

EAP Syllabus and Course Design

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ABSTRACT: A Syllabus is “a specification of what is to be included in a language course” (Jordan, 1997). This study aims to review the issues involved in EAP syllabus and course design, such as the steps in designing a syllabus, types of syllabus, different ways of defining a syllabus (i.e., the evaluation syllabus, the organizational syllabus, the materials syllabus, the teacher syllabus, the classroom syllabus, the learner syllabus, and the evaluation syllabus), the reasons for having a syllabus, dangers for having a syllabus, criteria and types of EAP syllabus, and constraints or variables of EAP course design.

Keywords: Evaluation syllabus, Organizational syllabus, Materials syllabus, Teacher syllabus, Classroom syllabus, Learner syllabus, Content-based syllabus, Notional-functional syllabus

Definition of a Syllabus

A Syllabus is “a document which says what will be learnt” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). It can also be seen as “a plan of what is to be achieved through teaching and learning, identifying what will be worked on in reaching the overall course aims and providing a basis for evaluating students’ progress” (Hyland, 2006). A syllabus, as Jordan (1997) argues, involves “the selection, grading and sequencing of the language and other content, and the division of the content into units of manageable material” (Hyland, 2006). Designing a syllabus, according to Jordan (1997), involves examining needs analyses and establishing goals. Similarly, Robinson (1991) states that “the ESP course design is the product of a dynamic interaction between a number of elements: the results of the needs analysis, the course designers’ approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials”. Nunan (1985) also reported analyzing needs analysis as the most important step in this regard. Yalden (1983) also has the same view, suggesting five steps in designing a syllabus: needs analysis, objectives and aims, sequencing, teaching methods, and testing and evaluation. Widodo (2007) argues that a syllabus is comprised of: (a) needs analysis, (b) objective formulation, (c) a selection of instructional contents, (d) a design of instructional contents, (e) a selection of instructional activities, (f) a design of instructional activities, and (g) a selection of instructional evaluation. Once the syllabus has been drawn up, the course can be designed, and then realized by means of timetables, and finally evaluated by utilizing various kinds of feedback (Jordan, 1997).

Two types of syllabus (i.e., synthetic and analytic) are suggested (White, 1988; Wilkins, 1976). The former consists of “lexico-grammatical and functional syllabuses and focuses on separated bits of knowledge which students are expected to accumulate through decontextualized activities before resynthesizing such knowledge in real communication” (Hyland, 2006). Analytic syllabuses, on the other hand, focus on “how the language is to be learned and include task-based and process syllabus types” (Hyland, 2006). Considering the impact of these two types of syllabus, Hyland further argues that:

Research is unable to confirm the direct effect of any syllabus on language learning but analytic syllabuses are more likely to offer a bridge from declarative knowledge, or what students know, to procedural knowledge, or what they can do with this knowledge.

Given EAP courses, although they might make use of elements of both, most tend to employ the elements of the analytic syllabus (Hyland, 2006). It can be argued that it might be due to the emphasis given to meaning and communication as the learner is exposed to relevant authentic target language discourse and contexts (Hyland, 2006). Hyland further states that EAP practitioners emphasize what is to be learned, particularly through text-based and content-based syllabuses.

A syllabus, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest, can be defined in a number of different ways. It can be the evaluation syllabus, the organizational syllabus, the materials syllabus, the teacher syllabus, the classroom syllabus, the learner syllabus, and/or the evaluation syllabus.

Evaluation syllabus, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), is “what the successful learner will know by the end of the course”. They also argue that evaluation syllabus is concerned with “the nature of language and

linguistic performance". For instance, if the syllabus is based on grammatical structures, this reflects a view that knowing a language involves knowing about the constituent structures. Hutchinson and Waters pointed out that it would be impossible to develop an evaluation syllabus without considering the important issues regarding what language is and how it is possible to be broken down. The organizational syllabus, on the other hand, concerns the order of what is to be learnt (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). They further state that the organizational syllabus is similar to the contents page of a coursebook. The organizational syllabus differs from the evaluation syllabus in terms of the nature of learning as well as language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). On the contrary, evaluation and organizational syllabuses are regarded as pure syllabuses in that they have not been interpreted. They are considered as a straightforward statement about what is to be learnt with some account regarding the order in which the items should be learnt.

Given the fact that the first person interpreting the syllabus is often materials writer, a third kind of syllabus, materials syllabus, can be suggested in which the authors in the process of writing materials add some assumptions about the nature of language, language learning, and language use (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In addition, it is the author who decides "the contexts in which the language will appear, the relative weightings and integration of skills, the number and type of exercises to be spent on any aspect of language, and the degree of recycling or revision" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). It is suggested that these factors can all have influence on the occurrence and the quality of learning (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). On the other hand, as a great number of students in the world learn language through the mediation of an instructor, another syllabus can be the teacher syllabus. Like the materials writer, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state, the teacher can affect "the clarity, intensity and frequency of any item and thereby affect the image that the learners receive".

Learners can also take part in the creation of syllabus; therefore, the learner syllabus can be suggested (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Breen (as cited in Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) argues that learner syllabus is related to the network of knowledge that can create in the learner's brain and which can empower the learner to comprehend and store the subsequent knowledge. This syllabus can be regarded as an internal syllabus and is considered to be different from other types of syllabus not just in "being internal as opposed to external, but in that it is in the opposite direction". In other words, it is "a retrospective record of what has been learnt rather than a prospective plan of what will be learnt" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

As what is planned and what actually happens in a lesson are two different things, and the lesson plan created is like the planned route, but like the planned route it can be affected by all sorts of conditions along the way (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The classroom, too, creates conditions which will affect the nature of a planned lesson. Therefore, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state, the classroom is not simply a neutral channel for the passage of information from teacher to learner; rather, it is a dynamic, interactive environment, which affects the nature both of what is taught and what is learnt. The classroom thus generates its own syllabus.

Why Should We Have a Syllabus?

A syllabus, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), can play a complex role. However, it can clearly satisfy a number of needs. In order to employ a syllabus appropriately, one needs to be aware of different roles a syllabus can play in the learning/teaching process. In the same line, a number of reasons are suggested by Hutchinson and Waters for having a syllabus:--Language is a complex entity. It cannot be learnt in one go. We have to have some way of breaking down the complex into manageable units.

-In addition to its practical benefits, a syllabus also gives moral support to the teacher and learner in that it makes the language learning task appear manageable.

-A syllabus, particularly an ESP syllabus, also has a cosmetic role. Sponsors and students will want some reassurance that their investment of money and/or time will be worthwhile.

-The syllabus can be seen as a statement of projected routes, so that teacher and learner not only have an idea of where they are going, but how they might get there.

-A syllabus is an implicit statement of views on the nature of language and learning.

-A syllabus provides a set of criteria for materials selection and/or writing. It defines the kind of texts to look for or produce the items to focus on in exercises.

-Uniformity is a necessary condition of any institutionalized activity, such as education. A syllabus is one way in which standardization is achieved.

-A syllabus provides a visible basis for testing.

Kausar (2007) points out that any syllabus ideally should provide: (a) a clear framework of knowledge and capabilities selected to be appropriate to overall aims; (b) continuity and a sense of direction in classroom work for teacher and students; (c) a record for other teacher of what has been covered in the course; (d) a basis for evaluating student's progress; (e) a basis for evaluating the appropriateness of the course in relation to overall aims and student needs identified both before and during the course; (f) content appropriate to the broader language curriculum, the particular class of learners, and the educational situation and wider society in which the course is located.

The Dangers Regarding a Syllabus

From the above list, it can be inferred that a syllabus is an important document in the process of teaching and learning. However, despite its multifunctional purposes, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggested the following dangers for having a syllabus.

-We should be aware of why we want a syllabus and what we will use it for.

-A syllabus is a model-a statement of an ideal. A syllabus is not; therefore, a statement of what will be learnt. It is important to remember that a syllabus can only constitute an approximate statement of what will be taught.

-Syllabuses cannot express the intangible factors that are so crucial to learning: emotions, personalities, subjective views, motivation.

-Syllabuses cannot take account of individual differences.

EAP Syllabus

As Jordan (1997) suggests, needs, aims, means (i.e., the teachers, materials, equipment, facilities, time and finance), and variables and constraints (i.e., limitations of the means) are the important factors which should be taken into account in designing an EAP syllabus. As described previously, one of the main purposes of a syllabus is to break down the materials into manageable units. This breakdown, as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) assert, should be based on a number of criteria. Jordan (1997) suggested three broad headings in this regard: content or product (focusing on the end result), skills, and method or process (focusing on the means to an end). Content/product (i.e., type a) consists of grammatical/structural form, notional-functional, situational, topic, and content-based syllabuses. Skills or type b syllabuses, on the other hand, involve only skills syllabuses, and type c (i.e., method/process syllabuses) entails process, procedural/task-based, and learning-centered/negotiated syllabuses (Jordan, 1997).

Grammatical/Structural/Language form Syllabus

As Robinson (1991) argues, this syllabus has had the longest history in ELT and has also been very important in ESP. "For many ESP course designers, this syllabus type is still powerful if, to them, unacceptable model" (Koh,). The focus of a grammatical syllabus is on aspects of grammar (e.g., verb tenses, sentence patterns, articles, nouns, etc.) and then the gradation of these aspects for teaching, supposedly from the simple to the complex, and based on frequency and usefulness of these aspects (Jordan, 1997, Robinson, 1991). It is suggested that this syllabus involves a cumulative step-by-step approach and if implemented with a focus on the spoken language, it can be referred to as an oral-structural method (Jordan, 1997).

Notional-Functional Syllabus

This syllabus, as Jordan (1997) points out, entails conceptual meanings: notions (e.g., time, space, and quantity) expressed through language (logical relationship) and the communicative purposes (i.e., functions) for which we use language (e.g., greetings, requests, apologies, description, comparisons, cause and effects, etc.). As this approach focuses on communication, the processes of communication (e.g., problem-solving, obtaining information, interacting with people) are often used in the teaching/learning and therefore, it is often referred to as the communicative approach (Jordan, 1997). Robinson (1991) stated that notional-functional syllabus was greatly developed within ESP based on concepts and, in EAP courses, based on functions.

Situational Syllabus

This syllabus, as Jordan (1997) argues, entails “the situations or contexts in which the language will be used and analyses the language needed for those situations”. According to Robinson (1991), situationally organized syllabuses can be found in ‘English for Business purposes’, in some ‘English for technology courses’ and in the ‘English for social orientation’ components of EAP courses. Robinson further states that for some ESP situations, there may be an order. For instance, in a business setting, the situations may be organized in the chronological order of a typical day’s or week’s work.

Topic-based Syllabus

It is suggested that a topic-based syllabus may have a similar approach to that based on situations and as with situations, the sequence of topics may have several alternatives (Jordan, 1997). However, Jordan argues that topics are selected from the students’ specialist studies and, the language analyzed based on appropriate syntax and lexis is then practiced. Likewise, it is suggested that one objective of the ESP course may be to teach this specialist content (Robinson, 1991).

Text-based syllabuses

Text-based syllabuses are organized around the genres that learners need and the social contexts in which they will operate (Feez, 2002; Hyland, 2004). One of key elements of this type of syllabus is that its content is “selected in relation to learner needs and the social contexts which learners wish to access” (Feez, 2002). This approach, as Hyland suggests, draws on “the SFL tradition of genre and adopts a scaffolded pedagogy to guide learners towards control of key genres”. Hyland further argues that scaffolded learning includes “active and sustained support by a teacher who models appropriate strategies for meeting particular purposes, guides students in their use of the strategies, and provides a meaningful and relevant context for using the strategies”. In this approach, as Flowerdew (2005) argues, the pedagogy is very much influenced by the concept of empowering disadvantaged learners to help them improve through mastery of important genres (i.e., those genres necessary for advancement in the workplace).

In text-based syllabuses, according to Hyland (2006), prior experience and the first-hand knowledge gained from new explorations are used. He also suggests a teaching–learning cycle shown in Figure 1, which includes a number of key stages:

- Setting the context: to reveal genre purposes and the settings in which it is used.
- Modeling: analyzing the genre to reveal its stages and key features.
- Joint construction: guided, teacher-supported practice in the genre.
- Independent construction: independent writing monitored by the teacher.

Comparing: relating what has been learnt to other genres and contexts.

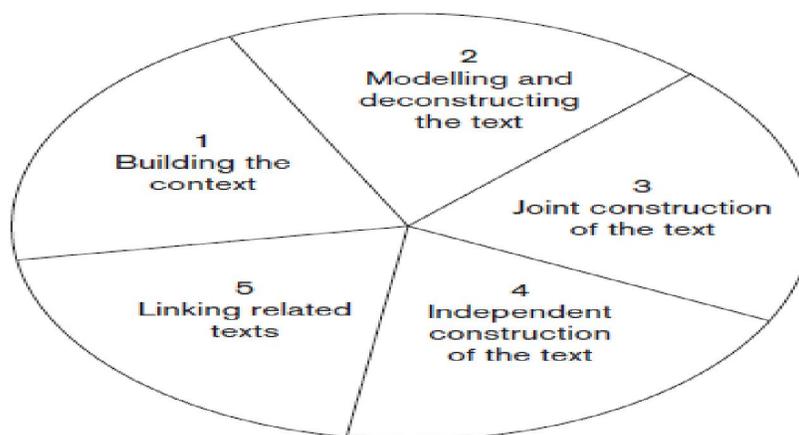


Figure 1. The Teaching-Learning Cycle.

This syllabus, according to Flowerdew (2005), has aspects in common with the task-based approach in that it sees language as a functional rather than formal artifact, to be used as a resource for meaning-making and for achieving purposeful goals. In fact, proponents of this type of syllabus are keen to point out that it can be considered as a type of mixed syllabus.

Content-based Syllabus

This syllabus, as Jordan (1997) suggests, influences teaching the students the language, skills and academic conventions related to a particular subject-matter and its content. Content-based, in recent years, is referred to as “the particular requirements of specific academic disciplines (e.g., economics, engineering, etc)”.

As Hyland (2006) argues, some engagement with the subject discipline is essential to the development of an effective EAP course with regard to this syllabus. He further suggests that “at the minimum this should involve an understanding of the texts, tasks and forms of information delivery in the target course or discipline, and the use of tutors as informants on the literacy practices of their fields”. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) identified three main types of subject–language integration: cooperation, collaboration, and team teaching. Hyland (2006) argues that content-based syllabuses are “thematic, sheltered or adjunct types, differing in their orientations towards language and content”. “Theme-based models emphasize language competence while sheltered models attempt to help students master content material and so are more discipline-specific” (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989). In the adjunct model, as Hyland points out, the language course is associated with a content course sharing the same content base, and the rationale is that students will develop strategies and skills transferrable from one course to the other. Emphasizing the “sustained” nature of much content-based instruction, Pally (as cited in Flowerdew, 2005) argues that students can only develop the rhetorical and argumentative skills related to particular disciplines through sustained, incremental practice over a period of time.

Skills-based Syllabus

This syllabus is based on one or more of the four traditional language skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking, and writing). In this syllabus, the constituents of the skills are often referred to as the subskills or microskills (Jordan, 1997). As Robinson (1991) suggests, a course in writing business letters, or in oral skills for business people, or in academic reading can be examples of this syllabus. As Jordan suggests, reading may be classified into a number of microskills (e.g., skimming, scanning, reading for information, ideas, opinions, etc.). Robinson also argued that “the actual content of the course, however, might be language forms or functions, as in content-based syllabuses”. Robinson also states that subskill and microskills are the developments coming not from considering traditional four skills but from looking at the constituents of these four skills. He suggests that some microskills, such as deducing gist can belong to more than one language skill (e.g., listening and reading); therefore, ‘learning skill’ development courses might cover more than one of the language skills. Cognitive as well as language skills development are suggested to be the possible results of skills-based syllabus (Robinson, 1991).

According to Robinson (1991), ESP course might focus on another set of skills entitled ‘professional skills’ or ‘communication skills’. ‘Making an oral presentation’ was an example of a macroskill, including microskills such as “control of gestures and body language, effective use of visual aids, as well as appropriate phraseology and terminology, and clear pronunciation”.

Process Syllabus

The focus in this syllabus, as Jordan (1997) argues, is on the learner and learning processes and preferences. He further points out that the negotiation process is part of the syllabus and among a number of options, the final selection is made by students. Likewise, Breen and Littlejohn (2000) argue that process syllabuses have a greater learning focus and are more learner-led, extending the idea of developing language learning through negotiation for meaning during tasks to negotiating aspects of the teaching–learning process itself. However, Robinson (1991) argues that there is a political aspect to this approach: a redefinition of the authority relations in the classroom due to the negotiation procedure between the teacher and the students. Process syllabuses, as Hyland (2006) asserts, are “central to EAP philosophies as they can help guide students towards a relevant professional expertise through authentic opportunities to develop their knowledge and engage more meaningfully in the learning process”.

Procedural/Task-based Syllabus

“The procedural or task syllabus, consisting of a set of tasks or activities ordered according to cognitive difficulty, is associated in general ELT with Prabhu (1987)” (Robinson, 1991). Robinson further argues that “class time is devoted to performance of tasks and attention is only consciously directed to language if this is necessary for completion of the task”. A task-based syllabus, according to Flowerdew (2005), is associated with “purposeful activities which learners might be expected to engage in real-life situations”. Ellis (2003) states that this type of syllabus emphasizes meaning and communication, in which students are primarily users rather than learners of the language. As Hyland (2006) argues, task-based syllabuses include “interaction between knowledge of language and using that knowledge in the solution of problems by setting up situations where the learners respond actively

and engage in purposeful communication with each other". Hyland suggests that the situations can include "real-world tasks, such as engaging in a tutorial or listening to lectures, or pedagogic tasks which facilitate learning how the language works, such as mapping how argument essays are structured". Jordan (1997) suggests that the task needs to be intellectually challenging in order to maintain students' interest. A particular type of task, the pedagogic task, often entails opinion-gap, reasoning-gap, and information-transfer activities.

Learning-Centered/Negotiated Syllabus

This syllabus, according to Jordan (1997), focuses on the learner, with the learner responsible for making a number of decisions. Although the primary focus is "on processes/methods, a choice of approaches such as (a) a tailor-made syllabus for an individual, (b) adapting a syllabus in the light of perceived needs, (c) providing a range of alternatives or options of content and methods, (d) self-access, (e) self-determined, and (f) self-directed is possible" (Jordan, 1997).

Constraints or Variables of EAP Course Design

Robinson (1991) argues that

ESP course design is a product of a dynamic interaction between a number of elements: the results of the needs analyses, the course designers' approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials. All of these are modified by the contextual constraints.

According to Jordan (1997), designing a course around a syllabus, in practice, will be restricted by several factors, the main ones being:

- Tutors (number available and their experience and capabilities)
- Students (number and nationalities to be catered for; their language level)
- Other staff (administrative, secretarial, technical, social, welfare)
- Time (length of the course: full-time or part-time; days, hours)
- Space (number of rooms, room size; location and proximity)
- Facilities/equipment (library, resource centre, language laboratory, cassette recorders, TV and video, computers....
- Accommodation
- Finance: budget-size, fixed or variable; method of payment
- Other influences such as (a) past experience, (b) motivation of students: their attitudes and expectations, (c) Need for variety, (d) a belief in learning by doing, (e) awareness of non-EAP needs, (f) need to be commercially viable, and (g) common sense.

EAP Courses

There are various approaches to the question of balance between EAP/study skills and general English (Jordan, 1997). One big determining factor, as Jordan suggests, is the language level of the students at the beginning of the course: the lower the level, the more general English that is needed. For example, lower-level students may have about 80 per cent general English and 20 per cent EAP, while intermediate students may have 30 per cent general English and 70 per cent EAP.

The purpose of including non-EAP components in an EAP course is threefold:

1. To serve as a necessary adjunct to the main study skills such as in programs in which (a) grammar is often incorporated with academic writing, (b) vocabulary development is often combined with reading comprehension, or (c) pronunciation may be combined with aspects of academic speech or geared as an individual matter to be pursued in a language laboratory.
2. To fulfill a perceived present or future need such as: a) social/survival English in an English speaking country, b) familiarization with TV news and newspapers to keep abreast of current affairs, c) hands-on experience with computers: useful later in producing essays and dissertations in subject departments.
3. To provide useful variety such as video material and mini-projects (Jordan, 1997).

CONCLUSIONS

EAP syllabuses, as Hyland (2006) concludes, "seem to be competence-based; are presented through tasks of various kinds; extend students' genre skills; involve at least some shared negotiation with learners; and develop a complementary array of skills and knowledge".

Flowerdew (2005) suggests that the type of syllabus implemented, to a great extent, depends on "a previously conducted needs analysis which may not only examine the target situation (i.e., what learners are

required to do), but also consider learning needs (i.e., how are learners best motivated to acquire the language and skills revealed through the target situation analysis)". Flowerdew further argues that, in reality, many syllabi developed by course designers are not based on a particular syllabus, but take into account aspects of two or three different syllabus types. Robinson (1991) suggests that all approaches should be simultaneously available, and syllabus designers should try to find the most suitable one for the context in which they are. Swan (as cited in Robinson, 1991) argues that the real issue is not which syllabus to choose; rather, how the eight syllabuses (i.e., structural, functional, notional, topic, phonological, lexical, situational, skills) are to be integrated into a sensible learning programs. Concerning the selection of the appropriate syllabus, Robinson (1991) states that "a judicious consideration of the student's needs and the objectives of the course, together with the institutional bias of the teaching institution should be taken into account".

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