



English Language Course Planning: Overview of Syllabus Types

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at reviewing syllabus types in order to raise university teachers' awareness of the features of these different syllabus types. The ultimate aim is to help teachers chose the appropriate type when they plan their courses. Knowing the characteristics of each type in addition to its merits and drawbacks will enable teachers to make the right choice and adopt a syllabus that is suitable to their students' needs and level and in harmony with their goals of teaching English as a foreign language. In order to fulfill these aims, a thorough documentary investigation was conducted using up-to-date references to cover all syllabus types. Features of each type in addition to its advantages and disadvantages were covered in more detail to facilitate teachers' decisions regarding selecting the most appropriate syllabus type when planning to teach English to their university students. Because such decisions regarding adopting the right syllabus should be based on certain theoretical frameworks, and consistent with the student's level in the language, some idea is given about these two preliminary aspects of planning language courses. The paper was concluded with some recommendations to teachers of how to follow a logical approach in creating their course plans and specifically designing their syllabuses.

Keywords / planning, English, curriculum

تخطيط البرامج التدريسية للغة الإنجليزية: نظرة عامة على أنواع المنهج

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ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى مراجعة أنواع المناهج من أجل رفع درجة وعي أساتذة الجامعات بخصائص هذه الأنواع المختلفة من المناهج، الهدف النهائي هو مساعدة الأساتذة على اختيار النوع المناسب عندما يخططون لبرامجهم التدريسية، إن معرفة خصائص كل نوع بالإضافة إلى مميزاته وعيوبه ستمكن الأساتذة من اتخاذ القرار الصحيح واعتماد منهج دراسي مناسب لاحتياجات طلابهم ومستوياتهم وينسجم مع أهدافهم في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ومن أجل تحقيق هذه الأهداف، تم إجراء تحقيق وثائقي شامل باستخدام مراجع حديثة لتغطية جميع أنواع المناهج الدراسية، وتم تناول خصائص كل نوع بالإضافة إلى مزاياه وعيوبه بمزيد من التفصيل لتسهيل اتخاذ القرار المناسب من قبل الأساتذة فيما يتعلق باختيار نوع المنهج الأكثر ملاءمة عند التخطيط لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب الجامعات، ولأن مثل هذه القرارات المتعلقة باعتماد المنهج الصحيح يجب أن تستند إلى أطر نظرية معينة، وتتوافق مع مستوى الطالب في اللغة، تم تقديم بعض الأفكار حول هذين الجانبين الأساسيين لتخطيط دورات اللغة، واختتمت الورقة ببعض التوصيات لأساتذة الجامعات حول كيفية اتباع منهج منطقي في وضع خططهم للمقررات الدراسية بشكل عام وتصميم مناهجهم الدراسية على وجه التحديد.

الكلمات المفتاحية / تخطيط، اللغة الإنجليزية، المنهج.

Introduction

A paradigm change in second language learning and instruction was brought about by the introduction of Communicative Language instruction (CLT) and the English for Special Purposes (ESP) movement. As alternatives to behaviorist learning theories, cognitive, interactional, and sociocultural theories of learning were put forth. A perception of language as a communicative tool, learning as a social process, genuine and meaningful communication, and language as a tool for information processing emerged as a result of this change. The design of language courses, syllabuses, teaching strategies, and resources are covered in the following sections, with a particular emphasis on choosing a syllabus structure and defining course level.

Determining the level of the course

While knowing the developmental stages of learners is essential for creating language courses, these broad categories are not enough for thorough planning. Assessments ought to take into account a number of factors, including learning objectives, curricula, and assessment techniques. ACTFL and ACTFL apply guidelines for curriculum organization and assessment of foreign language ability, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) band levels are utilized to create courses at appropriate levels (Council of Europe. 2001)

Choosing a syllabus framework

One of the most important components of course design is the syllabus framework, which outlines the key components or units of language, language usage, and learning. Courses are arranged into clusters, with a core component for each cluster. Since syllabus strands serve as the cornerstone of an integrated course, choosing the appropriate ones is essential. Reading comprehension skills are part of macro-level planning, whereas vocabulary, text kinds, and grammar are part of micro-level units. Grammar-based language training has given way to communicative and performance-based approaches. Activities, texts, competencies, and material are examples of syllabus types that are employed on a smaller scale, whereas other syllabus types serve as the core framework for courses (Council of Europe. 2001). So as not to take the impression that one type is favored over another, they are arranged alphabetically:

Competency-based syllabuses

Since the 1970s, competency-based language teaching, or CBLT, has been a popular method for designing and executing courses. It is used in

language instruction, especially in adult language programs that focus on survival and work-related language. CBLT focuses on imparting fundamental knowledge for observable actions that arise in daily life (Auerbach,1986).

The idea of task-based instruction—which divides activities into smaller parts and frequently incorporates necessary linguistic elements—is covered in the text. This method is comparable to task-based instruction, but it focuses on the language requirements of specific jobs, like those of a tour guide, waiter, or nurse. Task-based instruction requires a set of competences that are necessary for comprehension and communication to be successful (Kettner, Howard & Lee, 1981)

The Common Core Standards (Common European Framework of Reference CEFR), national language curricula, and vocational and technical education are all using competency-based frameworks more frequently to define skill components in terms of competencies. For example, for the skill of listening, the performance of a learner at the basic level (A1 and A2 of the framework) is described as follows (Council of Europe 2001, 66):

The person can address specific requirements, comprehend terms and words pertaining to current priorities, and follow slow, deliberate speech—as long as it is spoken clearly and slowly.

We can compare this with the ability of an advanced-level listener (C1 and C2 on the CEFR):

Even if they are not familiar with accents, they are able to follow lengthy speeches on difficult subjects and understand spoken language both live and on television with ease. They are able to understand and follow colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions, including those that imply relationships (Auerbach,1986).

In a competency-based approach, the instructor or course designer makes the decisions about language and methodology, with an emphasis on learning outcomes as the main driver of instruction. Encouraging pupils to become self-sufficient individuals who can handle the pressures of the outside world is the aim. CBLT bases its language instruction on the needs analysis of the scenarios in which the language will be used. Overt behaviors are prioritized over knowledge or the capacity to discuss language and abilities (Mrowicki,1986)

Drawbacks of Competency-Based Instruction

The CEFR and other competency-based systems are criticized for problems including defining competencies—which are frequently defined by experience and intuition—and its constituent parts. A competency's actualization is erratic and contingent upon a number of variables, including the circumstances, participants' roles, and emotional states. For instance, following well-spoken speech, starting discussions without preparation, carrying on a

conversation, and expressing emotions are all part of the CEFR's level B1 competency in conversation. To create instructional materials and assessments, these assertions must be operationalized in terms of language characteristics (Docking, 1994).

The CEFR offers comprehensive details on English grammar, vocabulary, and functions in order to direct the creation of curricula and courses. Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press provide funding for it.

Content-based syllabus (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Two well-liked methods for designing courses and syllabuses are Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Content, or the language used to convey knowledge, is the beginning point for syllabus planning in both CBI and CLIL. Grammar, texts, abilities, and functions are among the other considerations that are determined before content is chosen in traditional language teaching methods (Wu, 1996).

Language learning methods that are content-based place a strong emphasis on using language as a tool for knowledge acquisition as opposed to a goal into itself. They offer a logical structure for improving language proficiency and can be used as a task, a foundation, or an explanation for products sold as EFL/ESL teaching aids (Stryker, 2004).

Programs known as Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content-Language Instruction (CLIL), especially in North America and Europe, are predicated on certain assumptions about language acquisition. Whereas CLIL frequently involves a content teacher teaching subject in a second or foreign language, CBI typically involves a language teacher teaching content in English. CBI developed naturally, backed by a wealth of literature from both the US and other nations, as well as advocacy by academics and educators. Although they are not the same, CBI and CLIL have certain characteristics (Wu, 1996).

Drawbacks of CBI and CLIL

Although CBI and CLIL are extensively used methodologies, there are challenges associated with their application, such as how to integrate language and subject learning. The primary worry is if teaching material in a second language results in learners eschewing grammatical precision and focusing mostly on vocabulary and communication techniques, thus dumbing down the content. Significant concerns also include the obligations placed on educators and the requirement that educators receive training in teaching language as a skill (Coxhead, 2000).

Functional syllabus

Introduced in the 1970s, functional syllabuses placed a strong emphasis on communicative ability and were a crucial part of communicative language education. Learners' essential needs are identified by Threshold Level English, especially for travel and social survival (Tollefson, 1986).

Since the 1980s, functional syllabuses—such as Threshold Level—have become more and more popular in general-purpose course design. In their 1983 book *Teaching the Spoken Language*, Brown and Yule made a distinction between the interactional and transactional purposes of language, the latter of which is focused on real-world information-oriented functions and the former on preserving social interaction.

Functional syllabuses are designed with an emphasis on language and communication resources that convey functions; this ensures that students have a thorough comprehension of the subject matter by identifying exponents for each function.

In spoken English courses, functional syllabuses are frequently employed to emphasize communication skills. Main functions that are introduced from person to person include introducing oneself, inquiring about occupations, striking up a conversation, ordering food, comparing families, describing locations, providing directions, inviting, disagreeing, sharing personal biographies, scheduling appointments, and concluding conversations (Tollefson, 1986).

Drawbacks of functional syllabuses

Functional syllabuses imply a consistent relationship between functions and modes of expression; yet, communication is not limited to academic knowledge. Depending on the nature of the encounter and the roles of the parties involved, it incorporates both negotiation and interaction. Teaching listening and speaking skills can be made easier by connecting functions to other syllabus content, including as grammar, subjects, and vocabulary.

Functional syllabuses have been criticized for their vague selection and grading criteria, for taking an atomistic approach to language, for encouraging the phrase-book method, and for perhaps leaving students with gaps in their grammar knowledge (Tollefson, J. 1986)

Grammatical syllabus

Grammar served as the main framework for organizing language courses prior to the advent of communicative approaches to language teaching. Grammar-correct sentence production exercise was considered the key to learning in the 1960s and 1970s. Using this approach, a certain grammatical feature was isolated, learners were asked to construct sentences with the feature,

repeat opportunities were given, success was expected, and feedback on correctness was given. (Biber & Reopen, 2002)

Grammar is considered a fundamental strand in major worldwide four-skill integrated courses such as Interchange and Cutting Edge. It is an essential component of language courses, assessments, and resources. It is a part of high-stakes exams, signifies a well-known teaching strategy, and is expected by both teachers and students.

Drawbacks of grammatical syllabuses

Grammar-based course outlines in English classes have come under fire for a number of reasons, such as a deficiency of research foundation, a disregard for discourse, and an emphasis on sentences rather than longer discourse units. Grammar is not usually taught from grammatical in communication materials; instead, it is frequently taught through discrete textual purposes and based on tradition and intuition. Grammar was seen by traditional methods of teaching language as a separate aspect of language.

Grammar is currently taught through meaning rather than form as part of a multiskilled curriculum. It is seen as a tool for communication that may be applied to both written and spoken speech. The identification of grammatical resources, the instruction of text awareness, the use of corpora, the application of diverse teaching pedagogies, the provision of guided noticing, and the integration of grammar with other skills are among the twelve principles for integrating grammar (Biber & Reopen, 2002).

Depending on the syllabus framework, grammar is a micro-level course component connected to texts, assignments, and abilities. Grammar is mapped out in the syllabus planner together with other course materials such as readings, themes, skills, and assignments.

Situational syllabus

The final syllabus concentrates on the language required for a certain scenario, which includes the physical location, participants, objectives, plans of action, protocols, terminology, and results. It covers the environment, people involved, roles, tools, language, and the exchange's results. A syllabus of this kind is necessary for productive dialogue and engagement.

Threshold and other syllabus models emphasize the "situation" as a crucial component of syllabus preparation. Situations such as airports, immigration desks, banks, and dining establishments are included in these frameworks. Items from the syllabus are frequently selected depending on the language that is used and the activities that students participate in in these settings. This method works very well for course preparation and survival courses. (Jacobs, & Farrell, 2001)

Drawbacks situational syllabuses

Situation syllabuses have drawn criticism for their inconsistent syllabus, lack of transferability, and non-systematic teaching of grammar. They frequently result in a dialogue and phrase-book approach when utilized in travel and work-related contexts. Opponents contend that these courses limit students' skills to the scenarios covered and rehearsed in the course or its materials. (Jacobs, & Farrell. 2001)

Skill-based syllabus

Mastering the individual subskills (micro-skills) that comprise a complicated activity, such reading, writing, speaking, and listening—collectively referred to as the four macro-skills—is the first step in approaching a language through skills.

The text lists the abilities needed for writing, speaking, listening, reading, and composing subject sentences in addition to identifying important details and employing communication techniques (Bygate, M. 1987).

Understanding language script, inferring meaning, comprehending explicitly stated and unstated information, conceptual meaning, communicative value, sentence relations, cohesion devices, discourse markers, main points, and selective extraction are just a few of the listening skills that are emphasized in the text. It also covers the necessity of a listening training that advances these abilities.

Munby's "reading to learn" skillset covers both top-down and bottom-up approaches. These abilities, which are frequently employed in academic courses, include skimming, gathering fresh ideas, reading for preparation, responding critically, and reading for the major concepts.

Bygate (1987) divided speaking into two categories: production skills and interaction skills. The former focused on basic grammatical constructions and turn-taking techniques. The arrangement and validity of these skills in a syllabus, however, continue to be problems.

Drawbacks of skill-based syllabuses

Skill-based syllabuses distinguish teachable and learnable sections by emphasizing behavior or performance. They offer a useful framework for creating lesson plans and instructional resources. They have been attacked, meanwhile, for lacking a research foundation, discrediting skills taxonomies, and emphasizing discrete ability components rather than the development of universal communicative capacities.

Multimodal literacy skills are now necessary because the Internet has changed how people understand skills. This entails blending reading and writing

into one and incorporating digital literacy with viewing, listening, and reading. Large textual contexts are essential for learning for modern readers (Bygate, 1987).

Task-based syllabus

Based on the principles of second language acquisition (SLA), task-based instruction (TBI) engages students with activities instead of concentrating on grammar or other linguistic components. For efficient second language acquisition, TBI uses both tasks that are specifically created and tasks that mimic tasks found in everyday life. It gives learners adequate target language examples, which they then use cognitive processing to alter. TBI proponents compare their method to previous grammar-focused strategies like audiolingualism, which they believe can address issues with language instruction (Long, 2015).

A component of second language learning processes that can be activated is task-based grammar instruction (TBI), which focuses mostly on grammar acquisition through tasks. Tasks are processes that learners interact with, at first with the language resources they already possess. They have a purpose beyond only teaching language, even if language learning could happen as the student completes the activity. These kinds of jobs are instructional tasks, such reading a map and providing directions or reading a set of instructions and putting together a toy. By requiring students to apply interactional skills and communication techniques (shared tasks), these assignments contribute positively to language development. These kinds of jobs include reading instructions, putting together a toy, and reading a map and providing directions.

Examples of tasks of this nature include: (Van den Brandon, 2012).

- purchasing something in a store;
- describing a medical problem to a doctor;
- completing a form to apply for a driver's license;
- following written instructions to assemble something;

Later iterations of task-based instruction (TBI) placed more emphasis on task mastery as an end in and of itself, whereas earlier iterations saw tasks as a means to an end. With an emphasis on treating grammar and other aspects as needed, TBI focuses on employing activities to foster engagement, increasing language awareness, and developing language abilities related to task performance (Willis, 1996).

Drawbacks of task-based syllabuses

Task-based instruction (TBI) is a novel method to curriculum design that has students actively engaged in a task. It does, however, bring up concerns with

task selection and sequencing, accuracy growth, lack of relevance in curriculums driven by assessments, and demands on teachers. Because TBI is unique, educators must tailor their language instruction to each student's needs and environment. There are no published courses based on TBI, no standard syllabuses, and no pre-made syllabuses available for instructors or course creators (Willis & Willis. 2007).

Text-based syllabus

It is possible to view language learning objectives as a way to learn through a variety of social practices, including talks, instructions, factual recounts, interviews, narratives, opinion texts, personal accounts, persuasive texts, presentations, and procedures. A syllabus that is text-based covers scenarios such as attending an English-medium university or learning in an English-medium environment (Mickan, 2013).

Text-based methods, such as procedures, reviews, discussions, debates, fact sheets, stories, fables, and casual letters, are used in Singapore's national curriculum to teach a variety of subjects.

Identifying pertinent spoken and written texts, examining discourse and linguistic elements, and creating techniques to support students in gaining knowledge and proficiency with these texts are all part of the text-based approach to syllabus and course design. This method involves creating work units, guiding practice, teaching about structures, and connecting texts to cultural contexts. Transcripts of class activities, oral reports, and tourist locations are all included in the syllabus for an Australian program that offers guided city tours (Mickan, 2013).

When creating a text-based syllabus that arranges skill-based courses such as speaking, writing, listening, and reading, text kinds are essential. The focus of other syllabus components, such as grammar and vocabulary, is determined by the nature of each skill. This hybrid curriculum combines reading, writing, and oral communication while emphasizing the mastery of texts as a means of teaching grammar and other skills.

Topic selection, development, discourse management, turn-taking, backchanneling, questioning, meaning clarification, functions, conversational routines, and vocabulary are some of the components of the micro-level conversation syllabus.

Drawbacks of a text-based approach

Text-Based Instruction (TBI) has drawn criticism for its theory and implementation, with critics claiming that it prioritizes products over processes and frequently disregards the unique originality and expression of each individual student. Although the text-based approach is practical, it is not always

adaptable to real-life scenarios because it frequently depends on transcripts and textbook design (Mickan, 2013).

Vocabulary syllabus

All language use revolves around vocabulary, so regardless of the syllabus framework, items should be kept within the target vocabulary bands. The development of new syllabus types, such the Academic Word List, and the revision of older ones have been made possible by corpus research (Nation, 2001)

In order to cover a significant portion of words on an ordinary text page, vocabulary development calls for developing a minimum vocabulary of 3,000 words. An academic vocabulary is then built around an additional 600 words that are common to academic subjects.

For intermediate level learners who are prepared for advanced programs, a receptive vocabulary of 5,000 to 6,000 words is a decent starting point. Increased receptive vocabulary, exposure to vocabulary outside of the first 5000–6000 word band, knowledge of employing words at this level, and training in awareness skills for autonomous vocabulary learning are the objectives of the program (Shin & Nation. 2008)

Lexicography, or words and multiword combinations, or "chunks" employed as separate objects, is the main focus of lexical approaches in language instruction. These segments could be made up of lexical phrases or collocations. Although chunks have been a part of language learning since Palmer's time, the advent of corpus-based studies has led to a reevaluation of chunks' place in language theory.

When teaching language, a lexical approach emphasizes chunks, or multi-word units, as the fundamental building blocks of language. Lower-level students should be taught these sections directly, while intermediate and advanced-level students might not have access to the same material. Proponents contend that the syllabus serves as an ordered list of these chunks and that the purpose is to raise students' awareness of lexical units and give them with tools for identifying, learning, organizing, storing, and utilizing these chunks.

The lexical approach was first applied in the Collins COBUILD English Course, which was based on the observation that the 700 most common words in the English language make up about 70% of all English text. The syllabus was made up of single-word lexical items that were more focused than previous lexical methods. Mostly single-word lexical units rather than chunks made up the syllabus. (Lewis, 1993)

Drawbacks of vocabulary syllabuses

A course's vocabulary is a micro-level component that can be covered either directly or indirectly. Using a direct approach entails word selection, the introduction of new vocabulary, and word recycling. On the other hand, lexical item selection is determined by macro-level units. By addressing vocabulary as needed for content, skills, texts, and tasks, an indirect method gives other elements priority during the planning stages. This method could cause gaps in the vocabulary growth and knowledge of the learners (Nation, 2001),

Determining the scope and sequence

Determining the breadth and depth of material covering, as well as which knowledge is needed early and which will be studied later, are important aspects of planning a course's scope and sequence. Sequencing can be based on simple to complicated skills, with more complex skills taught later and simpler abilities like grammar necessary early.

Content can be arranged in accordance with needs, such as for fundamental literacy skills, money, shopping, time and dates, phones, health, emergencies, directions, transit, housing, and social language, or based on real-world occurrences, such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. This facilitates efficient content organization in a range of educational settings.

An essential component of learning is prerequisite knowledge, which lays the groundwork for more advanced concepts. In a reading course, for instance, a certain set of grammatical rules might be taught as a precondition for word attack or paragraph writing. It may also emphasize rehearsing segments prior to the entirety (Council of Europe, 2001)

Developing instructional segments

The process of choosing the syllabus and course material includes creating instructional segments, which are independent learning units with predetermined objectives. Choosing the right parts and determining the order in which to present them will help to improve the course's teachability, coherence, and structure.

Planning for instructional portions is done at the module and unit levels. Modules are self-contained learning sequences designed to achieve particular goals. For example, a 120-hour course can be divided into four modules, each lasting 30 hours. Units are educational blocks that are centered around a single instructional theme and are longer than modules. Length, development, coherence, pace, and outcome are characteristics of successful units that

guarantee students can comprehend and complete relevant tasks by the end of the unit (Leung, 2012).

Conclusion

A logical approach is used in the creation of a language course and syllabus, with content-based approaches emphasizing communication and the comprehension of meaning and data. To initiate learning processes and get students ready for performance outside of the classroom, task-based techniques begin with the identification of tasks. Text-based methods start with classifying different sorts of texts and concentrate on text production and analysis. There is no set methodology.

In order to incorporate into an entire syllabus framework, the text highlights the significance of addressing several strands in a course, including texts, skills, content, tasks, grammar, and vocabulary. Rather than sticking to a single strategy, it advises taking into account text-based, skill-based, content-based, task-based, and grammar-based approaches.

The order in which components of a syllabus are prioritized is determined by a number of variables, including tests, institutional or governmental requirements, current practice, and expediency. The design of syllabuses frequently reflects current practices, and government regulations may restrict teachers' options. Tests help to match assessment procedures with instruction, and certain methods are simpler to apply or have written documentation to support them.

Recommendations

When selecting their syllabuses, teachers should consider the following factors:

- They should ensure that the content of their selected syllabus satisfies students' needs and interests.
- They should Ensure that the syllabus material covers the topics necessary for obtaining the objectives of the course.
- They should pay attention to the sequence and pace of the material to ensure suitability for the student's level and time allotted for the course.
- Teachers should always seek advise from administrations and educational supervisors and experts in order to make informed decisions regarding selecting their syllabuses.

- Schools and educational institutions should create an atmosphere of continuous improvement in order to adapt to changing needs and conditions.

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