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Delineation of English Language Teaching Syllabi and Its Implications

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Abstract

Syllabus which plays a vital role in learning/teaching of English language. "A syllabus can also be seen as a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning. It performs as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some gals to be accomplished" (Breen, 1984a). The emergence of new approach and theories has given a new dimension to language teaching and learning. A variety of language syllabus based on learners' needs and course objectives have been devised. Remarkably, two extremes have been experienced. At one end, there are Type A- product-oriented synthetic syllabuses which focus on what be learned in the language, when at the other end there are Type B- Process-oriented analytic syllabi which deal in terms of the purposes for which the language is being learned and consequently concentrate on how a second language should be acquired. A third type of syllabus that possesses a hybrid nature merging the different features of the previous syllabuses known as Proportional syllabus.

Keywords: new approach, dimension, hybrid, second language syllabus.

Introduction

Since the launch**,** the history of language has seen many ups and downs of approaches to language learning/teaching. In recent years there has occurred an expanding tendency to understand and explain the process of language learning /teaching. This process has led to many theories - specific teaching style each with its own set of principles, different theoretical backgrounds, different teacher and learner roles, as well as certain types of syllabus influencing the teaching practices and the learning outcomes. "A syllabus is a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translates the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level." In fact, language syllabus as a vital part of each teaching method is devised with meticulous scrutiny through the process of syllabus design and curriculum development by either syllabus designers or language teachers. Munby proposes - syllabus design is seen as "a matter of specifying the contents that needs to be taught and then organizing it into a teaching syllabus of appropriate learning units." To gain the maximum benefits of syllabus in a limited time, it is imperative that syllabus must be designed taking into account the learners "needs and objectives" essential to require. In recent times the focus of syllabus has shifted from structure to situations, functions and notions to topics and tasks.

It would to be appropriate to differentiate and clarify the term syllabus and curriculum. In applied linguistics literature, curriculum has comprehensive connotations. It includes goal, objectives, contents, processes, resources and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for learners. A syllabus, on the other hand, is a blueprint or a statement of plan, which the teacher converts into the reality of classroom. Since there are several conflicting views on what it is that distinguishes syllabus design from the development. Regarding this difference Nunan argues that it is possible to distinguish a broad and narrow approach to syllabus design. According to Candlin (1984) curriculum is concerned with making general statements about language learning, learning purpose, experience, evaluation and the role and relationships of teachers and learners. Syllabi on the other hand, are localized and are based on accounts and records of what actually happens at a classroom level as teachers and learners apply a given curriculum to their own situation. Nunan (1993) also agrees with Candlin and proposes that "Curriculum" is also concerned with planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programme. "Syllabus" on the other hand, focuses on the selection and grading of content.

"A curriculum should not be equated with a list of topics or a set of textbooks. It defines completely the educational needs of learners and the needs by which these needs can be fulfilled. In other words, it is a comprehensive plan on which the entire teaching system is based. The syllabus, on the other hand, is a set of instructions to teacher and learner. It tells the learner how best she could devote her time to studies. It offers the teacher, specific components or learning items and the most efficient means of sequencing and grading them".

A syllabus can also be seen as a "plan of what is to be achieved throughout teaching and our students' learning" (Breen, 1984) while its function is "to specify what is to be taught and in what order" (Prabhu, 1984). In Wilkins (1981) words, syllabus is "specifications of the content of language teaching which have been submitted to some degree of structuring or ordering with the aim of making teaching and learning more effective process". In simple way it performs like a guide for both learner and teacher by providing some goals to be accomplished. So when syllabus is prepared, we must keep in our mind that it, in fact, deals with linguistic theory and theories of language learning and how they are utilized in the classroom. Widdowson (1990) interprets a syllabus as "the specification of a teaching programme or pedagogic agenda which defines a particular subject for a particular group of learner …………….. A syllabus specification, then, is concerned with both the selection and the ordering of what is to be taught". Hutchinson-Waters (1987) define syllabus at its simplest level "as a statement of what to be learned". Yalden (1987) also refers to syllabus as a summary of the content to which learners will be exposed". Finally, it comprises subject matter and linguistic matter.

Syllabus design was a growth industry through the latter part of the twentieth century and led to a number of key publications in which different approaches to syllabus design were

proposed. Depending on many factors including the learners' needs and the course objectives, different types of syllabi have been projected.

Types of syllabi

Virtually Linguists have distinguished six types of syllabi throughout the literature and they are product of two or more types of syllabi. They are under the headings –

A. Synthetic and Analytic syllabi
B. Product oriented and Process oriented
C. Type A and Type B syllabi

Wilkins (1976) separates language syllabi into synthetic syllabi and analytical types of syllabi. A synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which different parts of language are taught separately and gradually (step by step). Here acquisition is regarded as a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of language is built up. The learners' job is to synthesize the language that has been taken apart and presented to them in fragments. In contrast, analytical syllabuses are organized in terms of the purposes for which people intend to learn the language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to fulfill those objectives. The analytical syllabus is a semantic, meaning-based syllabus, which aims at developing the learners' communicative competence. There is no orderly presentation of linguistic items, one after the other. In this process of learning, to communicate, the learner uses his/her capabilities to understand discrete items in language.

Nunan (1988) explains that Product oriented syllabi are those in which the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction, while Process oriented syllabi are those which focus on the learning experiencing them. The Product oriented syllabus is also known as synthetic approach and the Process oriented syllabus as analytic approach. These syllabi focus on what the learners will know as a result at the end of instruction session (Rabbini, 2002). The grammatical, lexical, situational, and notional-functional are the example of synthetic/product-oriented syllabus. On the other hand analytical/process-oriented syllabi operate in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet those purposes (Wilkins, 1976). It is a process rather than a product. Hence, in this process focus is on the specification of learning tasks and activities that learner will undertake during the course, not on what the student will have accomplished on the completion of the programme. Procedural, process and task syllabuses are examples of analytic/process-oriented syllabi.

Synthetic/Product-oriented syllabuses

i.   Structural/formal syllabus
ii.   Situational syllabus
iii. Notional-functional syllabus (according to Long & Crooks, 1920)

Analytic/Process-oriented syllabuses

    i.   Task–based functional
    ii.   Procedural functional
    iii.   Contend-based syllabus
    iv.   Notional-functional syllabus (according to Wilkins, 1976)
    v.   Negotiated syllabus
    vi.   Proportional syllabus

Type A and Type B syllabuses

       White (1988), from another perspective explains that all current syllabuses come under two categories – Type A and Type B. Type A syllabi deal with what should be learned in a second language classroom. They don't consider who the learner may be or how languages are acquired. The emphasis is only upon subject and content. They determine a series of objectives and they 'pre-package' the language by dividing it into small, discrete units. The teacher is the authority and main research person for the students. The teacher decides what items the students must master and how they will be evaluated. In this process things are done to the learner. Hence all synthetic syllabi are considered Type A syllabi. On the contrary, Type B syllabi are concerned with how the language is learned and how this language is integrated with learner's experiences. The emphasis is upon the learning process. The elements of the syllabus come out from a process of negotiation between learners and teachers. Objectives are decided during the course and based upon the needs of the learners. In this process things are done with the learner. White categorizes content or skill-based syllabi as Type A and method–based as Type B.

       Taking into account the above points, it is obvious that in terms of syllabus design the academic community has confronted with two extremes. The Product-oriented syllabi are noticeable before 1970's, among which structural syllabi based upon grammatical form were prevalent throughout the world-at one extreme and at the other extreme, the process oriented syllabus are prominent among which procedural and task-based syllabi have got a firm position. Gradually, focus shifted away from structural syllabi to communicative aspects of language and on learner autonomy. This trend achieved its pinnacle in the early 1990's. The syllabus design has not achieved a fixed position and shape and there is always fluctuation from one extreme to another periodically swinging back towards a focus on form and structure. In contrary to the either-or nature of product-process oriented syllabus, Yalden (1987) has proposed a cross dynamic type of syllabus known as Proportional syllabus.

       Discussion of syllabus theory and syllabus model in communicative Language Teaching has been extensive. In theory, a language teaching syllabus can be designed in varied ways, depending on the designer's views of language and view of learning and teaching. In the past few decades, the structural syllabus, the lexical syllabus, the skill-based syllabus, the functional-notional syllabus, the task-based syllabus, the negotiated syllabus, the procedural syllabus, the

content based syllabus, the cultural syllabus and the proportional syllabus are proposed by the language syllabus designers. They are not totally distinct from each other. All language teaching syllabi are integrated product of two or more of the types of syllabi. In fact, the determining element in choosing a syllabus depends on the way in which the instructional context is employed in real teaching procedure. Some of them are being analysed -

1. Structural/formal Syllabus: The structural syllabus is, doubtless, the most familiar of syllabus types (Krahnke, 1987). The underlying assumption behind grammatical syllabus is that language is system which consists of a set of grammatical rules; learning language means learning these rules and applying them to practical language use. The learner is expected to master each structural step and add it to his/her grammar collection. These syllabi introduce one item at a time and require mastery of that item before moving on to the next.

Breen (1987) justifies this principle on the basis of the facts that –
- (i) it is well established and informed by a long tradition of linguistic analysis;
- (ii) it prevents learners with a subject matter which is systematic and rule rule-governed;
- (iii) because the linguistic system is analysable in certain ways, these analytical categories or schemes can be incorporated in a plan for teaching the system.

2. The Lexical Syllabus: Wills et al, 1990 pleads that "taking lexis as a starting point enabled us to identify the commonest meanings and patterns in English and to offer students a picture which is typical of the way English is used". The emergence of lexical syllabus was a reaction against traditional structural syllabus. The basic principle on which the syllabus is based is that students must be able to understand and use lexical phrases. In this regard, Lewis (1993) says that "an important part of language acquisition is that the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as analyzed wholes, or 'Chunks', and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar"

3. Skill-based Syllabus: Skill-based syllabus is organized around the different underlying abilities that are involved in using a language for purposes of such as reading, writing, listening and speaking i.e. four language skills. While designing a skill-based syllabus, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach and integrate the various skills. It is felt that if learners master the art of 'how to learn', he would have no problem with 'what to learn'. According to Mohsenifer (2008) - "in a skill-based syllabus the content of the language teaching is a collection of specific abilities that may play a part in using language". In similar way, Richards (2001) puts it "approaching a language through skills is based on the belief that learning a complex activity such as 'listening to lecture' involves mastery of a number of individual skills or micro-skills that together make up the activity".

4. Situational Syllabus: The situational syllabus appeared as an alternative to the grammatical syllabus. Palmer and Hornby believed that a grammatical or structural syllabus was neither efficient, nor effective for language learning since this model offers language sample outside their social and cultural contexts which makes transfer of learning from the classroom to the real world quite difficult.

It is based on the view that language always occurs in a social context and the teaching of language should not be isolated from its context. With this type of syllabus, the essential component of organization is a non-linguistic category i.e. the situation. The situation usually includes several participants who are involved in some activity in a particular setting. The language used in the situation comprises a number of functions combined into a plausible part of available discourse.

Alexander (1976) differentiate three types of the situational syllabus-
   (i)   Limbo situational syllabus - which includes the information of the specific setting is of little importance
   (ii)   Concrete situational syllabus - which includes information about the specific and concrete setting and the language associated with it
   (iii) Mythical situational syllabus - which includes the information depending on fictional storyline, frequently with a fictional caste characters in a fictional place.

5. Notional-Functional Syllabus: The notional-functional syllabus appeared in the early seventies as an alternative to minimize the difficulties of both the grammatical and situational syllabus. In notional-functional syllabus, the input is selected and graded according to communicative functions (such as requesting, complaining, suggesting, agreeing etc.) that language learners need to perform at the end of language programme. The notional-functional syllabi reflect a broader view of language provided by philosophers of language and sociolinguistics. Thus, sociolinguistics like Hymes (1971) criticizes the formal concept of Chomsky's view of linguistic competence. Hymes views the knowledge of competence as comprising, in addition to linguistic competence, knowledge of how to use language in appropriate ways to achieve particular purposes. Hedge (2000) highlights how the 'communicative revolution' in 1970 urged educators to go beyond structural analysis of language provided by linguists and start to consider what 'communicative ability' in a language entailed. It became apparent that developing such ability required a different view of language.

The notional-functional approach draws on theories and descriptions of language that emphasize the functional and social aspects of competence (e.g. Hymes' model of communicative competence and Halliday's functional grammar). This syllabus introduces two elements to syllabus designing - the first is notional or conceptual aspect such as time, space movements, cause, and effect, and the second is a functional aspect which describe the

international or purposive use of language. Widdowson argues, these syllabuses deals with "items" not "strategies", with "components of discourse" not the "process of creation".

6. The Content-based Syllabus: In content-based syllabus, the content of language learning might be defined in terms of situation, topics, themes or other academic subjects. The stimulus for content-based syllabus is the notion that language is not a subject in its own right unlike science, history, or mathematics, but merely a vehicle for communicating about something else. It is also known as topical syllabus. Krahnke (1987) defines content-based syllabus as the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or indirect or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught. Content-based syllabus is considered as a sub-category of process-oriented and analytic syllabus (Nunan, 1988).

Snow et al (1988) believe that the rationale behind the integration of language and content is that language is learned most effectively for communication in meaningful, purposeful social and academic contexts. In practical life, people use to talk about what they know and what they want to know more about, not to talk about language itself. The integration of content with language instruction provides a substantive basis for language teaching and learning. Content can give both motivational and cognitive basis for language learning.

7. Task-based syllabus: A task-based syllabus supports tasks and activities to encourage learners to make the language communicative so as to achieve a purpose. It indicates that a language is a skill best perfected through interaction and practice. According to Krahnke (1987), "The primary theory of learning underlying task-based instruction is Krashen's acquisition theory. Acquisition theory argues that the ability to use a language is through exposure to the language and participation in using it. Nunan (2001) also asserts that task-based syllabus offers a specific realization of communicative language teaching and differs from the previously proposed syllabuses like structural and functional-notional syllabus on the ground that task-based syllabuses start with needs analysis.

As Candlin (1987), cited by Nunan (1988), mentions the characteristics of a good task-
- i.   Promote action to meaning, purpose and negotiation
- ii.   Encourage attention to relevant data
- iii.   Draw objectives from the communicative of learners
- iv.   A problem to be worked by learners, centred on the learners but guided by the teacher
- v.   Provide opportunities for meta-communication and meta-cognition.

8. The Procedural Syllabus: The procedural syllabus is based on a "learning centred" approach to language teaching. The syllabus was proposed by Prabhu (1980) in the 'Bangalore Project' in India. His work is based on the principles that the learning is best carried out when attention is concentrated on meaning. The focus shifts from the linguistic aspect to the pedagogical one

focusing learning or the learner. The Bangalore Communication Teaching Project comprises a list of graded activities based on cognitive tasks which deal with topics of everyday conversation. The learners are expected to do is to solve problems and complete their tasks by using English. In due course, it is supposed that the grammatical system of the language will be covered through a meaningful interaction between the teacher and the learners. The procedural syllabus is a task-based syllabus. These tasks are not innovative, but they are claimed to be so in the way the material is used.

Prabhu defines a task as "an activity which required to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process". Prabhu recognizes that the acquisition of a linguistic structure is nit "an instant, one step procedure, and claims with Krashen that language form is acquired subconsciously through 'the operation of some internal system of abstract rules and principles' when the teacher's attention is focused on meaning i.e. task-competence, not language" (Prabhu, 1987).

9. The Process Syllabus: The design of this syllabus is based on how learners approach learning. It provides a bridge between content and method. This syllabus is designed for classroom work. It explicitly attends to teaching and learning and particularly the interrelationship between subject matter, learning and the potential contributions of a classroom. It gives the participants opportunity to do these things by themselves and create their own syllabus in the classroom (Breen, 1987).

10. The Proportional Syllabus: Yalden considers the following three principles in proposing the proportional balanced syllabus -
   i.   a view of how language is learned, which could result in a structure-based syllabus
   ii.   a view of how language is acquired, which could result in a process-based syllabus
   iii.   a view of how language is used, which could result in a function-based syllabus

It is a type of syllabus which offers a close interweaving of structural and non-systematic elements over time (White, 1988). Yalden (1987) emphasizes on proportional syllabus that 'it is a model that can be used where neither immersion not the sheltered classroom format is possible, but where development of overall competence is desirable'. The focus in this 'syllabus shifts from linguistic form to communicative function' as the programme progresses. His fully developed proportional syllabus has an initial 'structural phase' which concentrates mainly on formal meaning. This phase is more appropriate for true beginners and as the proficiency level of the learners increases the focus shifts to 'communicative phase' i.e. functional (discourse and rhetorical components) and finally it acquires 'specialized phase' in which specialized contents and surface features of the language are emphasized. The syllabus is designed to be dynamic, not static, with ample opportunity for feedback and flexibility.

Conclusion:

When a syllabus is designed and implemented, many elements have to be considered. The approaches depicted here all offer valuable insights into designing a syllabus. Each of these syllabuses fits a specific context and purpose, and caters for specific learners with specific needs. Obviously, each of the above types of syllabus has its merits and drawbacks (Nunan, 1988, Richards, 2001). Each developed with inspirations from linguistic and/or educational studies. Some of these have been used longer and more widely than the others. Practically, any syllabus design has a unique set of strengths and weakness. In this context, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest, "it is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful from each theory and trusting also in the evidence of your experience as a teacher". Hence an eclectic approach can do away the syllabus designer with the advantages of each approach and meet the specific needs of the learners. Finally, it is assumed that the issues and views discussed here will provide important theoretical and practical reasons for syllabus designer and give a right way to pedagogic implication to English Language Teaching.

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