

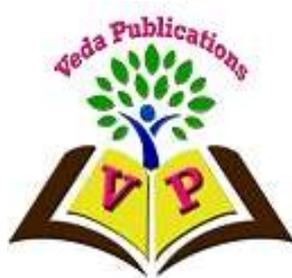


SHOULD ESL SYLLABUS BE SKILL ORIENTED OR LEARNER CENTERED? A DECISIVE AND NEED BASED APPROACH TO BECKON WITH/IN THE OFFING

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ABSTRACT



Etymologically the word syllabus means a "label" or "table of contents." The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines syllabus as 'a plan showing the subjects or books to be studied in a particular course'. We all consider that a syllabus should comprise an outline, and a list of topics, expectations and responsibilities etc. However, we assume that the purpose of syllabus is to get into some contact with the students and to communicate to all the enrolled students on what the course offers, whether the course is beneficial or not, what is its outcome and what is expected from the students to complete the course with a good grade point average. This study is aimed at analyzing the syllabus framing of the institutions and what aspects are looked into while designing the syllabus and finally what is required for ESL learners etc. This paper talks about the conditions that are encouraging and influencing the designing of syllabus and any related activity is aimed at following a significant approach or not.

Keywords: *Syllabus, Design, Outcome, Needs, students, ESL, Institutions, Approaches, Advantages and disadvantages.*

**DEFINITION AND FUNCTION OF SYLLABUSES**

"In foreign language learning context, there are various factors that influence the learning process such as motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning achievements, aptitudes, intelligence, age, personalities, etc" (Shams, 2008)

The understanding of syllabus is that it is a formal document that carries topics or portion covered in a particular subject. It is developed by the examination wing in consultation with the professors in case of higher educational institution. The professors are responsible for the quality of it which is made available to all the students by the teachers. It can be made accessible in hard copy or electronic form to bring their attention towards the subject and take their study seriously.

A syllabus is considered as a guide to the in charge as well as to the students. It helps the students to know about the subject in detail, why it is a part of their course of study, what are the expectations from students, consequences of failure, etc. It contains general rules, policies, instructions, topics covered, assignments, projects, test dates, and so on.

KEY FACTORS IN THE EXECUTION OF THE SYLLABUS

Course Content : The first topics in a syllabus should provide the course information; course title, course code/number, and credit hours. Also, it should highlight the prerequisites so as to make students realize whether they have requisite knowledge to pursue the course or not. Does the course necessitate taking the permission of the instructor? Does it include the location of classroom, and the hours/classes per week and lab sessions? However any leniency in preparing the course information leads to unsuccessful completion of the syllabus

Despite the almost universal agreement on the need for a syllabus in college courses, what actually constitutes a syllabus – content, format, and function – remains unclear. This lack of consensus may derive from the need of the syllabus to fulfill multiple purposes and to satisfy

multiple constituents. (Doolittle & Siudzinsla, p. 30)

Teacher's Role: Sometimes information about the instructor is also linked up with the syllabus due to the curiosity of the students, such as full name, designation; staff room location (and where to submit assignments), phone number; visiting hours etc. Many instructors give the students their mobile number or mail id with the purpose of helping the student acquaint more with the syllabus.

The notion of "teacher" will change significantly in the future. The growing number of formal and informal learning options is causing an unbundling of the teacher role. (Michael, p.01)

Study Material: University level instruction is heavily dependent upon the use of print and online materials. In some situations a textbook may be not be suggested, but a variety of readings expected. The syllabus should provide sufficient information on the kind of readings required. If so, whether the readings are essential for the students or just recommended for better understanding of the modules discussed in the class. Whether the material is kept available for students in the library or it is available for purchase in the online/offline mode? Sometimes the teachers make their own copies for distribution to students.

Develop one, maximally a two page document consisting of the topic, teaching goal, prerequisites and skills (a description of the knowledge/ skills to be gained in the particular lesson), afterwards explain the basic concept and ideas of the teaching matter discussed in the lesson (in the form of text and questions) and conclude with self-tests, tasks, quizzes, or an assignment. Never forget to include the bibliographical sources and or links to them. (Klimova, P.396)

Course Objectives/Outcomes: The treatments of this part in the syllabus, namely course description, content, goals, aims and objectives differ from one another. Especially course objectives are brief and lucid statements that describe what you expect your



students to learn by the end of the course. In some cases the purpose would be to repeat the objective/outcome in the college manual/catalogue, considering that it outlines the course with some accuracy. Certainly any description of such kind on the general content of the course would not be excessive. Some experts even relate this to information about instructional methods. However, the terms objective and outcome have to be treated separately, knowing their individual capacity.

The difference between course objectives and learning outcomes—and the reason these terms are so often conflated with each other—is the former describes an intended state (what you hope your students will learn), whereas the latter expresses a present or observed state (what your students actually learned).()

Course Calendar/Schedule: Some teachers have apprehension that, if they include a daily - or weekly schedule of topics in the name of course schedule, they can be questioned for, if they deviate from it. One solution to overcome this situation is to make a note in the schedule that it is tentative and subject to change depending upon the advancement of the class. Mostly the ESL teacher has only limited flexibility about scheduling anyway, e.g., in a multi-section course where concerned departments administer exams on specific dates, or in a course which is compulsory to pursue another course. If the teachers make students to meet the deadlines, the students should plan their work accordingly for which the information has to be provided by the teachers.

Attendance, lateness: At least for newly joined students, and perhaps for all undergraduate students, the syllabus should carry some statement regarding attendance (is it necessary, will regular students be given weightage in their total score, at least if the grade is borderline?). About lateness, many institutions are penalizing the students in various ways bypassing the uniformed approach. (Students who arrive late definitely disturb the class. In some campuses it is quite difficult for a student to move from one classroom to another when the

campus is big within the allotted time. Sometimes the teachers do not let students leave promptly.)

Grading System: How grading is connected to this topic? Even more, this academic activity is often considered as a separate area and not discussed along with syllabus. As it is commonly observed that the students are more interested in their grades, such inclusion is certainly defensible. Each syllabus whether skill oriented or learned centered should include details about how the students will be graded. What factors/tests determine their performance, how they are given some weightage, and how they are translated into grades. Information about the internal testing procedures, which are often presented in a student handbook, is also useful to any student of first year or second year undergraduate course.

Support Services for Improvement. Most college courses have available to the students a considerable variety of instructional support services. We often bemoan the fact that the students do not avail themselves of these services. Perhaps this is because we do not draw their attention to the possibilities. The libraries are probably the oldest resource, and perhaps still the richest. Include a brief statement in the syllabus identifying collections, journals, abstracts, audio or video tapes, etc. which the library has which is relevant to the course would be appropriate. If the institution has a learning center, making the students aware of its services can be of real benefit to students. In today's world computers are becoming almost a necessity. Most campuses have some terminals, if not personal computers, available for student use. Many courses have other support services unique to them. Briefly describe what is available in the syllabus, or tell the students where they can get detailed information.

All the foregoing thoughts and suggestions culminate naturally in the venture to be undertaken here, since the important thing ultimately is the practical use to which they can be put in terms of educating individuals.... we shall put forward by way of a general conclusion to this chapter a methodological framework for a syllabus, intended



to serve not as a model but as something to be borne in mind by, or a source of suggestions for, curriculum designers.(Rassekh & Vaideanu, P.218)

CONCLUSION

As the two components 'skills and Knowledge' are noticeably important for any institution or other body that works on the curriculum or more specifically in designing the syllabus, the focus should be on encouraging the skill development with the support of content required. The knowledge of the subject and ability to use the subject (knowledge) to progress further is the main objective of every learner when he/she confronts syllabus as part of the course taken for study. Hence it is more convincing to understand or learn that syllabus should guide the students in gaining skills that are required to transform themselves into more skillful in performing the opted jobs. This is possible only when the content is processed and presented for the skill development as part of syllabus design.

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