# English Syllabus for Grades 1-4

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**GECFDD, Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa, April 2008**

**Rationale**

**Why do Ethiopian children study English?**
English has been retained in the educational system because it is vital to for the economic development of Ethiopia. English is the language of wider communication across the globe in international relations, science and technology, commerce and trade. It is also the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education in Ethiopia

**What is the new syllabus based on?**
The English syllabus for grades 1-4 is designed based on the new curriculum framework for Ethiopian schools and on the needs assessment conducted prior to revision work. The syllabus has also considered international content standards for a similar age and grade level of learners.

**What are the main changes?**
The main changes to the previous English syllabus are:
- The content has been reduced and is compatible with students' age and grade level. Teachers should be able to cover the content in the allotted time.
- The syllabus is based on minimum learning competencies for each grade against which students will be assessed. Each unit provides the content and activities needed to build up students' competency.
- There is spiral progression throughout the four grades: the four language skills, grammatical and vocabulary items and other language components are taught at increasing levels of difficulty and sophistication within the topic areas. This spiral progression is demonstrated in the minimum learning competences and the topic flow chart.
- The content is relevant to all children whether they are progressing to secondary school, technical or vocational college or leaving school and contributing to development of the community.
- The syllabus demonstrates practical implementation of active learning and learner-centredness. It is designed to inform the production of quality textbooks that will inspire confidence and develop competence in teachers so they can use a broader range of methodologies in their teaching.

- The approach to language teaching is communicative and skills based: students learn and practise language which is meaningful to them and which has a real purpose and context. For this reason the focus is on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grammar and vocabulary items are integrated into practice of these skills. Language is about communicating with others and learners are encouraged to interact with each other in a variety of patterns: pairs, groups and whole class. The activities are also designed to encourage students' natural curiosity and appetite for discovery together with enjoyment of learning through games, songs and stories.

**What is the new approach?**
The new approach contains a number of aspects that are demonstrated in the MLCs, the syllabus and its activities

*1. Psychological preparation*

This includes:
- motivating children to learn English by using interesting and enjoyable methods
- learning geared to: communicating in English, using the language creatively, taking delight in talk
- building on young learners' instinct for play and fun
- taking account of their capacity for imagination and creativity
- developing in young learners sensitivity to foreign languages and cultures
- raising their awareness of the mother tongue and English
- developing in them a positive attitude to language learning

*2. Attitude goals*
Attitude is an important aspect of a young learners' syllabus. Young learners should want to communicate and find pleasure and confidence in exploring English. They should anticipate or predict what comes next and be willing to 'have a go'. They should not be afraid of taking risks or making mistakes. Finally they should reflect on their actions and learn from them.

*3. Content goals*
Content is both topic-based and linguistic. Topics have been chosen that are interesting and enjoyable to young learners. Grades 1-4 focuses on building students' oral skills. Language chosen is functional, relevant and realistic for children. The vocabulary and structures are appropriate to young learners' age and development stage

*4. Lessons and materials*
These include activities and tasks that:
- have a clear learning outcome
- can be personalised according to pupils' interests
- are graded, to facilitate movement from the cognitively simple to the more demanding

- are contextualised and meaningful, with a real purpose and audience in mind
- encourage creative, productive and enjoyable use of language
- are designed to enable increasing pupil independence and choice
- stimulate young learners
- engage children's minds and keep them physically occupied
- allow children to respond to language input by doing
- provide opportunities for interaction to develop fluency
- enable teachers to choose a style that suits the mood
- help young learners understand by using the various senses: seeing, hearing, feeling etc
- cater for different modes of learning: verbal, visual, musical, logical, physical, interpersonal etc
- keep lessons short and simple
- vary work on the same topic
- vary the organisation of learning (children working in pairs, groups, whole class)
- reuse materials for a different purpose
- repeat patterns (e.g. words or phrases) which promote learning
- repeat rhythms that reinforce English sounds, stress and intonation

**What are the main features of the syllabus?**

*1. Minimum Learning Competencies*
The Minimum Learning Competencies (MLCs) are the skill levels we expect all the students to have reached within the topic areas at the end of each grade. Some students will demonstrate abilities beyond the MLCs.

*2. Topic flow charts and content maps*
The topic flow charts show the spiral progression of the competencies within a number of topics. The content maps show the content to be learnt in each unit at each grade.

*3. Units and period allocation*
Each grade is broken up into a number of units based around a topic. Competencies in language and skills are built up within a topic as topics recur a number of times throughout the first cycle of primary.

In grades 2-4 there will also be at least two revision units. These units will provide teachers and students with opportunities to recycle language and skills and assess competencies. In these units there should be a variety of activities across the skills and integrated tasks to practise and assess what has been learnt. Activities should be fun and engaging but should also include examples of national test types such as multiple choice.

Each unit is divided into a number of periods based on a 34-week school year. Regular, short slots of language learning during the week are likely to be more effective than a longer, more concentrated slot once a week. In grades 1-4, children will have 5 periods of English per week.

Below is the proposed period allocation across the units. However, while teachers should ensure they finish they syllabus, exact period allocation is flexible. Teachers should respond to the needs of their students in different skills and topics.

**Grade 1** (5 periods a week)
Units 1, 2, 4, 5 and 13 have
12 periods each
Units 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
14 and 15 have 11 periods each
Total Periods 170

**Grade 2** (5 periods a week)
Units 1-14          12 periods
Revision units      2 periods
Total periods      170

**Grade 3** (5 periods a week)
Units 1-12          13 periods
Revision units     14 periods
Total periods      170

**Grade 4** (5 periods a week)
Units 1-12          13 periods
Revision units     14 periods
Total periods      170

*4. Learning outcomes and vocabulary*

Each unit starts with a learning outcome related to the topic and which is applicable across the skills. The topic area for vocabulary is also highlighted with some examples. At the end of each grade there is a list of vocabulary. Teachers should choose vocabulary from this list that is relevant to their students. Teachers are also free to add lexical items where appropriate. Although some ideas are given in the syllabus, teachers should also recycle vocabulary as much as possible. This can be done through vocabulary games at the beginning and end of lessons. Regular vocabulary tests should also be given.

*5. Competencies*
The left hand column lists the relevant competencies for each unit. These are derived from the Minimum Learning Competencies for each grade or in some cases may revise the competencies from previous grades. Teachers use these competencies to assess students (see assessment).

*6. Skills*
For clarity of focus each unit of the syllabus is broken up into
- Speaking and listening
- Reading
- Writing

Speaking and listening are put together because in a communicative interactive approach, they are often inseparable. When listening is practised as a discreet skill, this is reflected in the corresponding competency. Indeed listening is often the first activity of a unit because it is used to provide a context for the introduction of language items.

Speaking and listening also come first in each unit because in most cases, and especially in grades 1-4, students will be learning this aspect of the language first. Reading precedes writing because it is a receptive skill (rather than a productive skill) and the reading text will often provide a model for writing. In grades 1 and 2, writing is developing literacy skills in English so the focus is on copying letters and models. In grades 3 and 4 students gradually progress to producing their own words and sentences.

Although the activities within the skills are presented in this order in the syllabus documents, activities do not have to be followed in this order. Indeed it will often make sense to provide a variety of practice across skills

within a week's 5 periods. Furthermore some of the activities actually integrate all the skills.

### 7. *Language Content/items*
The middle column of language content/items contains the grammar, language patterns or text type to be learnt in each unit to build up students' competency within each topic and skill area. Examples of the language items students are expected to produce or respond to in order complete an activity are also given in this column. These are located in the speaking and listening column as we would generally expect them to be introduced in these skills first. Social expressions (functional language such as greeting people, introducing oneself or giving advice) are also included in this column and may overlap with language patterns and grammar. Under reading and writing the language content is the text type (such as words, phrases, sentences, paragraph, story, descriptive passage, recipe etc.) the students will be working with.

### 8. *Language activities and resources*
The third column contains activities and resources for the teacher to use with students to facilitate learning of the corresponding language content/items and build up the corresponding competencies. The resources that are needed are included in the activities.

The activities contain examples of language they aim to practise. Within a skill area, the activities build on each other so they need to be followed in the recommended order. For example most of the new grammar and vocabulary is introduced in the speaking and listening activities. This is to provide a realistic context for the new language and to focus on the spoken form rather than the written form. Teachers should clearly present the new language within context and check understanding before proceeding to the activities. The activities often start with controlled practice of discreet language items or patterns through a variety of activities. This is to give the students the chance to practise the target language. Freer speaking activities will occur later. Occasionally there are suggestions for activities which may not be possible in all classes, these are 'optional'. However, as with all the activities, teachers are free to adapt activities to meet the needs or situations they face.

This column also contains information and ideas for practising pronunciation and some spelling strategies. It is really important to draw students' attention to these. In grade 4 teachers should also start to build up students' skills in spelling by administering periodic tests.

With all the skills students should be encouraged to work on activities in a variety of interaction patterns: pairs, threes, small groups, larger groups and whole class. For listening and reading activities students should check and compare their work together, practising their English as they do so. For reading, students and read aloud in pairs and small groups rather than reading silently. The skill of writing is as much about process as product. For this skill too, students should sometimes be encouraged to write sentences and paragraphs together.

### 9. *Assessment*
Teachers are expected to assess students on a continuous basis. Many of the activities can be used for assessment as well as practice. Teachers should keep records of student performance in class and regularly take in notebooks to mark work and record achievement. On top of this, at the end of each unit there is at least one assessment activity. For grades 1-4 this is usually in the area of speaking and listening as this is the primary focus of English in the first cycle. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, each grade will have at least two revision units which will also provide the teacher and students with opportunities for assessment. It is not only the teacher who can assess; students should also be encouraged to do self and peer assessment activities.

### 10. *Assessing speaking*
Assessing speaking is vital for providing feedback to the students and for informing schemes of work and lesson plans. Assessing speaking should not be formal or intimidating. The teacher should just listen in on pairs and groups, provide them with feedback and record progress. The teacher should not focus on mistakes but rather on whether the students have reached the competency level and can be understood. This means the focus is on communication not accuracy, especially in grades 1-4.

In large classes assessing speaking can be challenging. Below are some ideas to address these challenges and provide the teachers with at least one assessment opportunity per child per term.

- At the beginning of each term, the teacher divides the class into speaking/assessment groups (of about 10 students) according to

where they sit in the class (this can be rows or groups of students whichever is more practical). For all speaking activities, students form pairs, threes or groups within these groups. For assessment the teacher concentrates on one group per week. He/she can assess a number of students each lesson and record comments.

- In each grade there are a number of activities where students are working in small groups. As long as the teacher is satisfied that discipline will not be affected, students can be pulled out of these activities to be assessed for speaking.

- Some of the writing activities may take a lesson or two. Once more the teacher could listen to 10 pairs of students perform a speaking/listening activity in this time.

### 11. Assessing listening, reading and writing
Teachers can assess the competencies for listening, reading and writing both informally and formally. Continuous assessment can take place as the students are doing the activities and through regular checking of students' notebooks. More formal assessment should be done through the end of unit assessment activities (although these mainly focus on speaking and listening) and through the revision units.