

## **Considerations in Language Syllabus Design**

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### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

There has been a great deal of excitement and activity in the area of second language teaching and learning in the recent past. The twentieth century has seen the rise and fall of many approaches to language teaching.

In the past, the task of learning a language involved understanding a large number of sometimes highly complex grammatical rules. This went together with the development of an ability to translate into and from the foreign language.

Later, language learning replaced translation with habit formation when the audio-lingual method came to the fore-front. Unfortunately, it did not live up to expectation. This gave rise to a lot of misgivings about the "fashions" of language teaching.

In the past, it was assumed that language teaching needed to be shown to be scientific and that this could only be done by relating it to psychology and linguistics. There was a blind following of the resulting principles and the realities of the actual teaching-learning situation were ignored. When those involved in following the principles finally became aware of the situation, it caused a lot of uneasiness.

It was then realised that there was a need for language teaching to have its own body of theory, which was less dependent on linguistics and psychology. This need consequently took on the likes of a more flexible attitude to language teaching approaches and methods. There was an increased interest in the learning-teaching situations and individual learners. There arose a need to find the means to "develop a taxonomy of language teaching techniques without prejudging which techniques should be employed for a special goal" so that experience and research could "attempt to establish the advantage of various combinations of techniques for given objectives, types of learners, and in specified learning situations". (Stern, 1983)

The recent trend in the theory of language is the growing interest in communicative rather than linguistic competence, and in communicative performance. Consequently, in planning language programmes, there has been a switch of emphasis from content" which normally meant grammar and lexis, to "objectives". These objectives refer to many variables other than linguistic content.

Of late, there has been a growing number of individuals who require languages for occupational and vocational purposes, as well as for general educational purposes. This has necessarily led to a corresponding increase in attention on syllabus design so as to provide appropriate teaching programmes.

The conclusion arrived at that there is no "best" method of teaching language, has also focused attention on syllabus development as a means of overcoming the problem. Theories of language and second language acquisition which have evolved have helped to bring into sharper focus the issues involved in designing language programmes.

## 2.0 "Curriculum" and "syllabus"

The terms "syllabus", "syllabus design" and "curriculum" have given rise to confusion in terms of their definitions and use. According to Stern (1983) the field of curriculum studies is part of the discipline of educational studies. In its broadest sense, it refers to the study of goals, content, implementation and evaluation of an educational system. In its restricted sense, curriculum refers to a course of study or the content of a particular course or programme. It is in this narrower sense of curriculum that the term "syllabus" is employed. According to Stern, "syllabus design" is just one phase in a system of interrelated curriculum development activities.

Shaw's (1975) survey of literature on second language syllabus development brings out the following distinction between "curriculum" and "syllabus". He says

"... the curriculum includes the goals, objectives, content, processes, resources, and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and out of the school and community, through classroom instruction and related programs..."

He then defines "syllabus" as

"a statement of the plan for any part of the curriculum, excluding the element of curriculum evaluation itself."

"Curriculum" as defined by Allen (1984) is a very general concept. It involves consideration of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational programme. "Syllabus" then refers to that subpart of a curriculum which is concerned with the specification of what units will be taught.

In defining a language "syllabus", Noss and Rodgers (1976) refer to it as "a set of justifiable, educational objectives specified in terms of linguistic content". Here the specification of objectives must have something to do with language form or substance, with language-using situations, or with language as a means of communication.

Stevens (1977) says that the syllabus is

"partly an administrative instrument, partly a day-to-day guide to the teacher, partly a statement of what is 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."

In Wilkins' (1981) words, syllabuses are "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 a more effective process."

Johnson (1982) explains syllabus as an "organized syllabus inventory" where "syllabus inventory" refers to the items to be taught. Crombie (1985) also defines "syllabus" as a list or inventory of items or units with which learners are to be familiarised. But Corder (1975) points out that it is more than just an inventory of items. In addition to specifying the content of learning, a syllabus provides a rationale of how that content should be selected and ordered (Mackey, 1980).

Candlin (1984) takes a different stand when he says that syllabuses are "social constructions, produced interdependently in classrooms by teachers and learners ... They are concerned with the specification and planning of what is to be learned, frequently set down in some written form as prescriptions for action by teachers and learners."

Basically, a syllabus can be seen as "a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning" (Breen, 1984) while its function is "to specify what is to be taught and in what order" (Prabhu, 1984).

## 2.1 "Syllabus design"

After having understood what the terms "curriculum" and language "syllabus" refer to, the next step would be to come to terms with what language "syllabus design" encompasses.

According to Webb (1976), syllabus design is understood as the organization of the selected contents into an ordered and practical sequence for teaching purposes. His criteria for syllabus design is as follows:

- progress from known to unknown matter
- appropriate size of teaching units
- a proper variety of activity
- teachability
- creating a sense of purpose for the student.

Garcia (1976) expands on this and provides more comprehensive criteria which should be taken into consideration when designing a language syllabus. He says that

"particulars concerning the social forces, the prejudices, the habits and the motives of the student population, the relation of student characteristics to what are considered universal concepts in language learning processes, contemporary insights into the nature of the language, and how it should be taught to non-native speakers and for what realistic purposes, must guide curricular decisions."

Designing a language syllabus is no doubt a complex process. According to Amran Halim (1976), the language course designer has to pay serious consideration to all the relevant variables. He has grouped all the variables into two categories, namely:

1. linguistic variables, which include the linguistic relations, between the language to be taught and the language or languages which the student uses in his daily activities; and

2. non-linguistic variables which range from policy to social, cultural, technological and administrative variables.

According to Munby (1984), syllabus design is seen as "a matter of specifying the content that needs to be taught and then organizing it into a teaching syllabus of appropriate learning units."

Maley (1984) sums it up when he says that syllabus design encompasses the whole process of designing a language programme. He says that

"the needs analysis Which produces an order unit of items to be taught is organically related to a methodology consistent with the syllabus, a set of techniques consistent with the methodology, and evaluation procedure consistent with the whole."

From the above explanations on syllabus design, it can be concluded that syllabus design involves a logical sequence of three main stages, that is, i) needs analysis, ii) content specification, and iii) syllabus organization.

This follows very closely the general model advocated by Taba (1962) which gave the following steps:

- i. needs analysis
- ii. formulation of objectives
- iii. selection of content
- iv. organization of content
- v. selection of learning activities
- vi. organization of learning activities
- vii. decisions about what needs evaluating and how to evaluate.

It is the intention of this paper to deal with the three main stages of syllabus design as listed earlier.

### **3. Stages in Languages Syllabus Design**

Three main stages have been identified in the process of designing a language syllabus, namely needs analysis, content specification and syllabus organization.

#### **3.1 Needs analysis**

A native speaker uses language to perform a large number of notions and functions in the course of his everyday life, It is almost impossible, and impractical to attempt to predict all the possible uses for which a foreign learner might want to use language. There has to be some criterion for the selection of those notions and functions which would be particularly useful.

According to Richterich (1972) language needs are

"the requirements which arise from the use of a language in the multitude of situations which may arise in the social lives of individuals and groups."

By analysing the language needs of specific groups of learners, we should be able to identify those notions and functions which will be most valuable to teach.

The concept of needs analysis enables us to discriminate between various learner types and to produce syllabus inventories specifically geared to their needs. But this system only holds true as long as the learner groups dealt with have the same needs. However, the language teacher is usually in a completely different predicament altogether.

Most students may not have a specific purpose for learning the language. They may be learning it just for fun, to talk to people, or just to pass an exam.

This problem was the concern of the Council of Europe team who were concerned with developing a framework for teaching languages to the most general and vague of audiences, that is, the average adult European. He could be living in any one of a number of countries, wishing to learn any one of a number of languages for any one of a number of purposes. Because of this wide diversity, in terms of the students and the environments, the framework had to be highly flexible. It was due to this reason that the team developed what they called a "unit/credit" system.

### 3.1.1 The "unit/credit" system

In this system, areas of language use were divided into "units". Since different areas of use are relevant to the needs of different groups of learners according to their specific requirements, the students are guided into a choice of which "units" to cover. Credits are given for units completed and when a number of credits have been gained, a qualification is given. These qualifications can be obtained "in a variety of ways appropriate to varying...patterns of study and needs" (Trim, 1973)

The point of interest of this system is the concept of "common core". This refers to areas of interest which are common to all students whatever their particular situations and specializations. There is a reasonable assumption that all students will need to be able to do certain things in the foreign language. The communicative needs are seen as being paramount.

A needs analysis is usually seen as being most beneficial for an English for Special Purposes (ESP) course. Though this is true, it can also be equally well considered for general language education. It has often been argued in the past that for courses in general English, for example in secondary schools in non-English speaking countries, it is unnecessary to depart from the standard syllabus which consists of a list of grammatical structures and a list of vocabulary items to be taught. It was felt that if the learners gained command of the grammar of the language, communication would eventually follow. It was also argued that it was too difficult or even impossible to determine the learners' communicative needs. It was felt, therefore, that they might as well be equipped with the full range of grammatical resources and that the rest would come later.

*The Threshold Level for Modern Language Learning in Schools* (J.A. van Ek, 1976) confirmed that specific communicative needs of school children could be assessed and defined in ways useful for syllabus design. Use estimates were made to prepare the learner for those foreign language contacts he would be most likely to engage in. Those estimates were based on:

- i. a general characterization of the type of language contacts which, as a member of a certain target group, he would engage in;

- ii. the language activities he would engage in;
- iii. the settings in which he would use the foreign language;
- iv. the social and psychological roles he would play;
- v. the topics he would deal with; and
- vi. what he would be expected to do with regard to each topic.

Munby (1978) came up with "Processing Profiles of Communication Needs" which was made up of nine areas, namely (i) personal (ii) purpose (iii) setting (iv) interaction variables (v) medium, mode and channel (vi) dialects (vii) target level (viii) anticipated communicative events, and (ix) key.

Though it provided complete specifications for a given participant, it completely lacked specifications of the actual language forms that would realise those needs. Such considerations made the fully detailed Munby-type investigation quite impractical.

Van Ek (1976) was more realistic when he said that it would be more feasible to identify large overlapping categories of needs which are found to be shared by a large number of students rather than to specify in minute detail the "micro-needs" of each individual language learner. It was also felt that a very basic or "threshold" level of linguistic skills would be sufficient for most purposes to satisfy a learner's needs.

After much experimentation, criticism and re-evaluation, the concept of needs analysis has been considerably extended and enriched. It includes the identification of the communication requirements, personal needs, motivation, relevant characteristics and resources of the learner. It also includes investigating those of his "partners for learning" (Trim, 1981). These refer to teachers, employers, administrators, family and friends and colleagues, and even those of material writers and textbook publishers.

Derwing and Schutz (1981) offer an eight phase plan for the assessment of needs, as follows;

- i. define the purpose, that is, have a clear idea of the goals and objectives of the programme.
- ii. delimit the target population, that is, determine the range of persons who the programme will have an impact on.
- iii. delimit the parameters of investigation for which the following information must be sought from the population surveyed:
  - a. general background
  - b. occupational speciality or academic field
  - c. English language background
  - d. attitudinal and motivational factors
  - e. relevance of English to use in occupational or professional field.
  - f. basic English language skills
  - g. functional registers and job tasks
  - h. course content and methods of instruction
  - i. reaction to project.
- iv. (iv) select the information-gathering instrument, This would be determined by the scope and objectives of the inquiry.
- v. (v) collect the data
- vi. (vi) analyse the results
- vii. (vii) interpret the results, and

viii. (viii)critique the project, so as to provide positive benefits for similar projects in the future.

### 3.1.2 "Needs" and 'Objectives"

Some writers like Widdowson (1981) have pointed out a controversy between "needs" and "objectives". As Widdowson comments:

"The expression - learner needs - is open to two interpretations. On the one hand, it can refer to what the learner needs to do with the language once he has learned it. This is a goal-oriented definition of needs and related to terminal behaviour, the end of learning. On the other hand, the expression can refer to what the learner tends to do in order to actually acquire the language. This is a process-oriented definition of needs, and related to traditional behaviour, the means of learning."

According to Hawkey (1984), the keywords used by Widdowson suggest objectives rather than needs. Corder (1973) said that the content and structure of a syllabus is related to the objectives of the learner or of society. These must be specified in terms of what he wants or must be able to do in terms of social behaviour and linguistic performance. This is known as his "terminal behaviour". But Ingram (1982) maintains that a clear specification of objectives provides a means of ensuring coherence of language activities in responding to learner needs.

In most language teaching programmes, strict behavioral objectives as defined by Mager (1962) are not often used. Mager stated that behavioural objectives should:

- i. describe the behaviour to be performed;
- ii. describe the conditions under which the performance will be expected to occur;
- iii. state a standard of acceptable performance.

Language programmes usually use objectives which specify

- i. the processes which underlie fluency in specific skill areas;
- ii. the form of the linguistic or communicative content which will be covered; or
- iii. the form of a level of proficiency.

Hawkey suggests that research learner needs should be taken into account when specifying objectives. Van Ek (1976) sums up the situation by saying that language learning objectives must be geared towards learners' needs, and that they should specify the following components:

- i. the situations in which the foreign language will be used, including the topics to be dealt with;
- ii. the language activities in which the learner will engage;
- iii. the language functions which the learner will fulfil;
- iv. what the learner will be able to do with respect to each topic;
- v. the general notions which the learner will be able to handle;
- vi. the specific notions which the learner will be able to handle;
- vii. the language forms which the learner will be able to use;
- viii. the degree of skill with which the learner will be able to perform.

Determining needs is not an exact science as it involves both quantitative and qualitative data. A number of formal and informal data gathering procedures are made use of to clarify needs. The

methods used vary according to setting. Investigations of language needs in industry and commerce have employed participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, content analysis of job descriptions and job advertisements, tests, role play, and analysis of communication breakdowns,

### 3.2 Content Specification

After having determined the language needs of the learner, the next step would be to decide on the content of the syllabus.

Most language syllabus content is drawn from inventories or lists which may be word frequency lists, inventories of functions or lists of specific topics. Content can also be specified through a series of checklists which deal with communicative functions, discourse skills, and study skills.

For example, Candlin (1984) states that content is drawn upon from "some content-bank" which is based on some stated objectives which are in turn derived from the needs assessment of learners. This view is also shared by Breen (1984) who says

"Starting with a general view or definition of the target language and/or its use, more specific objectives or "needs" are selected as appropriate subject matter."

From the objectives, elements of the subject matter are focused upon, for example, particular structures, sets of functions, or a range of communicative events.

A useful general analysis to specify content has been put forward by Brumfit (1984). According to him there are three types of such analyses. The first is that of the linguist, that is, formal analyses of phonology, syntax, morphology, or certain types of semantic categories. The second type is interactional analyses of various kinds, such as situational and functional categories which lead to the analyses of discourse rhetoric. The third type of analysis is an analysis of what is talked or written about.

Each of these analyses presumes a different view of the nature in which language is learned. For example, the first presumes inductive or deductive learning; the second presumes that discourse is learnt to interact and to communicate; while the third one presumes that interesting and motivating content is necessary.

Trim (1973) pointed out that the content specifications of a syllabus can be described in terms of

- i. the behavioural input-output chain involved;
- ii. select language which can be used in a wide range of contexts; and
- iii. taught language that is appropriate to the interest of the pupils and the situations in which he might possibly use his linguistic knowledge.

But Shaw (1976) sees the selection of content to be concerned mainly with two questions:

- i. how much can we teach or how much can be learnt by the learners in question; and
- ii. which items should be included.

He suggests a criteria for selection based on the "relative usefulness" or "relative difficulty" of the content matter. He argues that students' point of entry level and the duration of the course provide a



good indicator of how much should be included and how difficult the content matter should be. Purposes and types would determine the usefulness of the content.

Based on this criteria, Shaw proposed the following general procedure for selection of content:

- i. determine previous knowledge of learners,
- ii. decide amount of content in general terms,
- iii. list items in rough order of specific frequency,
- iv. group for relative difficulty,
- v. check that both functional and notional categories are present,
- vi. check coverage of grammatical items.

This section therefore provides us with some means by which we can go about selecting content matter for a language syllabus.

### 3.3 Syllabus Organization

Having once decided on what to teach, the next state is to decide on an appropriate strategy of presentation.

The objective of organizing a syllabus should be to promote learning, and not just to provide a description of the language. Therefore, the content matter should be organized in such a way so as to facilitate teaching and learning. The unit of organization should also suit the particular purpose of learning.

The syllabus may be structured on the basis of a gradual move from the more general to the more particular, a statement of a general rule to a statement of particular rules or exceptions which incorporates the deductive process. The material can also be organized so that the direction is from the particular to the general which is the inductive process.

The syllabus can also be organized such that the material starts with the learner's home life, moves on to the classroom situation and then moves out of the school into the post office, railway station, grocery shop and so on.

Pit Corder (1973) says that "the ideal syllabus would be one in which the sequencing of items taught logically derives from and presupposes the learning of some previous items." He also put forward the notion of a "natural syllabus" or a "built-in syllabus". He explains that

"the relevance of performance analysis to the designing of a syllabus is based on the notion that there is some 'natural' sequence of elaboration of the approximative system of the second language learner and that when/if this can be well established it would provide a psychological logic to the ordering of material in a syllabus."

However, it is quite impractical to allow natural ordering to be the basis of syllabus organization because it is very rare for teaching and language acquisition to go hand in hand.

According to Allen (1984), there are basically three approaches which can be utilized to sequence and organize content:

1. the traditional, structural-analytic approach in which the highest priority is given to formal grammatical criteria;
2. the functional-analytical approach which defines objectives in terms of categories of communicative language use; and
3. a non-analytic, experiential, or "natural growth" approach, which aims to immerse learners in real-life communication without any artificial preselection or arrangement of items.

Sequencing of content involves the marking out of subject matter along a path of development. Sequencing of subject matter will depend on particular views of language learning and classroom conditions that the syllabus designer holds. For example, if the syllabus represents a view of language as a formal system, then the criteria for sequencing would be related to "simplicity" or "complexity" of structures. If the syllabus represents a functional view of language, then the "usefulness" or "frequency" criteria would have greater prominence.

The syllabus sequenced on a particular view of learning may have to start with subject matter which is more "familiar" to the learner before moving on to something which is "unfamiliar". A syllabus may also represent a particular view of the conditions offered by the specific classroom situation. The sequence for the subject matter may have to take into account whether it is "easy to teach" or whether it is "more urgent".

Wilkins feels that staging and sequencing should be carried out according to the criteria of simplicity, regularity, frequency and contrastive difficulty.

Yalden suggests that more simple language should be taught before the more complex, so as to facilitate learning. Judgments of simplicity, however, have to be based on intuition. The criterion of regularity requires that the most productive linguistic structures should be taught before those of low productivity. The criterion of frequency involves deferring to a later stage the learning of forms that are rarely used. It is suggested that the early stages of learning should be devoted to language forms which present the fewest contrastive difficulties.

According to Johnson (1982), the organization of content matter depends on what is meant to be achieved. Wilkins suggests that a needs analysis be used to establish "semantic priority" so that the sequencing of items would depend on what is considered more useful.

Brumfit (1981) however pointed out that it is important that content matter be organized with priority for teaching purposes. He distinguishes two criteria for organization, that is, "intrinsic" and "extrinsic". "Extrinsic" refers to all criteria for sequencing not derived from within language itself while "intrinsic cohesion will be dependent on the extent to which items in the syllabus are elements of a system. If they are, then it will be possible to present the system in a structured way so that the overall system is reflected in the organization and sequencing of the elements. ... However, extrinsic criteria may also have to be produced for a language learning syllabus. These are criteria, usually defended on motivational grounds, in which an apparent cohesion may be established by the introduction of a story line, for example, in a text, or by the inclusion of information thought to be attractive to students "... syllabuses inevitably find themselves using a mixture of the two types."

Wilkins does not altogether disagree with Brumfit's intrinsic/ extrinsic distinction, but he states that

"in fact intrinsic criteria play a very small role in any kind of syllabus" and that "in a grammatically based syllabus, in practice it is extrinsic criteria that dominate, just as with other types of syllabus."

Gibbons (1984) also argues that neither linguistic analysis nor psycholinguistic research has shown that valid intrinsic criteria is important for sequencing syllabus components beyond the beginning level, In practice, syllabus organization is determined largely by extrinsic considerations especially learner needs and pedagogical factors.

Where language is learned for more specific purposes, learner needs can be better assessed and the criteria successfully applied. For more general language courses, the pedagogic criteria usually plays a larger role.

For the learner needs criteria, earlier language is taught according to

- i. which is needed most immediately by the learner,
- ii. which has high surrender value, that is, of most use to the learner,
- iii. which is necessary to avoid a communication breakdown,
- iv. which is flexible, that is, can be used most widely, and
- v. which is most frequently used by the learner.

All these fulfill the utility principle.

For the pedagogical factors criteria, earlier language is taught which

- i. can be taught most effectively and efficiently given in the classroom situation,
- ii. can be used in teaching other languages,
- iii. is needed for classroom purposes,
- iv. is simpler in form or meaning.

Until quite recently in language teaching, one syllabus type has generally been acceptable and has dominated the preparation of teaching materials. This syllabus generally consists of two components: a list of linguistic structures (the 'grammar' to be taught) and a list of words (the lexicon to be taught). The items are sequenced usually according to degrees of complexity or difficulty.

If language is viewed as learned, then the logic of grammar rules imposes a sequence. If language is viewed as acquired, then there is no linguistic content restriction. If a syllabus is based on language use, then following the Council of Europe, a needs analysis would be required. The identified needs would impose the choice of syllabus content. The organization of content is complex as it has formal and functional components.

### **3.4 Syllabus Implementation**

No matter how well developed a syllabus, it would not be able to achieve what it is meant to if serious consideration is not given to its successful implementation.

Various sources have cited a number of factors which need to be given consideration in the successful implementation of a language syllabus. These factors would also affect the choice of an appropriate syllabus for use.

Maley (1984) gives the following factors:

- i. cultural

- ii. educational
  - iii. organizational
  - iv. learner
  - v. teacher, and
  - vi. material
- i. Cultural factors are cited as the most powerful factors in the implementation of any language programme. It depends on whether a society is outward-looking and welcomes innovation, or inward-looking, seeking inspiration from deeply-rooted traditional values. The attitudes of a given society towards the learning process, towards books, towards teachers are also of key importance.
  - ii. Educational factors refer mainly to educational philosophy. Other factors are whether the system is authoritarian or participatory, whether it views learning as acquiring knowledge or acquiring skills, whether learning is considered a product-oriented business or as a life-long process, and whether the system encourages dependence or learner initiative. It is also important that top-level administrators are well-informed about the syllabuses. It is also important to take account of the role of exams in a given educational system.
  - iii. Organizational and administrative factors will affect the implementation of a programme especially if the national educational system is highly centralised or highly decentralised. This will be reflected in the way decisions are arrived at and communicated to others, that is, whether they are by open consensus or by closed decree.  
It is equally important that there is a clearly defined structure of communication between the administration and those executing a programme. There should be sufficient channels of communication between syllabus designers and classroom teachers. There should also be a clear structure of communication between technical and secretarial staff on the one hand and the teaching staff on the other.
  - iv. Learner factors involve the age and background of the learners as being highly significant. It is also significant how learners are selected for the programme because certain syllabuses may not suit the study habits of certain learners.
  - v. Teacher factors refer to the training and experience of teachers which provide an important criteria for successful implementation. The availability of teacher training is a key factor. It is important that the teacher is proficient in the target language. Teachers' language proficiency and training may well favour the choice of one syllabus vs. another. Teachers will have to understand why the syllabus is as it is so that they see the necessity of having to change their teaching procedure if necessary. Teachers, administrators and educators must be familiar with the objectives of the syllabus. It is also important that teachers are aware from the start about the number of hours they are expected to work as this will have important consequences for time-tabling and teacher morale.
  - vi. Material factors mean that there should be an adequate budgetary provision for all aspects of the programme. The hardware ordered for the programme should be appropriate and not just ordered for prestige reasons. Spares for the hardware should be readily available and they should be serviceable in the vicinity. Software should also be appropriate and available to those who need it. There should also be adequate provision for secretarial assistance.

Other sources have also given class size as a variable or factor to be considered. For example, the sorts of drills associated with structural syllabuses would be difficult to conduct where there are classes of 50 or more.

The economic condition is another important factor, mainly because new materials and retraining of teachers is expensive, it is vital that this factor be kept in mind for all aspects of the implementation process because the whole process actually depends on it.

The successful implementation of a syllabus also depends largely on the extent to which materials, methodology and exams are compatible with it.

These very same factors would also have to be taken into consideration when selecting an appropriate syllabus type to achieve the purpose desired.

#### **4.0 Types of Syllabuses**

Based on what has been dealt with earlier, various types of syllabuses can be designed to serve different needs.

##### **4.1 "Linear" and "Spiral" Syllabuses**

Language is mainly used either for production or reception. Usually, the same resources of language are used in different combinations to express different meanings. New bits of language are gradually learnt by experiencing them intermittently in different contexts. Repeated experiences of the same features of language is necessary. This is the concept behind the "cyclical" or "spiral" syllabus. It reflects the natural process of learning a language whereby the same things keep turning up in different combinations with different meanings.

However, most language courses, especially in the past, were usually "linear" whereby new points are strung along in a line and each point was completely utilized before moving on to the next. All the learning points were isolated and they were presented one after the other in some order. They required a great deal of practice before moving on to the next item.

While the "spiral" syllabuses have greater pedagogical and psychological advantages, they are more difficult to organize. That could be the reason why "linear" syllabuses are more readily found.

##### **4.2 Notional syllabus**

The basis of this syllabus is an adequate needs analysis from which the content of learning is derived. It includes not only grammar and vocabulary but also the notion and concepts the learner needs to communicate about.

##### **4.3 Functional syllabus**

This type of syllabus arranges the learning material according to selected functions regardless of the grammar constructions that may be necessary to fulfill those functions.

The notional/functional types of syllabuses stress on communicative properties of language where the central concern is the teaching of meaning and the communicative use of patterns, it emphasizes what speakers communicate through language and derives its content from an analysis of learners' needs to express certain meanings.

#### **4.4 Situational syllabus**

The fundamental unit of organization here is a non-linguistic category, namely the situation. The designer of a situational syllabus attempts to predict those situations in which the learner will find himself, and uses these situations, for example, a restaurant, an airplane, or a post office, as a basis for selecting and presenting language content. The underlying assumption here is that language is related to the situational contexts in which it occurs.

#### **4.5 Structural syllabus**

This is known as the traditional syllabus which is organized along grammatical lines giving primacy to language form. It specifies structural patterns as the basic units of learning and organizes these according to such criteria as structural complexity, difficulty, regularity, utility and frequency. It makes ample use of highly controlled, tightly structured and sequenced pattern practice drills.

#### **4.6 Process syllabus**

This syllabus type was advocated by Breen whereby a framework would be provided within which either a predesigned content syllabus would be publicly analysed and evaluated by the classroom group, or an emerging content syllabus would be designed in an on-going way. It provides a framework for decisions and alternative procedures, activities and tasks for the classroom group. It openly addresses teaching and learning and particularly the possible interrelationships between subject matter, learning and the potential contributions of a classroom. The actual syllabus is designed as the teaching and learning proceeds.

#### **4.7 Procedural syllabus**

This was proposed by Prabhu with the central hypothesis being "that structure can best be learned when attention is focused on meaning." This syllabus proposes to replace the linguistic syllabus with a syllabus of tasks which are graded conceptually and grouped by similarity. The tasks and activities are planned in advance but not the linguistic content. The emphasis here is on meaning rather than form. The learner is preoccupied with understanding, working out, relating, or conveying messages, and copes in the process, as well as he can with the language involved. There is no syllabus in terms of vocabulary or structure and no presentation of language items.

## 4.8 Multi-dimensional syllabus

There is no reason why only one of the inventory item types needs to be selected as a unit of organization. It would be possible to develop a syllabus leading to lessons of varying orientation - some covering important functions, others dealing with settings and topics, and yet others with notions and structures. This will allow a syllabus design which is less rigid and more sensitive to the various student language needs. There is flexibility to change the focal point of the teaching material as the course unfolds.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The stages of syllabus design outlined in this paper provide a basis for going about preparing a language programme. The modern trend in language teaching is towards being learner-centred. This brings with it a large number of variables, which have been pointed out under the section called Syllabus Implementation, which dictate the choice of a syllabus type.

Whether a syllabus is flexible or whether it is binding will depend mainly on the objective which it is to achieve. Most inexperienced teachers prefer a "rigid" syllabus which clearly prescribes everything that has to be done and how. Experienced teachers on the other hand, prefer both freedom and responsibility and therefore a syllabus which is more flexible.

The complex teaching situation today requires that time be set aside and concerted effort be put into designing a syllabus which would be appropriate for the variables involved in the teaching-learning process. The priority in language teaching nowadays is communicative performance among an increased number of learners. Therefore the emphasis on syllabus design is justified so as to produce appropriate syllabuses for the specific needs of the learners.

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