**Exploring Syllabus Design**

* 1. **Syllabus and Methodology**

The question that should be raised here is whether the syllabus covers what should be taught or how should be taught?

Actually, there are two different views; a narrow view and a broad view.

* + 1. **Narrow View (traditional view)**

It distinguishes between syllabus design and methodology. Syllabus design stands for the selection and grading of the content to be presented for learners, whereas methodology refers to the pedagogic ways used to transmit the content. Widdowson (1990, p. 39) claimed that “a syllabus is simply an inert specification. Only when it is actualized through classroom activity can it have an effect on learning. A syllabus is a scheme for teachers and its influence on learners is only indirect, mediated by methodology”. So, for him, the syllabus includes only objectives, content and its grading.

* + 1. **Broad View**

It encompasses both syllabus design and methodology. Yalden and Nunan opt for this view. Yalden (1988, p. 30) held that a syllabus may include not only instruction but also methodology and evaluation as well. Nunan (1989, p. 177) advocated an approach for designing courses including needs analysis, goal and objectives setting, the selection and grading of items, methodology, learning mode, and evaluation.

* 1. **Approaches to Syllabus Design**

Current literature distinguishes between two major types of syllabus design: synthetic and analytic (Wilkins, 1976).

* + 1. **Synthetic Syllabuses**

Synthetic syllabusesanalyse the language into discrete parts such as word, structure, notion, function, situation or topic in order to teach them one at a time. According to Wilkins (1976, p. 2), “a synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which the different parts of 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. At any time the learner is being exposed to a deliberately limited sample of language”.

In applying this type of syllabi, learners’ role is to build up all the bits and pieces of language that have to be digested gradually and linearly. In Wilkins words, the learners’ task is to re-synthesize the language that has been broken down into a large number of small pieces with the aim of making this learning task easier (1976, p. 2).

* + 1. **Analytic Syllabuses**

For this approach, language is not segmented into discretepieces. Long and Crookes (1991, p. 3) pointed out that “this type of syllabi presents the TL whole chunks at a time, in molar rather than molecular units, without linguistic interference or control”.

“analytic approaches…are organized in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet those purposes…since we are inviting the learner…to recognize the linguistic components of the language behaviour he is acquiring. We are in effect basing our approach on the learner’s analytic capabilities”(Wilkins, 1976, p. 14).

“It relies on the learners’ assumed ability to perceive regularities in the input and induce rules” (Long & Crookes, 1991, p. 3). Hence, the syllabus focuses on the actual use of language and requires students to use their capacities to think, recognize, and create hypothesis about patterns of language.

* 1. **Syllabus Types**

Syllabi are divided into two different types: product-oriented syllabi and process-oriented syllabi.

* + 1. **Product Syllabi**

According to Nunan (1988, p. 27), “product syllabuses are those which the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction”.

**1.3.1.1Structural Syllabus**

“A structural (or formal) syllabus is one in which the content of language teaching is a collection of the forms and structures usually grammatical, of the language being taught. Examples of structures include: nouns, verbs, objectives, statements, questions, complex sentences, subordinate clause, past tense, and so on, although syllabi may include other aspects of language forms such as pronunciation or morphology” (Kraknke, 1987, p. 16). It “focuses upon the systematic and rule-based nature of language itself” (Breen, 1987, p. 85).

It is designed “to help learners learn how to be correct or accurate in his or her production in the new language. It characterizes the capabilities we need to be linguistically correct in our use of the four skills” (Breen, 1987, p. 85).

The formal syllabus “adopts a sequencing which requires the learner to accumulate -in additive way-aspects of the various systems of the language and that the learner is required to gradually synthesize what the syllabus has previously analysed for the step-by-step presentation of the language” (Breen, 1987, p. 89).

Dialogues and drill form the basis of classroom practice. Drill is typically controlled through a dialogue that contains the desired language structures, cultural aspects of the target language and a given context.

**1.3.1.2 Notional/Functional Syllabus**

The functional syllabus takes its principles from Hymes’s communicative competence that redefines the term ‘language’ to include also “knowledge of how to use language in appropriate ways in order to achieve particular purposes and participate in particular everyday events and situations” (Breen, 1991, p. 88).

According to Wilkins (1972), two major categories are introduced for the purpose of functional-notional syllabus design:

1. Semantico-grammatical categories (notions) which are defined as “categories which … interact significantly with grammatical categories” like logical relationships, entities, colours. They are the conceptual meanings expressed through language
2. Categories of communicative function (functions): greetings, inviting, and requesting information are examples of functions.

“The learner is assumed to acquire certain key functions and their most common linguistic exponents as a kind of foundation – a basic repertoire of uses of language” (Breen, 1991, p. ).

This type of syllabus is based on the current and future language needs of learners. So, needs analysis becomes important because the notions and functions that a language is able to describe are a very high number which leads to problem of selection.

Since functional-nationalism provided a clear way of differentiating course content according to learning purposes, language for specific purposes (ESP) has been flourished.

**1.3.1.3 Situational Syllabus**

The failure of the grammatical syllabus to provide a communicative view of language and to contextualize the language samples presented led to an alternative content. This syllabus answers three questions: who, what and where (the participants, the activities they engage in , and the setting of those activities).

The designer selects and organizes the content items around “real or imaginary situations in which language occurs or is used” (Kahnke, 1987, p. 16). At the bank, at the supermarket, at restaurant are examples of this type.

Among the different linguistic focuses that can be found in situations is the grammatical focus, with which situations are presented in such a way that particular structures or sets of structures are emphasized. Another is a lexical focus, whose emphasis is on some set of vocabulary items.

Activities used: learners are given complete discourse, and students are asked to play the same situation using their own language and passively presented with situations. The most familiar way of presenting a situation is a dialogue, usually at the beginning of a lesson, although dialogues may occur anywhere in a lesson. The many ways in which dialogues can be handled in classrooms include passive listening, active listening, and memorization; they can serve as models for student improvisation.

**1.3.1.4 Skill-based Syllabus**

Skill is the principle around which the syllabus is organized. According to Kahnke (1987, p. 52), skill is a “specific way of using language that contains structural and functional ability but exists independently of specific setting or situations”.

This syllabus emphasizes the macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and micro skills such as listening to news, presenting a report, scaring or skimming, and summarizing a text.

The main focus of a skill-based syllabus is to combine linguistic competences, such as pronunciation and discourse together to attain generalized types of behaviour, examples would be: listening to spoken language to discover the main idea, summarizing and delivering presentations orally.

**1.3.1.5 Lexical Syllabus**

It is organized on the basis of “vocabulary and lexis” (Harmer, 2001, p. 297). “The syllabus usually contains lists of the most frequent words, their meanings, word collections and patterns where the words can be used”.

**1.3.1.6 Topical Syllabus/ Content-based Instruction**

Kahnke (1987, p. 66) said that “the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught”. Language is thematically approached under this type of syllabuses. Topics and themes form its constituents, and the focus is on the content presented through language.

**1.3.2 Process Syllabuses**

In recent years, the focus of attention has shifted from product-oriented syllabuses to process oriented syllabuses, from content to methodology. The main interest has been placed on the inherent cognitive processes of learning and the adequate procedures of teaching.

Process syllabi are termed task-based syllabuses because they use the task as a unit of analysis, and avoided earlier units of analysis such as word, structure, notion, function, situation, and topic. It is defined as “An activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process” (Prabhu, 1987, P. 24).

* + - 1. **Procedural Syllabus**

The fundamental hypothesis of the Procedural syllabus is that form is best acquired when attention is focused on meaning, i.e. the aim of this syllabus is the appropriate completion of tasks without bothering about the language system. Full consciousness is required of all learners in every attempt to receive or to convey meaningful messages; as a consequence, the grammatical system will be developed unconsciously.

A task is a classroom activity which involves some logical thinking and preoccupation with meaning to achieve some practical purpose. It falls into 3 main types:

1. **Information-gap Activity:** involves a transfer of given information from one person to another calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language.
2. **Reasoning-gap Activity:** involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning or a perception of relationships or patterns.
3. **Opinion-gap Activity:** involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling or attitude in response to a given situation.
   * + 1. **Process Syllabus**

It is mainly concerned with the processes of learning rather than the contents and the outcomes of the curriculum. Process syllabus gives priority to means over ends, to process over product, to procedural knowledge over declarative knowledge, to learners’ and learning performances over language and language communicative abilities.

**1.3.2.3 Task-based Syllabus (Task based Language Teaching ‘TBLT’)**

Long and Crookes (1992, P. 41) regarded task syllabus as an alternative to the procedural and process syllabuses which are deficient on three grounds:

1. They provide no procedures for basing task selection on learners needs.
2. They present no criteria for task sequencing.
3. They do not allow form-focused instruction

Task syllabus considers 2nd language learning as a non-linear process and abandons the pre-selection of linguistic items. It also maintains that language is best learned when attention is focused on meaning and on saying and doing something with language, i.e. L2 development is essentially incidental. Talking to learn and not learning to talk become a favourate motto for this kind of syllabus.

* TBLT has been justified on ***pedagogical*** and ***psycholinguistic*** grounds:

1. Pedagogical reasons for doing groupwork have been advanced by many researchers and pedagogues:

- increases opportunities for language practice,

- develops learner talk,

- provides a wide use of language,

- Promotes a positive affective environnement,

- increases motivation,

- Individualize instruction,

- furthers both cognitive and 1L meaning,

- increases more negotiation of meaning, and

- strengthens confidence.

b. The designing of tasks has to take into consideration the following psycholinguistic principles:

- language is a developmental process.

- it is a decision-making process.

- It is a process of negotiation.

- it is not linear and additive.

- it is primarily incidental.

- it is largely a subconscious activity.

It is meaning-focused activity.

(Kumaravadivelvu, 1993, p. 81)

* 1. **Syllabus Combination VS Syllabus Integration**

Combination is the inclusion of more than one type of syllabus with little attempt to relate the content types to each other, for example a lesson on the function of disagreement could be followed by one on listening for topic shifts (skill) in which the function of disagreeing has no significant occurrence.

Integration is when some attempt is made to interrelate content items, for example, if, after a structural lesson on the subjunctive, students were asked to prepare stories on them, “what I would do if I were rich”, the two types of instruction would be integrated.