**Lesson One: Designing a Syllabus and/or Course component**

1. **Definitions**
   1. **Syllabus**

White (1988, p. 4) referred to the term syllabus as “the content or subject matter of an individual subject”.

Strevens (1977, p. 25) said that a syllabus is “partly an administrative instrument, partly a day-to-day guide to the teacher, partly a statement of what to be taught and how, sometimes partly a statement of an approach…The syllabus embodies that part of the language which is to be taught, broken down into items, or otherwise processed for teaching purposes”.

Prabhu (1984, p. 274) indicated that the function of a syllabus is “to specify what is to be taught and in what order”.

* 1. **Course**

According to Anthony Berardo (2007, p. 12), “the course can be considered the product of the syllabus applied, including both the linguistic blueprint as well as the materials to be learned/taught, together with guidance to the practitioner in terms of approach and implementation, where possible and appropriate”.

It is “a series of classes about a particular subject in a school”.

A course is a “group of classes that lead to a degree”.

* 1. **Syllabus Design**

It is a basic contract between the instructor and students, laying out the responsibilities and expectations on both sides…it is also a roadmap that shows the general contours of the course, important milestones, and the land marks that will let students know they are on the right road.

* 1. **Course Design**

Course design is the process and methodology of creating quality learning environments and experiences for students. Through deliberate and structured expose to instructional materials, learning activities, and interaction, students are able to access information, obtain skills, and practice higher level of thinking.

Sterns said that **“the teaching of a course will be strictly guided by the syllabus in question”** (Brumfit, 1984, p. 5).

**2. Steps to Design a Course**

* 1. **The Course Rationale**

It is “a brief written description of the reasons of the course and the nature of it. The course rational seeks to answer the following questions:

Who is this course for?

What is the course about?

What kind of teaching and learning will take place in the course?”

(Richards, 2001, p. 145)

“The course rationale answers these questions by describing the beliefs, values and goals that underlie that course” (Richards, 2001, p. 145).

According to Posner and Rudnisky (1986 as cited in Richards, 2001, p. 146), the rationale serves the following purposes:

* guiding the planning of the various components of the course
* emphasizing the kinds of teaching and learning the course should exemplify
* providing a check on the consistency of the various course components in terms of the course values and goals

Thus, “in order to develop a course rationale, the course planners need to give a careful consideration to the goals of the course, the kind of teaching and learning they want the course to exemplify, the roles of teachers and learners in the course, and the beliefs and principles the course will reflect” (2001, p. 146).

* 1. **Describing the Entry and Exit Level**

According to Richards (2001, p. 146), “in order to plan a language course, it is necessary to know the level at which the program will start and the level learners may be expected to reach at the end of the course. Language programs and commercial materials typically distinguish between elementary, intermediate, and advanced level, but these categories are too broad for the kind of detailed planning that program and materials development involves. For these purposes, more detailed descriptions are needed of students’ proficiency levels before they enter a program and targeted proficiency levels at the end of it”.

“Information may be available on students’ entry level from their results on international proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS or specially designed tests may be needed to determine the level of students’ language skills. Information from proficiency tests will enable the target level of the program to be assessed and may require adjustment of the program’s objectives if they appear to be aimed at too high or too low level” (Richards, 2001, pp. 146-147).

* 1. **Choosing Course Content**

“A course has to be developed to address a specific set of needs and to cover a given set of objectives, what will the content of the course look like? Decision about course content reflects the planners’ assumptions about the nature of language, language use, and language learning, what the most essential elements or units of language are, and how these can be organized as an efficient basis for second language learning?” (Richards, 2001, P. 148).

“The choice of a particular approach to content selection will depend on subject-matter knowledge, the learners proficiency levels, current views on second language learning and teaching, conventional wisdom, and convenience” (Richards, 2001, p. 148).

“Information gathered during analysis contributes to the planning of course content, as do additional ideas from the following sources:

* available literature on the topic
* published materials on the topic
* review of similar courses offered elsewhere
* review of tests or exams in the area
* analysis of students’ problems
* consultation with teachers familiar with the topic
* consultation with specialists in the area” (Richards, 2001. P. 148)

At this stage, rough initial ideas are noted down as a basis for further planning and added to through group brainstorming. A list of possible topics, units, skills and other units of course organization is then generated.

At this stage, discussions about the course topics take place between planners and compare their ideas with other sources of information until clear ideas about the content of the course are agreed on.

Throughout this process, the statements of aims and objectives are continually referred to and both course content suggestions and the aims and objectives themselves are revised.

**2.4 Determining the Scope and Sequence**

Planning the scope and sequence of the course is about “the distribution of content throughout the course” (2001, p. 149).

**Scope** is “the breadth and depth of coverage of items in the course, that is, with the following questions:

What range of content will be covered?

To what extent should each topic be studied?” (Richards, p. 150)

**Sequence** “involves deciding which content is needed early in the course and which provides a basis for things that will be learned later” (Richard, 2001, p. 150).

**Criteria to Sequence the Content**

**Criterion 1 Simple to Complex:** content presented earlier is thought to be simpler than later items.

**Criterion 2 Chronology:** content may be sequenced according to the order in which events occur in the real world.

**Criterion 3 Need:** content may be sequenced according to when learners are most likely to need outside of the classroom.

**Criterion 4 Prerequisite Learning:** the sequence of the content may reflect what is the necessary at one point as a foundation for the next step in the learning process.

**Criterion 5 Whole to Part or Part to Whole:** in some cases, material at the beginning of a course may focus on the overall structure or organization of a topic before considering the individual components that make it up. Alternatively, the course might focus on practicing the parts before the whole.

**Criterion 6 Spiral Sequencing:** this approach involves the recycling of items to ensure that learners have repeated opportunities to learn them.

**2.5 Planning the Course Structure**

This stage is about “mapping the course structure into a form and sequence that provide a suitable basis for teaching” (Richards, 2001, p. 151).

According to Richards (2001, p. 152), this step involves two processes:

**2.5.1 Selecting a Syllabus Framework**

A syllabus describes the major elements that will be used in planning a language course and provides a basis for its instructional focus and content.

In choosing a particular syllabus framework for a course, planners are influenced by the following factors:

* **Knowledge and beliefs about the subject area:** the syllabus reflects ideas and beliefs about the nature of speaking, reading, writing, or listening.
* **Research and theory:** research on language use and learning as well as applied linguistics theory sometimes leads to proposals in favor of particular syllabus types.
* **Common practice:** the language teaching profession has built up considerable practical experience in developing language programs and this often serves as the basis for different syllabus types.
* **Trends:** approaches to syllabus design come and go and reflect national or international trends.

**2.5.2 Developing Instructional Blocks or Sections**

It refers to “a self-contained learning sequence that has its own goals and objectives and that also reflects the overall objectives of the course. Instructional blocks represent the instructional focus of the course and may be so specific (e.g., single lesson) or more general (e.g., a unit of work consisting of several lessons)” (Richards, 2001, p. 165).

“In organizing a course into teaching blocks, one seeks to achieve the following:

* to make the course more teachable and learnable
* to provide a progression in level of difficulty
* to create overall coherence and structure for the course” (Richards, 2001, 165).

According to Richards (2001, pp. 165-166), two commonly used instructional blocks are planning by modules and by units.

* Modules: “this is a self-contained and independent learning sequence with its own objectives. E.g. a 120-hour course might be divided into four modules of 30 hours each. Assessment is carried out at the end of each module. Modules allow for flexible organization of a course and can give learners a sense of achievement because objectives are more immediate and specific. Care needs to be taken… to ensure that the course does not appear fragmented and unstructured.”
* Units: “this teaching block is normally longer than a single lesson but shorter than a module and it is the commonest way of organizing courses and teaching materials. It is normally a group of lessons that is planned around a single instructional focus. (sometimes units are referred to as a scheme of work). A unit seeks to provide a structured sequence of activities that lead towards a learning outcome”.

The factors that account for a successful unit include:

* Length: sufficient but not too much material is included.
* Development: one activity leads effectively into the next; the unit does not consist of a random sequence of activities.
* Coherence: the unit has an overall sense of coherence.
* Pacing: each activity within the unit moves at a reasonable pace. E.g., if there are 5 activities in the unit, one does not require four times as much time to complete as the others.
* Outcome: at the end of the unit, students should be able to know or do series of things that are related.

**2.6 Preparing the Scope and Sequence Plan**

Richards (2001, p. 167)stated that “once a course has been planned and organized, it can be described. One form in which it can be describe is as a scope and sequence plan. This might consist of a listing of the module or unit and their contents and an indication of how much teaching time each block in the course will require”.