

Syllabus Design

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Syllabus Design Components

- **Structural**
- **Situational**
- **Topical**
- **Functional**
- **Notional**
- **Skills-based**
- **Task-based**

(Brown,1994)

Syllabus Design Components

- **needs analysis**
- **determining the goals and objectives**
- **conceptualizing content**
- **selecting and developing materials and activities**
- **organization of content and activities**
- **evaluation**
- **consideration of resources and constraints**

Graves (1996)

Scientific bases for Syllabus Design

A syllabus

“a summary of the content to which learners will be exposed.” Yalden (1987, 87)

“the specification of the content and the ordering of what is to be taught.” Richards (2002,69)

‘can be described as a statement of what is to be learnt.’ Hutchinson and Waters (2006, 80)

Continued...

- **Any syllabus will express-however indirectly-certain assumptions about language, about the psychological process of learning, and about the pedagogic and social processes within a classroom. (Breen 1984: 49)**
- **... the. syllabus is simply a framework within which activities can be carried out: a teaching device to facilitate learning. It only becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference from which bearings can be taken. (Widdowson 1984)**

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- ... curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational program. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that subpart of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology). (Allell 1984: 61)

Narrow and the Broad View

- The narrow view draws a clear distinction between syllabus design and methodology. Syllabus design is seen as being concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content, while methodology is concerned with the selection of learning tasks and activities. Those who adopt a broader view question this strict separation, arguing that with the advent of communicative language teaching the distinction between content and tasks is difficult to sustain.

Components of a language syllabus

- the situations in which the foreign language will be used, including the topics which will be dealt with;
- the language activities in which the learner will engage;
- the language functions which the learner will fulfil;
- what the learner will be able to do with respect to each topic;
- the general notions which the learner will be able to handle;
- the specific (topic-related) notions which the learner will be able to handle;
- the language forms which the learner will be able to use;
- the degree of skill with which the learner will be able to perform. (van Ek 1975: 8-9)

Teachers as Consumers

- In a recent book dealing, among other things, with syllabus design issues, Bell (1983) claims that teachers are, in the main, consumers of other people's syllabuses; in other words, that their role is to implement the plans of applied linguists, government agencies, and so on. While some teachers have a relatively free hand in designing the syllabuses on which their teaching programmes are based, most are likely to be, as Bell suggests, consumers of other people's syllabuses.

Concluding ...

- **'Curriculum' is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of education programmes. 'Syllabus', on the other hand, focuses more narrowly on the selection and grading of content.**

Curriculum decision-making

- **Assumptions about the learner's purpose in undertaking a language course, as well as the syllabus designer's beliefs about the nature of language and learning can have a marked influence on the shape of the syllabus on which the course is based. Learners' purposes varies according to how specific they are, and how immediately learners wish to employ their developing language skills.**

• **Needs Analysis Approach**

- **It is an analysis of communicative needs of the learner as well as a set of techniques and procedures.**
- **It has assisted widely the Syllabus Designers of ESP, EAP & GEP.**
- **Needs Analysis has been stimulated in education by the CLT.**
- **CLT proponents called for the content syllabus which reflects the communicative purposes and needs of the learners. (e.g) Language for Tourism (ESP).**
- **Needs Analysis includes biographical information such as age, first language background, reasons for learning a language, other languages spoken and time for learning.**
- **Munby(1978) developed a sophisticated instrument for doing NA called Communicative Needs Processor which involved the following elements;**

learner analysis Vs. task analysis.

- Learner analysis is based on information about the learner. The central question of concern to the syllabus designer is: 'For what purpose or purposes is the learner learning the language?'

Objective Vs. Subjective Data

- 'Objective' data is that factual information which does not require the attitudes and views of the learners to be taken into account. Thus, biographical information on age, nationality, home language, etc. is said to be 'objective'. 'Subjective' information, on the other hand, reflects the perceptions, goals, and priorities of the learner. It will include, among other things, information on why the learner has undertaken to learn a second language, and the classroom tasks and activities which the learner prefers.

Process Vs. Product

- **'process' is a series of actions directed toward some end. The 'product' is the end itself. This may be clearer if we consider some examples. A list of grammatical structures is a product. Classroom drilling undertaken by learners in order to learn the structures is a process. The interaction of two speakers as they communicate with each other is a process. A tape recording of their conversation is a product.**

Humanistic Education

- **Humanistic education is based on the belief that learners should have a say in what they should be learning and how they should learn it, and reflects the notion that education should be concerned with the development of autonomy in the learner.**

Analytic Vs. Synthetic designs

- A synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which the different parts of language are taught separately and step by step• so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up. (Wilkins 1976: 2)
- However some applied linguists feel that the term 'synthetic' need not necessarily be restricted to grammatical syllabuses.

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- **In an analytic syllabus, learners are presented with chunks of language which may include structures of varying degrees of difficulty. The starting point for syllabus design is not the grammatical system of the language, but the communicative purposes for which language is used.**

Grammatical syllabuses

- **The most common syllabus type was, and probably still is, one in which syllabus input is selected and graded according to grammatical notions of simplicity and complexity.**
- **The transition from lesson to lesson is intended to enable material in one lesson to prepare the ground for the next; and conversely for material in the next to appear to grow out of the previous one. (AJcDonough 1981: 21)**

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- **The assumption behind most grammatical syllabuses seems to be that language consists of a finite set of rules which can be combined in various ways to make meaning.**
- **he principal purpose of language teaching is to help learners to 'crack the code'. Rutherford (1987) calls this the 'accumulated entities' view of language learning.**

Criticisms

- One of the difficulties in designing grammatical 'chains' in which discrete grammatical items are linked is that the links can be rather tenuous.
- (SLA) research suggests that learning does not occur in this simple additive fashion.
- dilemma is attempting to follow some sort of structural progression in sequencing input

- **One early criticism was that structurally-graded syllabuses misrepresented the nature of that complex phenomenon, language.**
- **Matters are complicated, not only by the fact that language fulfils a variety of communicative functions, but that there is no one-to-one relationship between form and function. Not only can a single form realize more than one function, but a given function can be realized by more than one form (see Cook: Discourse published in this Scheme).**

Questions addressed by SLA

- Can syllabus items be sequenced to make them easier to learn? \
- What learning activities appear to promote acquisition?
- Is there any evidence that teaching does, in fact, result in learning?
- Why do learners at a particular stage fail to learn certain grammatical items which have been explicitly (and often repeatedly) taught?

- **Assumption: select, sequence grammatical rules and integrate them with vocabulary and phonological items sometimes in order to make meaning.**
- **Purpose: control and master the grammatical input to the learner, so that only one item is presented at a time.**
- **How?! this purpose has created a Dilemma with CLT in which it tights the learner to only specific limited items ignoring the different kinds of exposure encountered outside the classroom.**

Solutions

- **Abandon any attempt at structural grading.**
- **Use the graded structures not to determine the language to which learners are exposed, but determine the (items) pedagogic focus in class.**

Notional-Functional Syllabus

- **Notions are general conceptual meanings (e.g. time, cause, and duration)**
- **Functions are communicative purposes that are achieved through language (e.g. apologizing, advising, and expressing preferences [like & dislike])**

Notional-Functional Syllabus

- The broader view of language from sociolinguists was taken up during the 1970s by those involved in language teaching functions may be described as the communicative purpose for which we use language, while notions are the conceptual meanings (objects, entities, state's of affairs, logical relationships .. and;; on) expressed through language.

Notional-Functional Syllabus

**FINOCCHIARO AND BRUMFIT
(1983) SUGGESTS**

- **It sets realistic learning tasks.**
- **It provides for the teaching of everyday, real-world language.**
- **It leads us to emphasize receptive (listening/reading) activities before rushing learners into premature performance.**
- **It recognizes that the speaker must have a real purpose for speaking, and something to talk about.**
- **Communication will be intrinsically motivating because it expresses basic communicative functions.**

- **It enables teachers to exploit sound psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, linguistic and educational principles.**
- **It can develop naturally from existing teaching methodology.**
- **It enables a spiral curriculum to be used which reintroduces -grammatical, topical and cultural material.**
- **It allows for the development of flexible, modular courses.**
- **It provides for the widespread promotion of foreign language courses.**

Criticism...

- **In developing functional-notional syllabuses, designers also need to look beyond linguistic notions of simplicity and difficulty when it comes to grading items.**
- **Invoking grammatical criteria, it is possible to say that simple Subject + Verb + Object (SVO) structures should be taught before more complex clausal structures involving such things as gelatinization.**

However, the grading of functional items becomes much more complex because there are few apparent objective means for deciding that one functional item, for instance, 'apologizing' is either simpler or more difficult than another item such as 'requesting'.

Situational, contextual, and extra-linguistic factors which are used to a certain extent in the selection and grading of content for grammatical syllabuses become much more prominent and tend to complicate the issues of simplicity and difficulty.

Criticism

- **Widdowson (1983) pointed out that simply replacing lists of grammatical items with lists of notional, functional ones neither represented the nature of language as communication nor reflected the way languages were learned anymore than grammatical syllabuses did.**
- **(NFS are not based upon a theory of learning.)**

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- **Early versions of NFS were not so very different from the GS.**
- **There are no objective means for deciding that one functional item is more complex than another.**
- **Most functions can be expressed in many different ways and at many different levels of complexity.**