SYLLABUS DESIGN FOR ESP

"There may be value in showing the syllabus to students so that they can have a 'route map' of the course." (Robinson 1991). Returning to our analogy of learning as a journey; the syllabus can be seen a statement of '**projected routes'** so that the teacher and the learner not only have <mark>an idea about where they are going, but how they might get there</mark>. The syllabus would normally be expressed in terms of what is taken to be the most important aspect of language learning. If we take a skill basis, we are saying that skills are the most important aspects; **the syllabus then tells the teacher and students not only what is to be learnt but also why it is to be learnt**.

"A syllabus provides a set of criteria for materials production, it defines the kind of texts to look for or produce, the items to focus on … however, a syllabus can be one of the most damaging for the course design if wrongly used. It is clear that the syllabus is an important document in the teaching/ learning process, a syllabus is a model, a statement of an ideal" (Hutchinson & waters 1987).

1. Curriculum Vs. Syllabus

Nunan (1988: 3) explains that there is some confusion over the terms "syllabus" and "curriculum"; this is why it would be important to establish the difference between the two items and call attention to their particular functions.

Many definitions have been proposed for the term "curriculum" on one hand: Pratt & Short (1994: 1320) define it as "a plan for a sustained process of teaching and learning". Others as Clark (1989: 133- 134) gives a much broader definition including "the learner's cognitive, emotional, and pragmatic needs". Dubin and Olshtain (1991: 34-35) argue that "a curriculum contains a **broad description of general goals** by indicating an **overall educational cultural philosophy** which applies across subjects together with a theoretical orientation to language and language learning with respect to the subject matter at hand." and add that a curriculum is often "**reflective of national and political trend**s as well." (1991: 35)

On the other hand, Syllabi are the **specification** of what is to be included in a language course; they act as a **guide for both teacher and learner** by providing the specific **objectives to be attained**. Robinson (1991: 34), defines syllabus as "a plan of work and is thus essentially for the teacher, as a guideline and context of class content". This statement indicates that the syllabus first **concerns the teacher**, and that it **helps her/him plan courses**. A further definition of syllabus is provided by Dubin & Olshtain (1991: 35) who consider that: "***A syllabus is a more detailed and operational statement of teaching and learning elements which translates the philosophy of the curriculum into a series of planned steps leading towards more narrowly defined objectives at each level.***"

❖ To sum up, Nunan (1988: 8) explains that ""*Curriculum" is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programs, [whereas] "Syllabus", on the other hand focuses more narrowly on the selection and grading of content.*" Dubin & Olshtain (1991: 35) also try to clarify the difference between the two terms arguing that: "*a single curriculum can be the basis for developing a variety of specific syllabuses which are concerned with locally defined audiences, particular needs, and intermediate objectives*.

2. Why Should We Have a Syllabus?

There are some acknowledged and hidden reasons for having a syllabus:

1) 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**.
2) It also gives moral support to the teacher and learner, in that *it makes the language learning task appear* **manageable**.
3) A syllabus, particularly an E.S.P. syllabus, also has a **cosmetic role**. Sponsors and students will want some **reassurance** *that their investment of money and/or time will be worthwhile*.
4) Returning to our analogy of learning as a journey, the syllabus can be seen as a **statement of projected routes**, so that the teacher and learner not only have *an idea of where they are going, but how they might get there*.
5) It is an implicit statement of views on the nature of language and learning. *A syllabus, then, tells the teacher and student not only* **WHAT is to be learnt**, *but, implicitly,* **WHY it is to be learnt**.
6) It provides a *set of criteria for* **materials selection** *and/or writing*. This is probably one of the commonest uses for a syllabus, yet it can be one of the most damaging to the course design, if wrongly used.
7) **Uniformity** is a necessary condition of any institutionalized activity, such as education. A syllabus is one way in which **standardization** is achieved (or at least attempted).
8) Teaching is intended to lead a learner to a particular state of knowledge; a syllabus, therefore, provides a **visible basis for testing**.
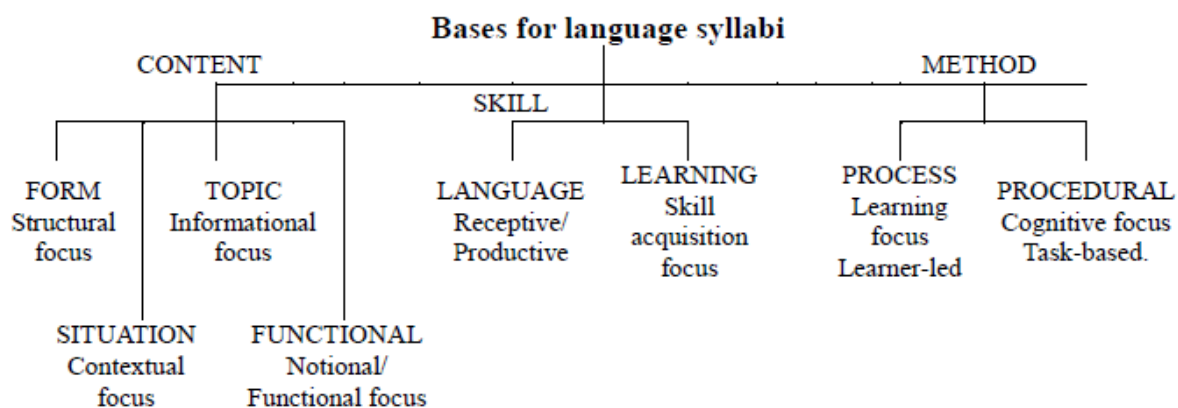
It is clear from this list of roles that a syllabus is an important document in the teaching/learning process; but therein also lie the dangers:

1) We should be **aware of why we want a syllabus and what we will use it for**. If it is really just for cosmetic purposes to placate a sponsor, then we should not try to use it as a means of selecting texts or deciding what to put in the exercises.
2) It is important to remember that *a syllabus can only constitute an* **approximate** *statement* of what will be taught; it can predict very little about what will be learnt. A syllabus *can never then be more than a statement* of a teaching ideal.
3) Syllabus **cannot express the intangible factors that are so crucial to learning**: emotions, personalities, subjective views, motivation.
4) It **cannot take account of individual differences**. Just as they are a statement of the ideal in terms, they also implicitly define the ideal learner.

❖ **The role of the syllabus a complex one, but it satisfies a lot of needs. We need crucially to be aware of the different roles that it plays, so that it can be used most appropriately. In particular, we need to recognize its ideal nature and, therefore, its limitations as an indicator of learning (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 83-85).**

3. ESP SYLLABI

Robinson (1991: 35) argues that one major issue in ESP is "the relationship in any syllabus of language, pedagogy and content (that is, the students' specialist area)". Accordingly, White (1988) classifies language syllabus types into CONTENT/PRODUCT- based, SKILL-based, METHOD-based syllabuses. They are not specific to ESP, but can be used in ESP situations.

Bases For Language Syllabus Design (White 1988 : 46)

A. **Content/Product – Based Syllabi:**

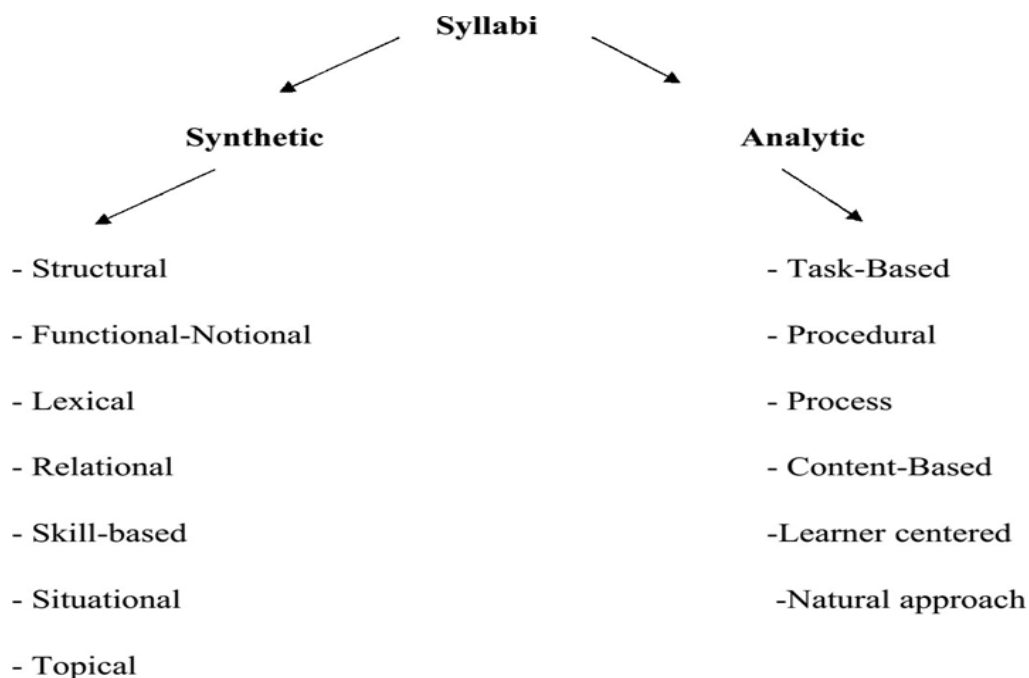| CONTENT/PRODUCT-ORIENTED SYLLABI			
Structural/ Grammatical Syllabus	**Situational Syllabus**	**Topical Syllabus**	**Notional Functional Syllabus**
• Primacy to LANGUAGE FORM. • The structural syllabus items are organized one after the other according to the degree of ➢ Easiness/difficulty. ➢ Generality/detail. ➢ Simplicity /complexity	involves the use of SIMULATIONS in class which are supposed to represent the way language behavior are used every day outside the classroom	Providing students with a sequence of topics which are relevant	• Functions as "the communicative purposes for which we use the language." • Notions as "the conceptual meanings (objects, entities, states of affairs, logical relationships, and so on) expressed through language

B. **Skill-Based Syllabi**

The skill-based syllabus is **directed towards the teaching of the four skills** that make up the language, as Jordan (1997: 61) states it: "Sometimes this involves a syllabus being based on one or more of the four traditional language skills." In this kind of syllabus, the constituents of the skills are generally highlighted: the sub-skills or micro-skills; as an example we can take reading as a macro-skill that can be divided into a number of micro-skills such as, skimming, scanning, reading for information, ideas, etc.

C. **Method/Process-based Syllabi:**

METHOD/PROCESS-ORIENTED SYLLABI teacher's pedagogic steps, learners' experiences, types of activities		
Process Syllabus	**Procedural Syllabus**	**Task-Based Syllabus**
• The framework would be **publicly analyzed and evaluated by the classroom group.** • An emerging content syllabus would be designed in **an on-going way.**	The procedural syllabus consists of the **specification of the activities** like **information processing and problem solving that learners will engage** in, in the classroom	• **Tasks which students must perform in a target situation.** • **Tasks are static**; they should involve a process of **new informational content** that the language learners do not have at the beginning of the task. • Another characteristic of tasks is that they **require the student to apply cognitive processes of evaluation.**

Other researchers have other kind of divisions for syllabuses' types; according to Basturkmen (2006:21) syllabuses can be **'synthetic'** in which the "language is segmented into discrete linguistic items for presentation one at a time", or **'analytic'** wherein "language is presented whole chunks at a time without linguistic control".

Classification of Syllabi (Long and Crookes, 1993)

The figure shows that the 'Synthetic' syllabus includes the classical approaches to syllabuses as the grammatical, the lexical, the functional-notional, and the situational and topical ones. However, the 'Analytic' one consists of the task-based, the learner-centered and content- based syllabi which are considered as

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modern approaches in language teaching methodologies. Each one of them is based on a specific conceptual teaching ideology and not all of them received popular status, accordingly the researcher will deal only with the most known and largely used.

Lexical Syllabus	Relational syllabus	Content-based Syllabus	Learner-Centered Syllabus
• consists of : ➢ Grammar ➢ Expressions of notions and functions • The organizing principle is lexical	• Notional relations : cause-effect, etc. • discourse relations : question-reply, clause structure, etc	• Giving **primary role to the information** that students acquire in the course • Highly **specialized content.**	• To provide learners with efficient learning strategies. • to negotiate on the syllabus, • To encourage learners to set their own aims. • To choose corresponding learning strategies to fulfill their aims. • To develop self-evaluation skills. • Any decision is open to change, i.e. the content

Natural Approach	Competency Based Syllabus	The Communicative approach and ESP/EST	
• Promotes communicative tasks. • Linguistic competence appears over a time. • Emphasis is on error correction and meaning, not grammatical form.	competency is a set of related behaviors that ➢ impact performance; ➢ measured ➢ improved • Competencies are observable, measurable, not simply concrete • Teaching how adults learn. • Match learning and teaching. • Facilitate, than control. • Model humility, critical thinking and respect. • Support knowledge, skills. • Promote & expect learner accountability. • Provide feedback beginning with learner self-assessment. • Individualize learning experiences. • increasing complexity of performance	• Maurice (1987) condemns the way English is taught in most EST classes &calls for a teaching of English as a skill that can be used for scientific/ educational purposes. • Allen and Widdowson (1978: 58) "Broadly, what is involved is **a shift of the focus of attention from the grammatical to the communicative properties of the language**. We take the view that the difficulties which the students encounter arise not so much from a defective knowledge of the system of English, but from an unfamiliarity with English use, and that consequently their needs cannot be met by a course which simply provides further practice in the composition of sentences, but only by one which develops a **knowledge of how sentences are used in the performance of different communicative acts**. The approach which we wish to outline here, then, represents an attempt to move from an almost exclusive concern with grammatical forms to at least an equal concern with rhetorical functions. • Communicative methodology can be used in EST classrooms to encourage small-group work and situations which are more beneficial than just lockstep language lessons.	

4. Conditions to Syllabus Design:

Harmer (2001) establishes some rules that should be taken into consideration when designing a syllabus, and states that "every syllabus needs to be developed on the basis of certain criteria" (Harmer, 2001:295), which consist of:

1) **LEARNABILITY:** the content should be organized in a gradual manner in order to be more efficient, i.e. from the easier themes to the more complex ones.
2) **FREQUENCY**: integration of the most frequent items used in target language.
3) **COVERAGE**: incorporate the terminology and structures that have wider coverage in the use of the language.
4) **USEFULNESS:** set up language forms and skills that are socially useful f or the learners.

Conclusion

❖ "the syllabus may show a combination of items from **grammar, lexis, language functions, situations, topics, tasks** and **different language skill tasks** or **pronunciation issues**" (Benyelles, 2009: 55), this view is labeled 'multi-syllabus' or **"eclectic syllabus"** in which all the elements are matched and synchronized."

❖ Designing an ESP syllabus is not an easy task to perform because of its significant and complex role. However, it obviously satisfies a lot of needs since it has a multi-functional purpose.

❖ ESP rejects 'synthetic' approaches to course design (Basturkmen 2006:103); so, it is important to present the language using **an ECLECTIC method**