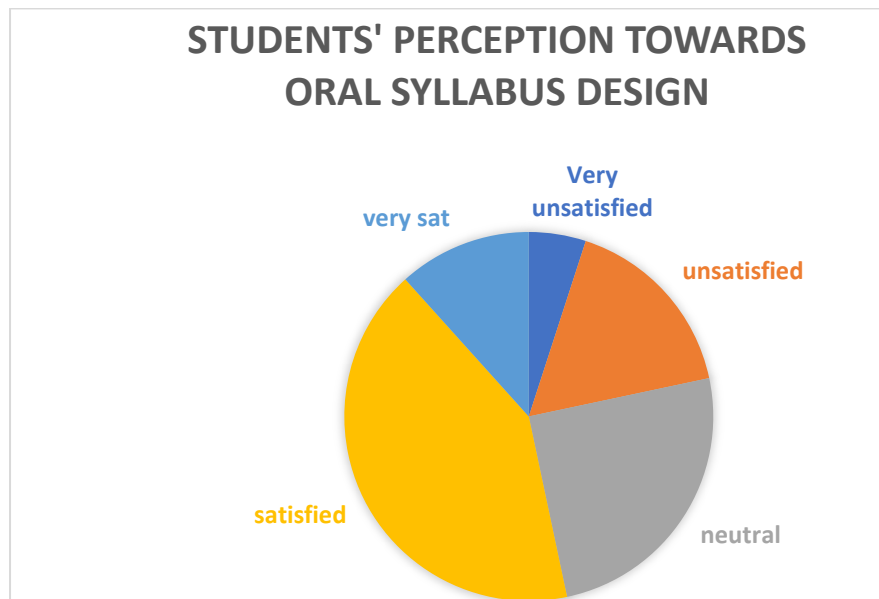


Figure 3.6. Students' Perceptions Towards Oral Syllabus Design

The pie chart provided depicts the distribution of students' perceptions regarding the oral syllabus design. Out of the total surveyed students, 3 expressed being very unsatisfied, 10 were unsatisfied, 15 had a neutral stance, 25 were satisfied, and the remaining 7 reported being very satisfied with the oral syllabus design.

Question Nine: Rank the following syllabus components in order of importance to you:

- Course objectives
- Learning activities
- Assessment method
- Reading materials

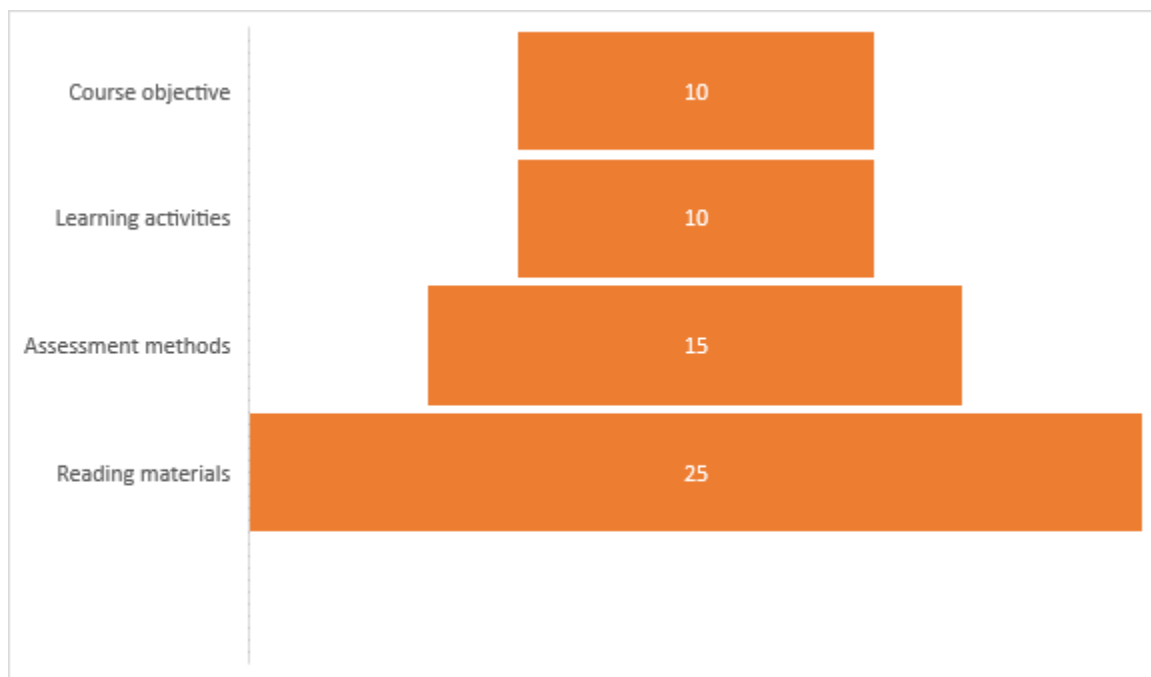


Figure 3.7. Syllabus Components

The graph provides insights into students' perceptions of the relative importance of syllabus components in the CEO classes. This data offers a detailed understanding of the students' priorities. According to the information, 25 students considered the reading materials as the most important aspect, while 15 students ranked assessment methods as the most crucial element. Interestingly, 10 students identified learning objectives as the most important, and another 10 placed the highest importance on course objectives. This distribution suggests diverse student preferences regarding the syllabus. The varied perspectives underscore the need for a multifaceted approach to curriculum design. Incorporating this data-driven understanding can enhance the overall effectiveness and engagement of the CEO classes.

Question Ten: In your opinion what could be improved in the syllabus to support students' better agency?

Many participants added their opinions towards improving the syllabus to support students' better agency, these opinions can be summarised as follows:

- Allow students to have a greater say in the selection of reading materials or provide a curated list of options that cater to diverse interests.
- Offer students the flexibility to choose assessment methods that align with their learning styles and preferences, such as projects, presentations, or written assignments.
- Involve students in the process of setting learning objectives or course objectives, giving them a sense of ownership over their educational goals.
- Encourage students to take an active role in their learning, such as by designing their projects or conducting independent research.
- Provide resources and support that enable students to take ownership of their learning journey and develop essential self-regulation skills.

Question Eleven: What changes would you suggest for the syllabus design based on your learning preferences?

- I think we need more choice and flexibility in the syllabus. It feels one-size-fits-all now, and I'd love to customize my learning experience more. Being able to choose from various reading materials or assessment options that align with my interests and strengths would keep me engaged and motivated.
- Transparency is crucial to me regarding the syllabus. I want to understand how each component is designed to help me develop the skills and knowledge I'll need as a CEO. Having open discussions about the reasoning behind the syllabus choices would empower me to take an active role in my learning.
- Integrating real-world experiences into the syllabus would be a game-changer. I'd love the opportunity to apply business concepts through case studies, simulations, or site visits to local companies. This kind of interactive learning would better prepare me for the realities of the CEO role.

- I believe we need more opportunities for self-directed learning in the curriculum.
Dedicated time for research projects and business proposals would be empowering.
- Regularly gathering student feedback is crucial for refining the syllabus to align with our evolving needs and preferences.

3.2.2 Teachers' Question

Section One: Demographic Information

Question One: what is your role in EFL education?

EFL Teacher

EFL Curriculum Developer

EFL Program Administrator

Other (please specify)

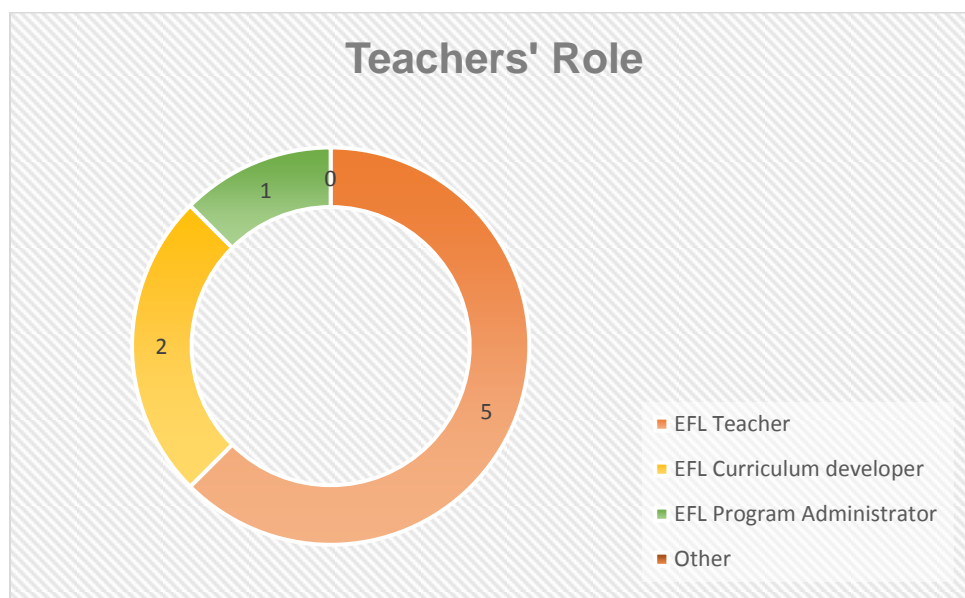


Figure 3.8. Teachers' Role

The pie chart displays the distribution of teacher roles in the EFL program based on the responses of eight participating teachers. According to the data, one teacher is an EFL program administrator, two are EFL curriculum developers, and five are EFL teachers. Understanding the composition of the teaching team is valuable for informed decision-making and continuous improvement efforts within the EFL program.

Question Two: How many years of experience do you have in EFL education?

Less than 1 year

1-5 years

6-10 years

More than 10 years

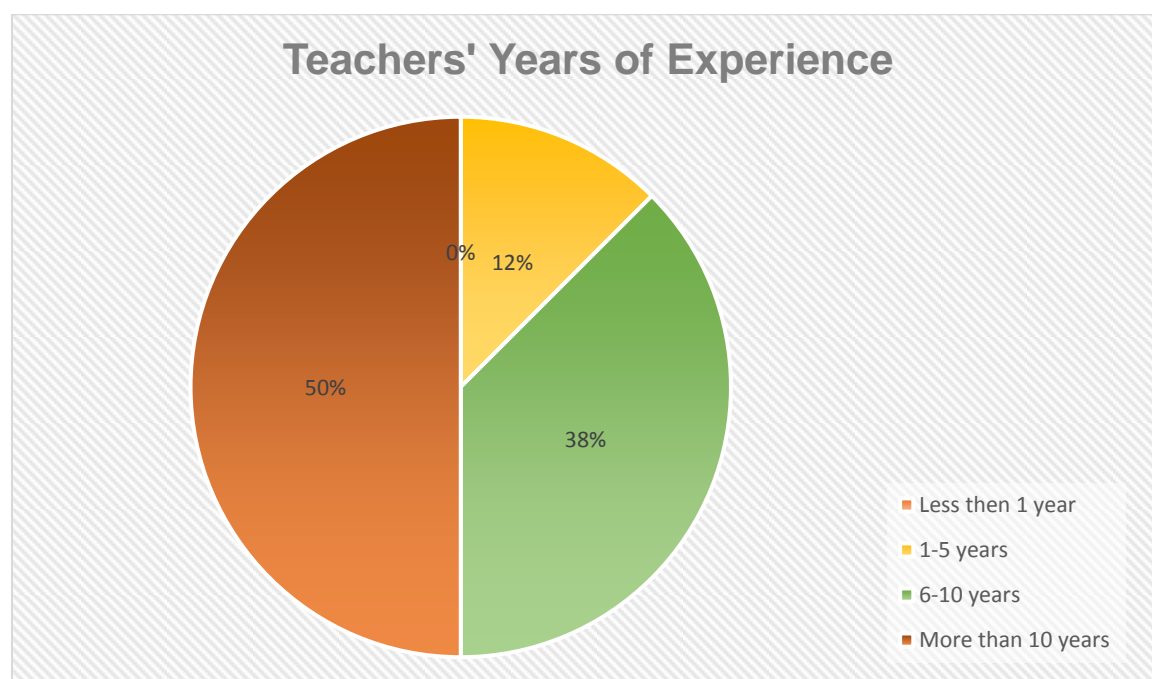


Figure 3.9. Teachers' Years of Experience

The chart illustrates the experience levels of 8 teachers in the EFL program. One teacher has 1-5 years of experience, three have 6-10 years, and four have more than 10 years.

Understanding these levels helps optimise the program's effectiveness and ensures students benefit from a well-qualified instructional team.

Section Two: Scale Questions

Question Three: Please write the following statements based on your experience and practices:

1. Involve students in the process of designing oral syllabi

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

2. I consider students' interests and preferences when designing oral syllabi.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3. Students have opportunities to provide input on topics and activities included in the oral syllabus.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

4. I encourage students to take ownership of their learning goals in oral skills.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

5. I adapt oral syllabi based on students' feedback and suggestions.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

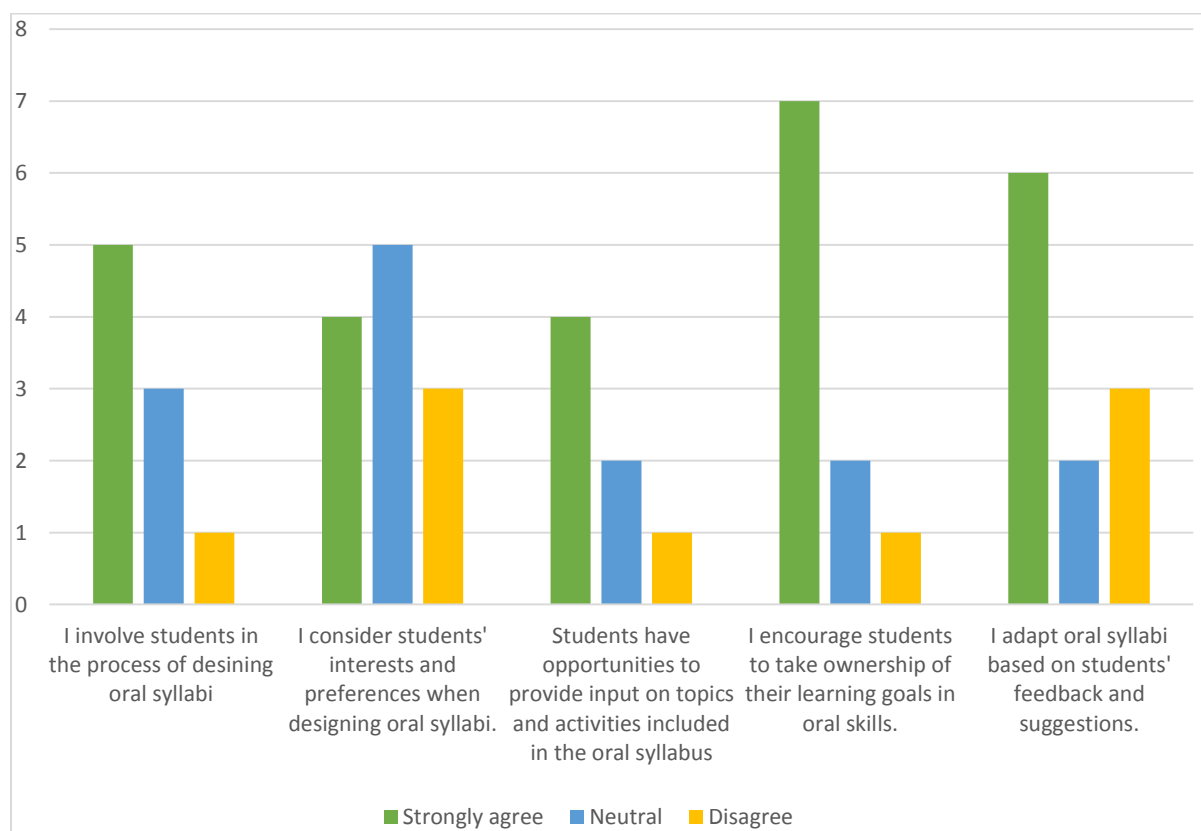


Figure 3.10 Teachers' Experiences and Practices

The graphic shows that most teachers agree on the benefits of involving students in designing the oral communication syllabus. This collaborative approach can enhance student engagement and motivation. However, some teachers acknowledge the challenges associated with this practice, such as balancing diverse student preferences and managing collaborative decision-making. Recognizing both the benefits and challenges can help educators develop effective strategies for incorporating student input.

3.2.3 Teachers' Interview

Question One: How do you define student agency in the context of EFL learning?

- Teacher A claimed that agency is a developed form of students' autonomy, meaning that students start as autonomous and then develop to reach a level of student agency where they become actual agents of change. Agency is about making changes, such as improving learning achievement.
- Teacher B emphasized the value of student agency, particularly in the context of learning a foreign language. Students are active participants in the language acquisition process, and their efforts in using the language are crucial. Therefore, I believe that their input is highly significant and should be considered as an essential addition to the curriculum.

Question Two: Can you describe your approach to designing oral syllabi for EFL learners?

- Teacher A stated that we follow guidelines from the ministry and then elaborate on the content of the syllabus. In this elaboration, we refer firstly to theory and secondly to our students' expectations and needs. That's why each

time, during the first session of all communication classes, we focus on introductions. Through these introductions, I can gauge the students' levels, interests, orientations, and fields, and based on that information, I can help design the course. We need to ask about students' needs and wants.

- Teacher B claimed these past three years I have opted for real-life projects and real-life context because I am dealing much more with improvising tasks which leads to more creativity and attracts students' imagination and cultural background because they don't have the time to think or prepare but rather extract their competencies and abilities

Question Three: To what extent do you involve students in designing oral syllabi?

- Teacher A mentioned that student involvement depends on their level. For example, first-year students may not be as engaged due to their lack of experience compared to more advanced students. However, there is still potential for them to become independent learners and take charge of their studies. Therefore, it might be better to introduce autonomy in the second year, particularly when the focus is on listening and basic communication skills. Typically, students start to take more initiative in their second year.
- Teacher B stated that it is done implicitly because I am not going to talk about designing the oral syllabi to my students they don't share interests but their input is very important especially when it comes to pointing out their preferences

Question Four: what strategies do you use to facilitate students' agency in the design of oral syllabi?

- Teacher A emphasized the importance of allowing students to make decisions, as it's not always easy for them to know what to do. Sometimes students feel lost, and they need positive encouragement and support. It's important to let them know that they have the power to make positive changes, rather than just imposing things on them. Student agency involves two key components: the will to make changes and the opportunities available to them. The strength of will comes from their engagement and motivation, while the opportunities come from the educational context and the support provided by educators and administrators. Without these opportunities and support, we cannot truly talk about student agency.
- Teacher B stated that I don't like to limit my students to one method I consider myself an eclectic teacher because limiting students is going to make all different in one box and it's not correct so I prefer to be flexible

Question Five: When designing oral syllabi, how do you balance students' interests and preferences with the curriculum requirements?

- Teacher A emphasized the importance of integrating theoretical concepts with previous teachings on oral communication, as well as taking into account individual student interests and preferences. Additionally, they highlighted the significance of collecting data about students' fields of interest to create a well-rounded approach. In each session, they start with a comprehensive introduction, encouraging student engagement and participation.
- Teacher B this usually happens during the class implicitly for instance I give them a game or task and I see what are their preferences and interests so when designing the syllabus I just adjust depending on their input, and if I ask them

directly they may lie or won't share and prefer to keep it for themselves that's why I prefer to do it implicitly.

Question Six: Can you provide examples of how students' input has influenced the design of the oral syllabus?

- Teacher A assigned numerous activities for students, and I provided feedback when I noticed positive reactions among the learners. I also volunteered to suggest topics and fully engaged with the subject matter. As a result, I had to adjust, omit, and add parts to the activities, using the ones that had a positive impact on the students.
- Teacher B claimed that unfortunately, this doesn't happen all the time. However, in 2016, I had a group of students who were incredibly brilliant. They were very demanding and always wanted more. After each lecture, they would write notes for me. Even though they were at a pre-intermediate level in their second year, they wanted to do more and reach the advanced level. This group forced me to improvise and move away from my traditional teaching methods. Challenging these students made me realize that it could enhance their creativity. It also helped me to change and express myself better, despite my natural shyness. The improvisation was tough, but it had a positive impact on me.

Question Seven: what challenges do you encounter in promoting students' agency in syllabus design for oral classes?

- Teacher A claimed that sometimes it's challenging to reach all students. Some students may have issues, lack interest, or suffer from low self-esteem, leading them to believe their contributions aren't valuable. Additionally, students are often drawn to social media, and we lack the resources to incorporate these platforms into our classes.
- Teacher B mentioned that there is a lack of motivation among students, leading to passivity. This lack of motivation is particularly evident due to the overuse of technology, with students relying on their smartphones instead of using their brains as they normally would.

Question Eight: How do you perceive the impacts of incorporating students' agency in designing oral syllabi on students' engagement and learning outcomes?

- Teacher A claimed that it is very fruitful, we don't have to impose things and when something doesn't work you can say it on your students' faces we have to invite them to be more active partners in the educational process we need to give them a kind of value because it has both cognitive and affective support and benefits when you allow and give opportunities for learners to be autonomous and to be agents of change you are helping them acquire knowledge because they need the skills and competence so they are going to develop themselves as far as cognitions' concerns second on the affective level when you give them this opportunity to make decisions they are going to feel that they are valuable elements in the learning-teaching acquisition
- Teacher B emphasized the importance of welcoming students and giving them opportunities.

Question Nine: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with student agency in designing oral syllabi?

- Teacher A emphasizes that to help our students improve their communication skills and oral competencies, we must first consider their autonomy. Starting with autonomy is important because we cannot immediately expect them to take action and be proactive without guidance. In a conversation with my students, they expressed that the current conditions are not conducive for them to be active and make a difference. They want to be agents of change but feel that they face obstacles in their environment, including educators, decision-makers, stakeholders, and even at the ministry level.

There is much to be done to support our students in becoming active agents of change. They need to be motivated and have the opportunity to change things and themselves. Our syllabus should be designed to be flexible, and open to discussion, suggestions, elaboration, modification, and improvement.

- Teacher B mentioned that I would discuss students, teachers, and the administration. When I talk about students, I believe that they need to reconnect with their human nature. Technology has made them seem detached and lacking in emotion. When they explain a situation or tackle tasks, it feels like they are not fully present. Even when they read a text, their lack of presence is noticeable. It's as if they rely solely on data and are not fully engaged. Moving on to teachers, I think we should move away from the traditional teacher-student dynamic and work together to create a syllabus that meets the needs of all students. As for the administration, the content of the syllabus provided by the ministry doesn't always align with the student's needs, and there is a disconnect between teachers and students that the administration should address.

3.3 Discussion and Interpretation

The study's findings provide valuable insights into the impact of prioritizing oral expression in the syllabus for EFL learners. The results reveal the complex factors influencing students' participation in syllabus design and their perceived role in the process.

Teacher interviews show that instructors recognize the importance of incorporating student input and promoting agency in developing the oral expression syllabus. Allowing learners to actively contribute to the syllabus design can enhance their motivation, ownership of the learning process, and the relevance of the content covered, aligning with learner-centred approaches.

The student questionnaire data supports these insights, indicating that the majority of EFL learners desire to participate in syllabus design and believe that their involvement would positively impact their learning outcomes. The findings suggest a significant relationship between students' participation in syllabus design and their perceived agency.

Additionally, the data reveals that factors such as language proficiency, prior experiences, and motivation influence the extent of students' participation and their sense of agency. Learners with higher proficiency levels and stronger intrinsic motivation tend to exhibit a greater willingness to engage in the syllabus design process, underscoring the importance of considering individual learner characteristics and providing scaffolding and support to encourage the participation of all students.

The teachers' reported use of participatory strategies, such as soliciting feedback, incorporating student suggestions, and fostering collaborative decision-making, positively affects learners' engagement and agency. Furthermore, the perceived benefits of student participation, including enhanced relevance, motivation, and learning outcomes, provide strong justification for the implementation of student-centred approaches to syllabus design.

Conversely, identified barriers, such as time constraints and lack of confidence, suggest the need for additional support and scaffolding to enable more effective student participation and agency.

In conclusion, the study highlights the value of EFL learners' involvement in syllabus design, particularly for oral expression classes. By expanding student agency and incorporating their voices, teachers can create more engaging, relevant, and effective learning experiences, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of EFL instruction.

3.4 Recommendations

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the traditional approach to syllabus design has often been top-down, where educators develop course outlines without significant input from students. However, recent educational research advocates for a shift towards more inclusive practices that actively involve students in shaping their learning experiences, particularly in areas like oral expression.

Student involvement in syllabus design not only enhances motivation but also promotes a deeper engagement with the learning process. When students have a say in curriculum decisions, they feel a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for their education. This collaborative approach is crucial for fostering a supportive and student-centred learning environment, where learners' needs and preferences are taken into account. To effectively integrate student voices into syllabus design, EFL educators can employ various participatory strategies:

Needs Assessments: Conducting thorough needs assessments allows educators to understand the specific language learning goals and challenges of their students. This foundational step ensures that the syllabus is aligned with learners' needs from the outset.

Collaborative Discussions: Facilitating open discussions and brainstorming sessions encourages students to contribute ideas and suggestions for the syllabus content and activities. This collaborative process not only enriches the curriculum but also promotes critical thinking and communication skills among learners.

Regular Feedback Mechanisms: Implementing regular feedback loops enables continuous refinement of the syllabus based on student input throughout the course. This iterative approach ensures that adjustments can be made promptly to better meet evolving student needs and interests.

Empowering Student Leadership: Providing opportunities for students to take on leadership roles in syllabus design fosters agency and autonomy. Educators can delegate tasks such as researching new teaching methods, evaluating course materials, or leading discussions on curriculum choices

Utilizing Technology: Integrating digital tools and platforms can enhance student participation in syllabus design. Online surveys, collaborative document editing, and virtual meetings allow for asynchronous engagement and accommodate diverse learning preferences and schedules.

In addition to strategies directly involving students, it is essential for educational institutions and policymakers to support these initiatives through:

Professional Development: Offering training and workshops for EFL teachers on learner-centred pedagogies and collaborative curriculum development.

Resource Allocation: Allocating sufficient time, funding, and technological resources to facilitate effective student involvement in syllabus design.

Policy Adaptation: Adapting institutional policies to prioritize student agency in curriculum decisions and recognize the value of participatory approaches in enhancing educational outcomes.

Project-Based Learning: Incorporate project-based learning (PBL) approaches where students collaboratively design and execute projects related to oral expression. This hands-on approach allows students to apply language skills in real-world contexts while shaping their learning experiences.

Task-Based Learning Activities: Design syllabi around task-based learning activities where students engage in authentic language use tasks. By involving students in selecting and designing tasks, educators can tailor activities to align with learners' interests and proficiency levels.

Peer Evaluation and Reflection: Introduce peer evaluation mechanisms where students provide constructive feedback on each other's oral presentations or language use. This not only develops peer collaboration skills but also encourages students to reflect on their learning progress and areas for improvement.

Student-Led Workshops: Organize student-led workshops where learners can showcase their language skills, share cultural insights, or lead discussions on topics of interest related to the syllabus themes. This promotes leadership skills and reinforces learning through teaching.

Institutional Support and Policy Recommendations

Flexible Curriculum Frameworks: Advocate for flexible curriculum frameworks that allow for adaptation and customization of syllabi based on ongoing student feedback and changing educational needs.

Inclusive Decision-Making Structures: Establish inclusive decision-making structures within educational institutions, such as curriculum committees that include student representatives. This ensures that student voices are heard and considered in broader educational policy discussions.

Recognition and Validation: Recognize student contributions to syllabus design through certificates, awards, or credits that acknowledge their role in shaping the learning environment. This fosters a culture of appreciation for student agency in education.

Harnessing Technology and Digital Platforms

Virtual Learning Environments: Utilize virtual learning environments (VLEs) and learning management systems (LMS) that support collaborative syllabus design. Features like discussion forums, polls, and shared document editing facilitate asynchronous collaboration among students and educators.

Online Feedback Mechanisms: Implement online feedback mechanisms where students can provide anonymous feedback on syllabus components, teaching methods, and overall learning experiences. This ensures continuous improvement and responsiveness to student needs.

Research and Evaluation Continuum

Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to explore the sustained impact of student involvement in syllabus design on language proficiency, learner motivation, and educational outcomes over time. This research can inform evidence-based practices and policy recommendations.

Cross-Cultural Research: Extend research efforts to include cross-cultural perspectives on student involvement in EFL syllabus design. Comparative studies across different cultural

contexts can shed light on effective strategies and challenges in promoting student agency in diverse educational settings.

3.5 Conclusion

The study findings have highlighted the crucial role of student agency in designing EFL syllabi, specifically in oral expression lessons. Data collected from teacher interviews and student questionnaires has provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of learner participation in syllabus design and the perceived benefits and barriers associated with this approach.

The results clearly show a significant relationship between EFL students' involvement in syllabus design and their sense of agency, supporting the study's alternative hypothesis. Factors such as language proficiency, motivation, and previous experiences were found to influence the extent of student participation, emphasizing the need for a nuanced, learner-centered approach. Importantly, the participating teachers recognized the importance of incorporating student input and empowering learners through collaborative decision-making.

The data suggests that using participatory strategies can encourage greater student engagement and agency, ultimately leading to more relevant and meaningful learning experiences. The benefits of student involvement, including enhanced relevance, motivation, and learning outcomes, further emphasize the value of adopting a student-centred approach to syllabus design. However, identified barriers, such as time constraints and lack of confidence, highlight the need for additional support and institutional resources to facilitate more effective student participation.

By embracing the recommendations from this study, EFL educators and policymakers can work towards creating a more inclusive and empowering learning environment for language learners. Empowering students to actively contribute to the design of their educational

experiences can improve the quality of EFL instruction and better meet the diverse needs and aspirations of language learners.

As the field of EFL education continues to evolve, the insights gained from this research underscore the importance of prioritizing student agency and fostering a culture of collaboration and co-creation within the syllabus design process. By prioritizing learner-centred approaches, EFL institutions can unlock the full potential of their students and significantly enhance the overall effectiveness and relevance of language instruction.

General conclusion

General Conclusion

This dissertation explores the role of student agency in the design and implementation of oral language syllabi within the context of higher education English language teaching.

Traditionally, the development of course curricula has been the sole domain of instructors and academic institutions, with limited opportunities for learner input. However, there is growing recognition that empowering students to participate actively in the syllabus design process can have significant benefits for their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

The primary purpose of this thesis is to investigate the extent to which EFL students in the ELL (English Language and Literature) department can meaningfully contribute to shaping the syllabi for their oral communication courses. The research examines the factors that influence students' participation in this collaborative endeavour, as well as the strategies employed by teachers to encourage learner agency. Additionally, the study explores the perceived benefits and potential barriers to effective student involvement in syllabus design.

To address these objectives, the thesis is guided by a series of research questions that delve into the various aspects of student agency and syllabus development. These include:

What factors influence EFL students' participation in syllabus design, featuring agency?

What strategies do EFL teachers use to encourage student participation and agency in syllabus design?

What are the perceived benefits of student involvement in syllabus design for EFL learning outcomes?

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and classroom observations. This methodology allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions from multiple stakeholder perspectives, including both students and instructors.

The findings of this thesis contribute to the growing body of research on learner-centred pedagogies in language education. The insights gained can inform the development of flexible, responsive oral skills syllabi that leverage student agency to enhance the quality and relevance of classroom learning. Additionally, the study provides practical recommendations for effectively engaging learners in the syllabus co-construction process while maintaining academic rigour and curricular coherence.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters. The first chapter presents a theoretical framework on student agency in oral syllabus design, exploring the concepts of student agency and their relationship with learner motivation and attitudes. The subsequent chapters delve into the research methodology, data analysis, and discussion of the key findings. The final chapter summarizes the study's conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Students' Questionnaire

Dear Participants, you are invited to take part in a research study titled « Students' Agency and Syllabus Design in Teaching Oral Expression to the Second-year Students in the ELL Department » This questionnaire aims to gather your insights and experiences to understand better how student agency can influence syllabus design. Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will remain confidential. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research.

Demographics Section:

1. Age:

2. Gender:

Male

Female

Student Agency Section:

3. On a scale of 1-5, how much control do you feel over your Learning outcomes?

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.....

6. How often do you set learning goals for yourself?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes

- Often
- Always

7. Describe a situation where you felt you had a significant impact on the content or design of your course.

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8. What motivates you the most in your studies?

- Personal interest in the subject
- Desire to achieve high grades
- Future career prospects
- Other (please specify):

9. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your overall motivation in your CEO classes?

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10. Can you share an experience where you felt highly motivated to learn?

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Syllabus Design Section

11. How satisfied are you with the current syllabus design in your CEO

Classes?

- Very Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

12. Rank the following syllabus components in order of importance to you (1 being the most important):

- Course objective
- Learning activities
- Assessment methods
- Reading materials

13. In your opinion, what could be improved in the syllabus to support students better

Agency and motivation?

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Appendix B

Teacher's Questionnaire

Survey (Quantitative Data)

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses will help us understand the extent to which students' agency is applied in designing oral syllabi for EFL learners.

A. Demographic Information:

1. What is your role in EFL education?

EFL Teacher

EFL Curriculum Developer

EFL Program Administrator

Other (please specify)

2. How many years of experience do you have in EFL education?

Less than 1 year

1-5 years

6-10 years

More than 10 years

3. Which educational institution do you belong to?

Secondary School

Language Institute
University/College
Other (please specify)

B. Scale Questions:

Please rate the following statements based on your experiences and practices:

1. I involve students in the process of designing oral syllabi.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. I consider students' interests and preferences when designing oral syllabi.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3. Students have opportunities to provide input on topics and activities included in the oral syllabus.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

4. I encourage students to take ownership of their learning goals in oral skills.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

5. I adapt oral syllabi based on students' feedback and suggestions.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Appendix C

Teacher's Interview

Introduction Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The aim is to gather more in-depth insights into your perspectives and practices regarding student agency in designing oral syllabi for EFL learners.

A. Opening Questions:

1. How do you define student agency in the context of EFL education?

2. Can you describe your approach to designing oral syllabi for EFL learners?

Main Questions:

3. To what extent do you involve students in the process of designing oral syllabi?

4. What strategies do you use to facilitate student agency in the design of oral syllabi?

5. How do you balance students' interests and preferences with curriculum requirements when designing oral syllabi?

6. Can you provide examples of how students' input has influenced the design of oral syllabi in your teaching practice?

7. What challenges do you encounter in promoting student agency in syllabus design for oral skills? _____

8. How do you perceive the impact of incorporating student agency in designing oral syllabi on student engagement and learning outcomes?

C. Closing Question:

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with student agency in designing oral syllabi?

Thank you for your time and valuable insights.

