

Syllabus Concepts, Approaches and Types: A Theoretical Account

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Abstract

Language syllabus is a crucial element in the educational process. It is based on a decision about the "units" of classroom activity and the "sequence" in which they are to be performed. However, the researchers see that syllabus design is neglected nowadays, and it needs more light shading on. So, in this study, the researchers present the concepts of the syllabus, then, the most influential approaches to the syllabus are accounted for. Last, the researchers shed light on the basic types of syllabi be applied in the classroom. After stating and observing the theoretical account, the researchers conclude that the syllabus concepts are very crucial area needs to focus on as it represents a guide for both the teacher and the student in the classroom setting. Moreover, there are many syllabus types with a set of concepts; each leads to a specific type of syllabus. Last, according to the approaches stated, there are six syllabus types that most educationalists agreed upon. However, in real practice, more than one type of syllabus is applied.

Key Words: Syllabus, Concepts, Approaches, Types

مفاهيم المنهج وطرقه وأنواعه:

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الملخص

يعتبر منهج اللغة عنصر اساسي في العملية التعليمية. ويعتمد هذا العنصر على تحديد المفردات "العناصر" لنشاطات الصف الدراسي و تسلسلها "التسلسل" الذي سيتم اجراء هذه النشاطات فيه. ومع ذلك ، يرى الباحثون أن تصميم المنهج الدراسي مهمل في الوقت الحاضر ، ويحتاج إلى مزيد من الضوء حوله. لذلك ، وفي هذه الدراسة ، يقدم الباحثون مفاهيم المنهج ، ثم يتم ادراج الطرق الأكثر تأثيراً في المنهج الدراسي. أخيراً ، يقدم الباحثون الأنواع الأساسية للمناهج الدراسية التي يتم تطبيقها في الفصل الدراسي. بعد ذكر الجانب النظري وملاحظته ، استنتج الباحثون أن مفاهيم المنهج الدراسي هي جزء جوهري يحتاج إلى التركيز عليه لأنه يمثل دليلاً لكل من المعلم والطالب في إعداد الفصل الدراسي. فضلاً على ذلك ، هناك العديد من أنواع المناهج المبنية على مجموعة من المفاهيم ؛ كل منها يؤدي إلى نوع معين من المنهج. أخيراً ، وفقاً للمناهج المذكورة ، هناك ستة أنواع من المناهج يتفق عليها معظم التربويين. ومع ذلك ، في التطبيق الحقيقي للمنهج الدراسي، يتم تطبيق أكثر من نوع واحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنهج ، المفاهيم ، المناهج ، الأنواع

1 .The Research Questions

1. What is meant by a syllabus?
2. What are the approaches to a syllabus that affect its design? How?
3. What are the basic types of syllabi?

2. The Hypotheses

Based on the above research questions, the following hypotheses are drawn:

1. It is hypothesised that the syllabus concept is an ambiguous term for many educationalists and need to be clarified.
2. There are different approaches to syllabus design, and each approach has its concepts that affect designing a syllabus.
3. According to the syllabus approaches, there are many types of syllabi used as basics in language teaching.

3 .The Aims

1. To explain the concepts of the language syllabus.
2. To show the concepts of the approaches that affect designing a syllabus.
3. To figure out the basic types of a syllabus applied in language teaching?

4.Syllabus Concepts

The term syllabus is sometimes used interchangeably, differentiated and sometimes misused and misunderstood with the term curriculum. A syllabus is a specification of what takes place in the classroom, which usually contains the aims and content of teaching and sometimes contains the suggestion of methodology (Rabbini,2002:5). A curriculum, however, provides general statements about the rationale about language, language learning and language teaching, detailed specification of aims, objectives and targets learning purposes and implementation of the program (Nunan, 1988:3.)So, a syllabus is more localized and is based on the accounts and records of what happens at the classroom level as teachers and students apply a curriculum to their situation.

The syllabus involves the integration of the subject matter (what to learn) and linguistic matter (how to learn). The choice of syllabi may vary from a purely linguistic language, when the grammatical and lexical forms of the language are the content of language teaching, to a pure semantics or informationist language, when there are some qualifications or information in the teaching content and only incidentally a language form (Breen,1987; Sabbah,2018)—deciding what is taught and in what order to develop a curriculum Hence, to create a syllabus, means to decide what and how.

Therefore, the language theory, which underlies the language teaching approach openly or implicitly, will play a crucial role in selecting which language syllabus to implement (Krahnke,1987). Learning theory is also crucial in determining the type of syllabus used (Al-Juboori, 2001). For example, a syllabus based on acquisition learning

theory would stress unexamined but carefully selected experiences of the new language in a suitable variety of different types of contexts.

5. Syllabus Approaches

Language education programmes show the link between syllabus and materials. Such educational programmes are conceived in various regions of the world according to the syllabus approach, which sets the type and the ways in which content is to be used for classroom teaching Sabbah, (2018). The syllabus approach even determines in particular educational contexts how materials should first be designed

Yalden (1988:33) provides three paradigms reflecting a range of syllabus types. They are: synthetic /analytical, formal /functional, structural / contextual. Every type falls within spectrum extremes. Yalden argues that there are some teaching contents that are relatively distant from any real or imagined use context, and some educational contents are the same as the language being learnt. White (1988:68) expands the view by saying that the ESL/EFL syllabi are based on several approaches, and all of these aspects show comparable conceptual poles: formal/structural, contextual/grammatical, linear/spiral, difficulty/usefulness, synthetic/ analytic (Breen, 1987: 160ff). For example, by the structural approach, a syllabus is selected according to the language features. With the functional approach, the syllabus is identified by what students can do according to the standards Nunan(, 1988:52). Difficulty Syllabus approaches - easy things will initially be taught, hard things afterwards will be taught. The Syllabus Linear - content is sequenced from one item to the next. The Spiral Syllabus – the same item is continuously returned

and each time is more carefully treated. Syllabus Utility Approaches - based on what is necessary to students, useful and essential.

5.1. Synthetic and Analytic approaches

Synthetic and analytic approaches to syllabuses types are discussed first by Wilkins (1976), who distinguishes between them. White (1988) class them as type A and type B and ultimately different alternatives in task-oriented syllabus design such as procedural, process and task-based syllabuses.

5.1.1 Synthetic approach

The synthetic approach to syllabus types assumes that language is segmented into discrete linguistic items for presentation one at a time. In the Synthetic approach, a syllabus is selected according to the language form. This kind of approach to syllables design is identified by Wilkins (1976:21), who separates between the synthetic and analytic approaches. Wilkins describes a syllabus based on the principles of the synthetic approach as "one in which the different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that the acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of the language has been built." Based upon this approach, the language subjects to be taught are classified into a list of grammatical structures and lexical elements in the building of syllabuses (Breen,1987).

Synthetic syllabuses teach a language in an additive manner step by step. So, the learner acquires a step-by-step accumulation of pieces until all the language structure has been constructed. The language is broken into separate components by grammatical

criteria (Nunan, 1988). These elements are classified according to their grammatical contexts, fluency in the occurring situation, contrasting complexity and pedagogical convenience in regard to first language situation need (Irfani, 2014:33). Some linguists suppose that the synthetic syllabuses are not confined to grammar syllabuses exclusively but can be used to any syllabus with product-orientated content.

5.1.2. Analytic approach

The analytical syllabus is arranged for the student's goal to learn the language and the kind of performance needed for these purposes. The beginning point for syllabus design is the communicative aim for which language is employed, not the grammatical structure of the language (Rabbini, 2002: 6). Language and content are drawn from the input and principally determined and classified according to the needs of the learner to complete the communication task in the real world (Krahne,1987). In order to resolve a communication difficulty, the linguistic knowledge built through the unit is employed. Contexts, themes, and courses define the content of the analytical syllabus.

Nunan (1988: 33) refers to the analytic syllabuses as "those which present the target language whole chunks at a time, without linguistic interference or control." Such syllabuses focus on: the learners' assumed ability to perceive regularities in the input and to induce rules (or to form new neural networks underlying what looks like rule-governed behaviour), and/or the exposure of learners to natural samples of the L2. Procedural, process and task syllabuses are all examples of the analytic syllabus type. Long and Crookes (1992:41) argue that the analytic approach to syllabuses types sees that language

is presented whole chunks at a time without linguistic control Analytic approach, the syllabus is identified by the function of language. Breen (1987) assumes that the distinction between synthetic and analytic is that previous perspectives are additive while later consider that learning is holistic the nature of learning, having regard to the whole of something rather than just to parts of it.

5.2. Product and Process-oriented approaches

Breen(1987:167) presents these approaches to syllabus design. He divides them as follows:

5.2.1.Product-oriented approach

This approach to syllabus types emphasises the products of language learning. It involves syllabuses types like structural, notional/functional, and situational. These types of syllabuses, also known as the synthetic approach, stress the product of language learning and are likely to be used by an authority.

5.2.2.Process-oriented approach

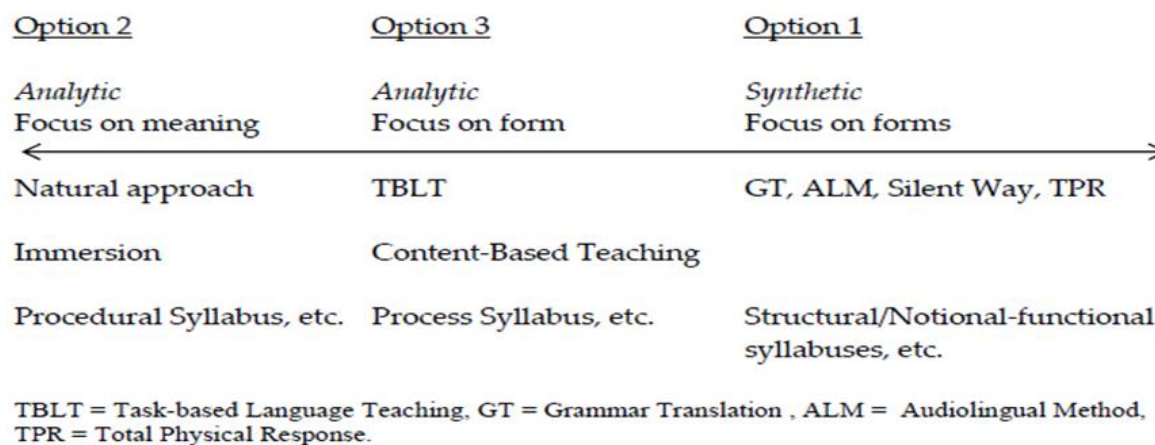
This approach to syllabus types enhances communicative skills and focuses on the specification of the learning task and activities that students undertake(Breen, 1987). It includes syllabuses like procedural, task, process, and content syllabuses.

Nunan (1988:40) argues that "In the process-oriented syllabuses, however, the focus shifts from the 'outcomes of instruction, i.e., the knowledge and skills to be gained by the learner, to the processes through which knowledge and skills might be gained". He adds that "the procedural and task-based syllabuses are considered as examples of process-oriented syllabuses."

Product-oriented syllabi focus on the information and skills that the student should acquire through the teaching instructions. While process-oriented syllabi focus on the process the student himself experiences. Each syllabus is both product-oriented and process-oriented. Nevertheless, the distinction is made when one of them is emphasised during the building of a syllabus. The focus on the output is on the product-oriented syllabi; the concentration is on the goal. The emphasis is on the process; a succession of actions is vital in a process-oriented syllabus (Breen, 1984:51).

Richards and Rodgers (1986:69) assume that if our view of languages is communication, then the nature of linguistic and language learning will look advantageous if we have a syllabus focused on activities and work that encourage real and meaningful communication. The objectives of the course and the needs of the students are more to be considered while critically evaluating the syllabus. Last but not least, a hybrid syllabus will be produced merely for pragmatic reasons. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987:51) indicate: "It is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful from each theory and trusting also in the evidence of your own experience as a teacher. Thus, to what extent has an integration of the various approaches taken place? Does the syllabus specification include all aspects? If yes, how is priority established? These questions must also form part of the criteria when designing or assessing your own syllabus." Long and Robinson (1998:16) present a figure that shows the options in Language teaching course as follows:

Figure 1: Options in Language Teaching



Long and Robinson(1998:16)

6.Syllabus Types

The choice of language teaching syllabus is an important decision in language education and must be taken with the greatest possible consciousness and information. In this study, although different types of language syllabuses are addressed as though they are "purely," in reality, these kinds rarely occur independently. Nearly all current language syllabuses are mixtures of two or more of the kinds outlined here. One form of syllabus typically predefines a particular course, but other syllabi can be associated with it (Breen, 1987). In addition, the syllabic types are not wholly different. For example, there may be a small difference between skills and task-based syllabus. The differentiating factor is typically how the educational contents are utilised in the actual teaching procedure (Ellis, 2003). As there are a number of different language syllabus

types, and in various teaching settings such diverse types can be implemented, the researchers state the six basic language teaching syllabuses that most syllabus designers agreed upon, including:

6.1. Structural syllabus

The content of language teaching is a collection of, usually grammatical, forms and structures of the language being taught. The content is a structural syllabus. Examples include parts of speech like nouns, verbs, adjectives, phrases, clauses etc. (Ellis 1993:199)

Structural syllabi are one of the most common syllabi that are found in the contents of numerous course books. The syllabus has been defined as consisting of a list of selected and rated grammatical objects in terms of simplicity and complexity (Nunan, 1988). For example, in contrasting pairs, the structures are normally presented one by one with simple past or single nouns vs plural nouns (Long & Crookes, 1992). This type of syllabus is defined as synthetic, indicated by Wilkins (1976). Wilkins' definition indicates that the grammatical syllabus contains structures graded on a one-by-one basis based on grammatical complexity and learned by students prior to the next issue. The Structural Syllabus (also referred to as the conventional syllabus) is based on a philosophy of language, which takes it as its basic or useful elements that are the grammatical or structural features of language forms. This syllabus is based on the learning theory that shows that the functional ability of language is based on structural

knowledge(Nunan,1988). It is built on the concept that language rules are recognised linearly and that learners are to master a rule before going to the following.

6.2. Notional/functional syllabus

At the time that language issues were moved out of the linguistic structure of phonology, morphology and syntax to the communicating needs of semantics, pragmatics, speech act, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, the notional-functional syllabus as White's (1988) and the functional-notional syllabus referred to in Finocchiaro's (1979). The design of the syllabus has thus changed for the language taught.

According to this syllabus, the contents of language education are a collection of functions performed when language is being utilised or the concepts used to express language. Function examples include approval, apologization, request; concept examples include size, age, colour, comparison, time, etc. The criteria or considerations for the choice of concepts and functions at a certain stage are the following: needs of the student, learning background and grammatical, structural complexity (Wilkins 1976: 58-60; Finnochiaro 1979: 16; Finnochiaro and Brumfit 1983: 14-15; Dobson 1979: 7).

6.3. Situational Syllabus

The content of language taught is a collection of real or imaginative scenarios where language occurs or is used. In general, multiple persons participating in certain activities in a certain location are involved in a situation. The situation syllabus includes some functions arranged into a credible speech segment (Baleghizadeh, 2012:113). The

basic objective of a syllabus is to teach the language which happens in situations. For example: meeting a new student.

White (1988: 62) says that a distinction should be made between the situation method and the situation syllabus by saying that "the situation method applies to the classroom situations, activities and real objects used to explain the meaning of new linguistic items, and the situational syllabus is used for the contexts in which language and behaviours occur in the real world, outside the classroom" AL- Juboori(2001: 42-43) assumes that the initial stage in the development of a situational syllabus is to inventory the situations and a range of language structures typically utilised in such situations. "The features of situations which must be accounted for are the physical contexts in which the language events occur, the relevant objects within the setting, the channel of communication, the participants and the relationship between them." Yalden (1984: 17) states that "while the situational syllabus represents a step towards a greater emphasis on the semantic component, the student is confined to the predictable language, which is usually used in a specific situation." In addition, the functional components, such as complaints, demands or apologies that may be carried out in real-life settings in nearly any situation, cannot be taken into consideration (AL- Juboori,2001:44).

6.4. Skilled syllabus

The contents of language teaching are a set of specific skills which can contribute to the use of language. Skills are things that somebody must be able to perform in a language, regardless of the environment or situation in which language can be used.

Whilst the situation syllabus combines functions together in specific language environments, the skilled syllabus group the linguistic items like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc., to be combined into generalised types of behaviour, such as listening to the language spoken for the principal idea. The main aim of skill-based education is to master language skills. A possible secondary objective is to build more general language abilities, by accident, just to learn any available material while exercising language skills (Krahnke, 1987: 2).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 69) reveal that Language skills are what people must do, independent of the situation within which language is used. They are traditionally called listening, speaking, reading and writing. The core principle of the qualified syllabus is that communication skills can be developed in a language to provide adequate and suitable comprehension, speaking, reading and writing within a specific context.

Yalden (1988:37) indicates that the skilled syllabus involves a range of skills like linguistic skills, cognitive skills, and studying skills. Widdowson (1983: 52) argues that this taxonomy is "not hierarchically organised." He insists that the taxonomy "does not distinguish linguistic skills from other types of skills and does not specify the conditions under which the skills are to be used nor the degree of skills to be exhibited". Besides, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 71) have criticised such a syllabus for treating the "learner as a user of language rather than a learner of language".

6.5. Task-based syllabus

In terms of the content of the educational process, the students will carry out a series of challenging and purposeful tasks in their language. These tasks are characterised as activities other than language acquisition but are treated in a way that aims to enhance second-language skills, as is done in a content-based syllabus. Language learning is dependent on task performance, and language learning takes place only when a task is needed. Tasks include linguistic skills (and other) in specific language use circumstances (Candlin,1984: 41)

The task syllabus is predicated on the assumption that a subconscious mind perceives, abstracts, or requires certain language structures embodied in those entities to develop internal system rules while the conscious mind develops some meaning content (Prahbu, 1987: 69). Breen (1987: 23) indicates that tasks are "a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating learning language form. It ranges from the brief and straightforward exercises to lengthy activities such as problem-solving and decision making". He assumes that the sequence and gradation of tasks have two criteria: "the relative familiarity of the task to the learner's current communicative knowledge and abilities, and the relative inherent complexity of the task in terms of the demands placed upon a learner"(ibid: 164).

Task-based learning varies from situation-based teaching because, while situational teaching aims to teach the particular linguistic content that takes place in the circumstance (a preset product), task-based teaching aims to educate students on the means to do some assignment (a process)(Nunan, 1988). The learners draw upon a wide

range of language forms, functions, and abilities to complete the tasks, often individually and unpredictably. Tasks that can be used for language acquisition are usually tasks that the students must do in all cases.

6.6. Content syllabus

The contents based syllabus does not view language as an individual subject but as a means for communication. The typical example of content-syllabus is teaching a foreign language course of physics, where English is the medium for education, and it is often employed for particular objectives (Krahnke, 1987: 3). The content syllabus focuses on the information of the subject matters taken, while task-based language teaching concerns communicative and cognitive processes (Irfani,2014:27). The science class is another example of applying the content syllabus in the language the students need or want to learn, possibly with linguistic adjustment to make the science more understandable and comprehensible.

Stern et al. (1983) characterise the content syllabus as experiential: a syllabus in which students do not analyse but learn the language. Therefore, it can be considered as the achievement of what Wilkins (1976) calls the analytical approach, whereby the language student is exposed to without a degree but defined by the subjects.

The main objective of such a syllabus is to deliver content or information in the language that the learners also learn. At the same time, the learners are language learners and learners of any content. The subject matter is primary, and language learning occurs incidentally to the content learning. The teaching of the content does not concern the

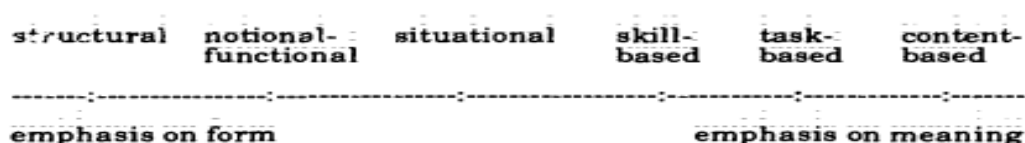
teaching of languages but the reverse. Nunan (1988: 49) reveals that "by the preselection of a linguistic forms and teaching them the syllabus gives a logic and coherence which might be missing in an analytic syllabus, where tasks are randomly selected and collected". He believes that the subject matter itself can "provide a non - linguistic rationale for selecting and grading content."

7. Conclusions

In the present research, a theoretical account of the syllabus concepts, approaches, and types is given to answer the research questions and achieve the research aims on the basis of the previous assumptions. First, the syllabus concepts reflect an ambiguous area in the education process which is sometimes misunderstood and misused by some researchers. It shows confusion with the term curriculum. However, we can say that there is a difference between the syllabus and the curriculum; since the curriculum is broader than the syllabus, it includes all activities and arrangements taken during the academic year. However, the syllabus is the main document restricted to a certain subject in one class to guide the teaching and learning process. Thus, in the light of the above observations, the syllabus is seen as a plan the teacher converts into a reality of interaction in the teaching community. It presents a short theoretical account for the arrangement, guidance and implementation as an act of accountability in a particular setting of the subject-specific study; it offers teachers and learners instructions to achieve the course objectives. Second, when discussing the syllabus approach, there is a huge amount of material to communicate. The approaches offer significant insights into the

creation of a language programme. Structural, situational and functional syllabuses in synthetic versions all have to achieve goals and learn content. The basic principles of the product syllabi remain identical. However, the underlying of linguistic learning differs considerably from analytical approaches: Process-type syllabuses: procedural, task and process affirm the transitory nature of learning the language and cannot be itemised; the pedagogical procedure takes precedence over content. All these approaches to syllabuses have managed to make language students learn a new language. Choosing between and among many types of syllabuses and integrate them in the real teaching programme in a useful and effective way requires knowledge of the strengths and deficiencies of each type. Besides, in practice, of course, these different types rarely occur independently of each other. Almost all actual language teaching syllabi are combinations of two or more of the types of syllabus described here. Third, generally speaking, the six types of syllables are provided, starting with the most language structure and ending with the most language use. If language is seen as a relationship of form, meaning, and instruction that emphasises one type or the other of this relationship, then the six types of syllabuses could be expressed as a continuum, which varies from form-based to meaning-based, as it is shown in the following figure:

Figure 2: Continuum of Syllabi



In real practice, these diverse types of syllabuses are, of course, rarely occurring independently. Nearly all the current language syllabuses are mixtures of two or more of the mentioned types.

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