

# Syllabus planning

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Syllabus Design Syllabus: A syllabus is an expression of opinion on the nature of language and learning; it acts as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some goals to be attained. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 80) define syllabus as follows: At its simplest level a syllabus can be described as a statement of what is to be learnt. It reflects language and linguistic performance.

This is a rather traditional interpretation of syllabus focusing on outcomes rather than process. However, a syllabus can also be seen as a “ summary of the content to which learners will be exposed” (Yalden. 1987).

It is seen as an approximation of what will be taught and that it cannot accurately predict what will be learnt A language teaching syllabus involves the integration of subject matter and linguistic matter. Difference between Syllabus and Curriculum Curriculum is wider term as compared with syllabus. Curriculum covers all the activities and arrangements made by the institution through out the academic year to facilitate the learners and the instructors.

Where as Syllabus is limited to particular subject of a particular class.

Syllabus Design To design a syllabus is to decide what gets taught and in what order.

For this reason, the theory of language underlying the language teaching method will play a major role in determining what syllabus should be adopted. Theory of learning also plays an important part in determining the kind of syllabus used. For example, a syllabus based on the theory of

learning evolved by cognitive code teaching would emphasize language forms and whatever explicit descriptive knowledge about those forms.

A syllabus based on an acquisition theory of learning, however, would emphasize unanalyzed and carefully selected experiences of the new language.

The choice of a syllabus is a major decision in language teaching, and it should be made as consciously and with as much information as possible. There has been much confusion over the years as to what different types of content are possible in language teaching syllabi and as to whether the differences are in syllabus or method. Several distinct types of language teaching syllabi exist, and these different types may be implemented in various teaching situations. TYPES OF SYLLABI Although six different types of language teaching syllabi are treated here as though each occurred “purely,” but in practice, these types rarely occur independently.

Almost all actual language teaching syllabi are combinations of two or more of the types defined here. For a given course, one type of syllabus usually dominates, while other types of content may be combined with it. Furthermore, the six types of syllabi are not entirely distinct from each other. For example, the distinction between skill-based and task-based syllabi may be minimal. In such cases, the distinguishing factor is often the way in which the instructional content is used in the actual teaching procedure.

The characteristics, differences, strengths, and weaknesses of individual syllabi are defined as follows: 1:- Product-Oriented Syllabus This kind of syllabuses emphasizes the product of language learning and is prone to

approval from an authority. There are three types of syllabus described in the following: (i) The Structural Syllabus Historically, the most prevalent of syllabus type is perhaps the structural or grammatical syllabus in which the selection and grading of the content is based on the complexity and simplicity of grammatical items.

The learner is expected to master each structural step and add it to her grammar collection. As such the focus is on the outcomes or the product. One problem facing the syllabus designer pursuing a grammatical order to sequencing input is that the ties connecting the structural items may be rather weak. A more fundamental criticism is that the grammatical syllabus focuses on only one aspect of language, namely grammar, whereas in truth there exist many more aspects of language.

Finally, recent research suggests there is a disagreement between the grammar of the spoken and of the written language; raising complications for the grading of content in grammar based syllabuses. (ii) The Situational Syllabus The limitations found in structural approach led to an alternative approach where situational needs are emphasized rather than grammatical units. Here, the principal organizing characteristic is a list of situations which reflects the way language is used in everyday life i. e. outside the classroom.

Thus, by linking structural theory to situations the learner is able to grasp the meaning in relevant context. One advantage of the situational Syllabus is that motivation will be heightened since it is “ learner- rather than subject-centered” (Wilkins. 1976). However, a situational syllabus will be limited for students whose needs were not encompassed by the situations in the syllabus. This dissatisfaction led Wilkins to describe notional and <https://assignbuster.com/syllabus-planning/>

communicative categories which had a significant impact on syllabus design.

### (iii) The Notional/Functional Syllabus

Wilkins' criticism of structural and situational approaches lies in the fact that they answer only the 'how' or 'when' and 'where' of language use (Brumfit and Johnson.

1979: 84). Instead, he enquires " what it is they communicate through language" Thus, the starting point for a syllabus is the communicative purpose and conceptual meaning of language i. e. notions and functions, as opposed to only the grammatical items and situational elements. In order to establish objectives of such a syllabus, the needs of the learners will have to be analyzed on the base of communication need.

Consequently, needs analysis has an association with notional/functional syllabuses.

White (1988: 77) claims that " language functions do not usually occur in isolation" and there are also difficulties of selecting and grading function and form. The above approaches belong to the product-oriented category of syllabuses. An alternative path to Syllabus Design would be to adopt process oriented principles, which assume that language can be learnt experientially as opposed to the step-by-step procedure of the synthetic approach. 2:-

### Process-Oriented Syllabuses

Process-Oriented Syllabuses are developed as a result of a sense of failure in product-oriented courses to enhance communicative language skills. Syllabus is a process rather than a product. That is, focus is not on what the student will have accomplished on completion of the program, but on the

specification of learning tasks and activities that s/he will undertake during the course.

(i) Procedural/Task-Based Syllabus Prabhu's (1979) 'Bangalore Project' is a classic example of a procedural syllabus. Here, the question concerning 'what' becomes subordinate to the question concerning 'how'.

The focus shifts from the linguistic element to the educational, with an emphasis on learning or learner. Within such a framework the selection, ordering and grading of content is no longer wholly significant for the syllabus designer. Arranging the Syllabus around tasks such as information- and opinion-gap activities, it was hoped that the learner would perceive the language subconsciously whilst consciously concentrating on solving the meaning behind the tasks. There appears to be an indistinct boundary between this approach and that of language teaching methodology.

A task-based syllabus assumes that speaking a language is a skill best perfected through practice and interaction, and uses tasks and activities to encourage learners to use the language communicatively in order to achieve a purpose. Tasks must be relevant to the real world language needs of the student. That is, the underlying learning theory of task based and communicative language teaching seems to suggest that activities in which language is employed to complete meaningful tasks, enhances learning.

(ii) Learner-Led Syllabus

The notion of basing a syllabus on how learners learn language was proposed by Breen and Candlin (1984). Here the emphasis lies on the

learner, who it is hoped will be involved in the implementation of the syllabus design.

By being fully aware of the course they are studying, it is believed that their interest and motivation will increase, coupled with the positive effect of nurturing the skills required to learn. However, as suggested earlier, a predetermined syllabus provides support and guidance for the teacher and should not be so easily dismissed.

Critics have suggested that a learner-led syllabus seems radical and utopian in that it will be difficult to follow as the direction of the syllabus will be largely the responsibility of the learners. This leads to the final syllabus design to be examined ; the proportional syllabus as suggested by Yalden (1987). (iii)The Proportional Syllabus The proportional syllabus basically attempts to develop an “ overall competence”.

It consists of a number of elements within the main theme playing a linking role through the units.

This theme is designated by the learners. It is expected initially that form will be of central value, but later, the focus will turn towards interactional components. The syllabus is designed to be dynamic, not static, with sufficient opportunity for feedback and flexibility. The shift from form to interaction can occur at any time and is not limited to a particular stratum of learners.

As Yalden observes, it is important for a syllabus to indicate explicitly what will be taught, “ not what will be learned”.

This practical approach with its focus on flexibility and spiral method of language sequencing leading to the recycling of language, seems relevant for learners who lack exposure to the target language beyond the classroom. Practical Guidelines to Syllabus Choice and Design It is clear that no single type of content is appropriate for all teaching settings, and the needs and conditions of each setting are so particular that specific recommendations for combination are not possible. However, a set of guidelines for the process is provided below. Steps in preparing a practical language teaching Syllabus Choice: 1.

Determine, to the extent possible, what outcomes are desired for the students in the instructional program i. e. what the students should be able to do as a result of the instruction. 2. Rank the syllabus types presented here as to their likelihood of leading to the outcomes desired.

Arrange the six types with preference you going to give to each type. 3. Evaluate available resources for teaching, needs analysis, materials choice and production and in training for teachers. 4. Rank the syllabi relative to available resources. That is, determine what syllabus types would be the easiest to implement within available resources.

. Compare the lists made under Nos. 2 and 4. Making as few adjustments to the earlier list as possible, produce a new list of ranking based on the availability of resources. 6. Designate one or two syllabus types as dominant and one or two as secondary.

7. Review the question of combination or integration of syllabus types and determine how combinations will be achieved and in what proportion. In



making practical decisions about syllabus design, one must take into consideration all the possible factors that might affect the teachability of a particular syllabus.

By starting with an examination of each syllabus type, tailoring the choice and integration of the different types according to local needs, one may find a principled and practical solution to the problem of appropriateness and effectiveness in syllabus design. Suggested Steps for Planning Syllabus:

- Develop a well-grounded rationale for your course.
- Decide what you want students to be able to do as a result of taking your course, and how their work will be appropriately assessed.
- Define and delimit course content.
- Structure your students' active involvement in learning. Identify and develop resources.
- Compose your syllabus with a focus on student learning.

Suggested Principles for Designing a Syllabus that Fosters Critical Thinking:

- Critical thinking is a learnable skill; the instructor and class fellows are resources in developing critical thinking skills.
- Problems, questions, or issues are the point of entry into the subject and a source of motivation for nonstop inquiry.
- Successful courses balance the challenge to think critically with supporting students' developmental needs.
- Courses should be assignment centered rather than text and lecture centered.

Goals, methods and evaluation emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it.

- Students are required to formulate their ideas in writing or other appropriate means.

•Students should collaborate to learn and to stretch their thinking, for example, in pair problem solving and small group work. •Courses that teach problem-solving skills nurture students’ metacognitive abilities. •The developmental needs of students are acknowledged and used as information in the design of the course. Teachers in these courses make standards explicit and then help students learn how to achieve them. Syllabus Functions: Establishes an early point of contact and connection between student and instructor •Describes your beliefs about educational purposes •Acquaints students with the logistics of the syllabus •Contains collected handouts •Defines student responsibilities for successful course work •Describes active learning •Helps students to assess their readiness for your syllabus •Sets the course in a broader context for learning •Provides a conceptual framework •Describes available learning resources •Communicates the role of technology in the course •Can improve the effectiveness of student note-taking Can include material that supports learning outside the classroom •Can serve as a learning contract Checklist Syllabus Design: •Title Page •Table of Contents •Instructor Information •Letter to the Student •Purpose of the Course •Course Description •Course and Unit Objectives •Resources •Readings •Course Calendar •Course Requirements •Evaluation •Grading Procedures •How to Use the Syllabus •How to Study for This Course •Content Information •Learning Tools Course Objectives: •What will the students know and be able to do as a result of having taken this course? What levels of cognitive thinking are required from students to engage in? •What learning skills will the students develop in the course? •Instructional Approaches: •Given the kind of learning I’d like to encourage and foster, what kinds of instructional interactions need to occur?

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Teacher-student, student-student, student-peer tutor? •What kinds of instructional approaches are most conducive to helping students accomplish set learning objectives? •How will classroom interactions be facilitated? In-class? Out-of-class? Online? Electronic discussion? Newsgroups? Chatroom?

Course Requirements, Assignments: •What will students be expected to do in the course? •What kinds of assignments, tests do most appropriately reflect the course objectives? •Do assignments and tests bring forth the kind of learning I want to foster? Assignments (frequency, timing, sequence)? Tests? Quizzes? Exams? Papers? Special projects? Laboratories? Field trips? Learning logs? Journals? Oral presentations? Research on the web? Web publishing? Electronic databases? •What kinds of skills do the students need to have in order to be successful in the course? Computer literacy?

Research skills? Writing skills? Communication skills? Conflict resolution skills? Familiarity with software? Course Policies: •What is expected of the student? Attendance? Participation? Student responsibility in their learning? Contribution to group work? Missed assignments? Late work? Extra credit? Academic dishonesty? Makeup policy? Classroom management issues? Laboratory safety? Grading, Evaluation: •How will the students' work be graded and evaluated? Number of tests? In-class? Take-home? Point value? Proportion of each test toward final grade? Grading scale? How is the final grade determined? Drop lowest grade? •How do students receive timely feedback on their performance? Instructor? Self-assessment? Peer review? Peer tutors? Opportunities for improvement? Ungraded assignments?

Texts/Resources/Readings/Supplies: •What kinds of materials will be used during the course? Electronic databases? Electronic Course Reserve? Course

Webpage? Software? Simulations? Laboratory equipment? •What kinds of instructional technologies will be used? •Course Calendar: •In what sequence will the content be taught? When are major assignments due?

Fieldtrips? Guestspeaker? Schedule for Term Examination? Result? Vacations? •Study Tips/Learning Resources: •How will the student be most successful in the course? •What resources are available? Online quiz generator? Study guides? Lecture notes online? Lecture notes on reserve in library? Guestspeaker to explain/demonstrate online resources? TA? Peer tutors? Study groups? Academic Services Center? Writing Center? Evaluation of online resources? Citation of web resources? Student Feedback on Instruction: •Anonymous suggestion box on the web and E-mail.

Student feedback at midterm for instructional improvement purposes. •End-of-term student feedback. Supplement to departmental student feedback form. Bibliography 1. Brumfit, C.

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