Researching the Relation between the Communicative Approach and Types of Syllabi to Language Teaching

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Abstract :

> To increase learners' engagement as well as learning, various theories and approaches have been developed to contribute to effective learning. The majority of the scientific tools and methods focus on the significance of the delivered learning channels and the ways of ensuring language acquisition. The current paper is designed to give the learning/ teaching population an idea about the philosophy of using certain tools of instruction and thereby describe the communicative as well as learner-centered¬ approaches and their underlying roles in language teaching especially when they are used and viewed in a holistic approach. The second point is that language designers are not only obliged to determine the necessary syllabuses to meet the needs of the language learners, but also to select and mix them to reach the learning objectives.

Keywords : Teaching/Learning - Language - Communicative approach - Learner-centered approach - Syllabi.

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المناهج التواصلية والمتمحورة حول المتعلم: أنواع المناهج الدراسية وصلتها بتدريس اللغة

ملخص:

لزيادة مشاركة المتعلم وتعلمه، تم تطوير نظريات ومناهج مختلفة من أجل المساهمة في التعلم الفعال. تركز غالبية الأدوات والأساليب العلمية على أهمية قنوات التعلم المقدمة ووسائل ضمان اكتساب اللغة. تم تصميم هذه الوثيقة لإعطاء المتعلمين/المعلمين فكرة عن فلسفة استخدام أدوات تدريس معينة، وبالتالي وصف المناهج التواصلية والمتمحورة حول المتعلم وأدوارها الرئيسية في تدريس اللغة على وجه الخصوص، عند استخدامها والنظر فيها في نهج شامل. النقطة الثانية هي أن مصممي اللغات ليسوا مطالبين فقط بتحديد البرامج اللازمة لتلبية احتياجات متعلمي اللغة، ولكنهم مطالبون أيضا بالنظر في اختيارهم ومزجهم لتحقيق أهداف التعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التدريس/التعلم - اللغة - المنهج التواصلي - المنهج المتمحور حول المتعلم - المنهج الدراسي.

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Recherche sur la relation entre l'approche communicative et les types de programmes d'enseignement des langues

Résumé :

Pour accroître l'engagement et l'apprentissage des apprenants, diverses théories et approches ont été développées afin de contribuer à un apprentissage efficace. La majorité des outils et méthodes scientifiques se concentrent sur l'importance des canaux d'apprentissage fournis et les moyens d'assurer l'acquisition de la langue. Le présent document est conçu pour donner à la population apprenante / enseignante une idée de la philosophie de l'utilisation de certains outils d'enseignement et décrire ainsi les approches communicatives et centrées sur l'apprenant et leurs principaux rôles dans l'enseignement des langues, en particulier lorsqu'ils sont utilisés et considérés dans une approche holistique. Le deuxième point est que les concepteurs de l'apprentissage des langues ne sont pas seulement tenus de déterminer les programmes nécessaires pour répondre aux besoins des apprenants, mais aussi de voir comment ces programmes pourraient être sélectionnés et mixés pour atteindre les objectifs d'apprentissage.

Mots clés : Enseignement /Apprentissage - Langue - Approche communicative - Approche centrée sur l'apprenant - Syllabus.

Introduction

The communicative approach makes real communication the focus of language learning and provides opportunities for learners to experiment and use their knowledge by developing both accuracy and fluency. Furthermore, it encourages learners' involvement in real speech situations. Communicative methods dominate language teaching and help learners to develop their linguistic and communicative competencies and provide opportunities to progress in many areas including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This is why language of syllabi needs to produce meaningful and real communication through classroom activities. This approach commends instructors and educational materials designers to determine learners' language needs before launching the teaching process, whereas ; within learner-centered approach, the focus exceeds the needs to skills and interests of the learner, and the problems that face their learnedness and knowledge prospects. So, the learner-centered objective is not only learning a language but also developing lifelong learning skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and obviously communication skills. It is pivotal for teaching materials designers to make use of a welding process whereby the two approaches are fused, forming a holistic approach that contributes efficiently to the process of teaching and learning. In the same vein, to raise learner responsibility and curiosity, syllabi content needs to be motivating and graded, since syllabuses are a key component of the curriculum which refers to all competencies and represent the fundamental elements for achieving course performance and comprehension ? in the educational setting and process.

1. Communicative Approach :

The emergence of this new and dominant movement in teaching (Communicative Language Teaching or CLT), whose primary concern is social and its main objective is to communicate successfully with deep and far-reaching effects in language generally and specifically in applied linguistics. CLT theories advocate communicative activities by the correct use of language in context. «Language-learning success is to be assessed neither in terms of accurate grammar and pronunciation for the own sake, nor in terms of explicit knowledge of the rules, but the ability to do things with the language, appropriately, fluently, and effectively ». (Cook, 2013 : 37).

To a great extent, language studies make further efforts to widen the communicative competence, definition and components to make it knowable and understandable. Additionally, the content of the communicative competence consists of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, information gap, and textual competence, even the communicative strategy is also regarded as a component of communicative competence by scholars. In this vein, grammar competence is not enough in language study, this does not mean mastering the form, developing language abilities and knowledge as well to communicating successfully.

> ...a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others.
>
> (Hymes, 1972 : 277)

With these words, Hymes criticized Chomsky's theory which could be considered as a set of ideal notions, since the consensus of the idea is that the native speaker has not only to master the rules of grammar but a system of rules through which communication competence is achieved. Hymes (1972) describes communicative competence as the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language use, and in fact, contains four components of communicative competence which are stated by Canal & Swain as the following:

a- Grammar system competence or linguistics competence refers to the acquisition of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical rules. (Coherence and cohesion).

b- Psycho-linguistic system competence is the human information processing comprehension and production of utterances at the level of communication.

c- Socio-cultural system competence deals with the acquisition of pragmatic aspects of speech act, cultural values, beliefs, socio-cultural conventions such as the context, the topic of the discourse, the participants' background information (age, sex, social status…), and registers of speech, moreover, the social meaning of specific utterances.

d- Strategic competence that deals with self-correction, enhancing the communication effectiveness in verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication. It is also known as the probabilistic rules of occurrence. Hence, figure (1) illustrates clearly the major components of communicative competence.

Figure 1 : Communicative Competence Components

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │    Communication    │
                        │     competence      │
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Grammar System competence	Psycho-linguistic competence	Socio-cultural System Competence	Strategic Competence
Coherence And Cohesion	Comprehension And production of utterances	Pragmatic aspects Of speech acts	Probabilistic Rules of occurrence.
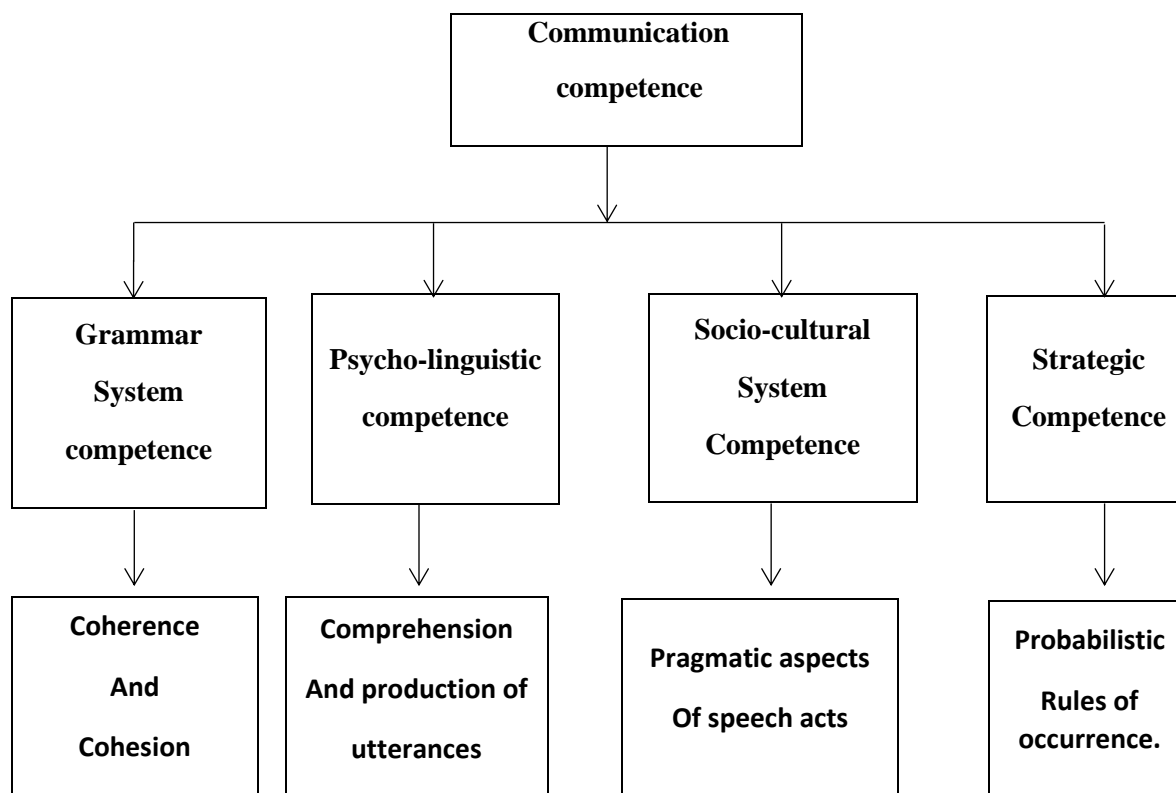
Grammatical competence deals with the ability of the learners to form sentences or utterances based on appropriate rules. It is mostly related to accuracy. Whereas psycho-linguistic competence generally refers to communicators' knowledge processing that is linked to their comprehension and production of speech. Yet, Socio-cultural linguistic competence considers how to initiate interaction in society. Therefore, insufficient knowledge or the lack of this skill in sociolinguistic competence might create difficulties or misunderstandings among people.

For strategic competence, the main purpose of this competence is to overcome communication problems and difficulties. It is generally related to both grammatical and sociolinguistic competencies, plus verbal and non-verbal communication in order to be able to complete or fill in the gap that occurred within the interaction in certain circumstances.

The communicative approach has diverged distinctly from the known teaching approaches by methodizing that the components of the language system cannot be set apart but managed all at once as in the real life. Communicative Approach (CA) commends imperatively teachers and educational materials designers to determine learners' language gaps in advance, to detect what meets their needs. i.e to conduct a Need Analysis Process then create the necessary conditions for studying or training purposes to enhance learners' motivation in and outside the pedagogic settings. « Concentration upon communicating meaning from the outset could lead to inaccurate _ if temporarily successful _ language use which, uncorrected, could then fossilize, preventing the learner from further development for more complex use ». (Cook, 2013 : 38)

Yet, this thought of emphasizing the ends via the fixed clear objectives and learners' needs restriction can have a crucial role in creative aspects of teaching. It has to maintain relationships between situational and cultural issues appropriate to language use. All in all, the process of teaching/learning is entirely based on learners' objectives and achievement in a special social situation in language use.

As a matter of fact, in the scholastic domain needs analysis accentuates the relevance of learning tasks and activities to definite objectives. On the contrary to form learning, needs analysis promotes the prominence of the finalities, in addition to far-reaching results on the macro and micro levels.

- The micro-level started with the progression of Task-Based Instruction (TBI)*, wherefore; learning is arranged through tasks reliability to real-world activities by focussing upon the meaning and successful task completion. Then the interest shifts to individuals: learner-centered approach and which aims to develop learner autonomy and independence by putting the responsibility of the learning in the hands of learners basically and then the teachers.

- The macro-level develops the syllabus and curriculum design. This latter fosters widely the language and discourse skills needed for a specific setting and level.

2. Learner-centered Approach :

Broadly speaking within learner-centeredness, the focus is on the needs, skills, and interests of the learner, and the problems that face their education as opposed to traditional approaches to teaching/ learning. Mainly, the emphasis is on the learner and authentic inquiries rather than on the structured analysis of the curriculum content for «learner-centered is often accompanied by a problem-based approach, where the problems are picked to robust the interests and needs of the learners». (Jayalaxmi 2015)

Many terms have been used for this type of learning, such as collaborative learning (Moore &Zyomont 2003), flexible learning (Taylor, 2000), experiential learning (Burnard, 1999), Learner-centered learning (Jones 2007), and self-directed learning. All this literature has been dubbed learner centered approach, which promotes dependent learning and places the learner in the primarily "active" role.

Figure 2 : Learner-centered Learning Meanings and Terms
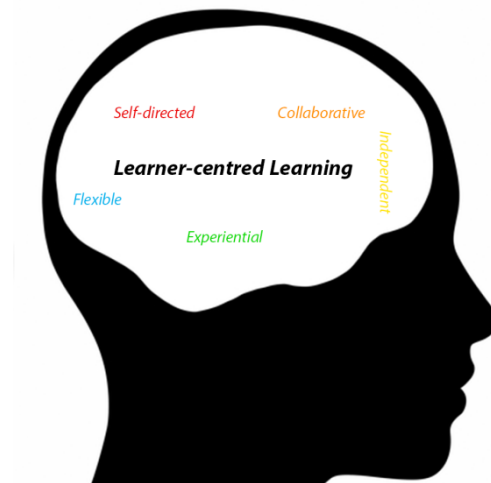
However, it is not a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning, "it is collaborative learning where the teacher and student are actively engaged in the content and process of learning". (Moore & Zyomont, 2003). Therefore, instead of delivering lectures by teachers to transmit knowledge, learner-centered instruction goes beyond the learning of content. Generally, it includes the learning of the process.

Moreover, this approach aims at teaching students how to learn and develop lifelong learning skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. This philosophy enhances learners' opportunity to think, reflect, share together, discuss ideas, question, analyse and solve problems. That is to say, the learner-centered approach is a combination of active and collaborative learning. Therefore active learning is considered the major factor in critical thinking and self-expression as well.

Teaching and learning practices like project-based and collaboration, foster knowledge building and require self-regulation and assessment. It deals mainly with the creation of a significant atmosphere and brings on value to the process of learning. The student-centered approach, considers the learner as an explorer and contributes to the efforts that used to be made only by the teachers to engage them in the process of learning.

Learner-centered approach uses different strategies and pedagogic tools, mainly audio-visual aids, community outreach activities, case-based group discussion, and students' presentation on projects, in addition to exercises, games, multimedia, etc. so that to promote learning plus make the learning experience more fruitful, interesting and enriching. Following regular practice, learning acquisition is primarily assessed through individual quizzes, tests, and case study presentations.

3. Syllabus :

A syllabus is a detailed description of a course, and it is a pedagogic tool that enhances as well as facilitates the teaching/learning process. «The primary purpose of a syllabus is to communicate to one's students what the course is about, why the course is taught, where it is going, and what will be required of the students for them to complete the course with a passing grade». (Altman & Cashin, 1992)

Insisting typically on the learner, the syllabus is responsible for communicating what is expected from the learner to accomplish the duty of teaching, moreover, to design the competencies and the essential elements for achieving course performance and apprehension in an educational setting.

Purposefully, to ensure consistency and conjunction within the educational program, the syllabus content should conform to the learning or training concerns. In addition, the course syllabus ought to be captivating and motivating so as to raise learner responsibility and curiosity for knowledge acquisition.

4. Syllabus vs. Curriculum :

A syllabus can be defined as a list of topics, books, etc. that students should study in a particular subject at learning institutions. The syllabus is concerned with the selection and grading of the learning issues, therefore, it represents precisely the planning phase of the curriculum.

With its broad range of scopes, the curriculum is an umbrella term that overlaps the planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of educational programs. According to the Oxford dictionary, it is the subjects that are included in a course of study or taught in a school, college, etc. hence, this idea has been well developed by Allen.

> *Curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social, and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational program. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that subpart of a curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught.*
>
> (Allen 1984 : 61)

It is clearly apparent in Allen's quote that a syllabus is a statement of content, its main function is planning courses, therefore, it depends on syllabus designers to select and grade this content. From these perspectives, it is completely conceived that the syllabus is a key component of the curriculum which refers to all the courses managing a particular level of learning.

Table 1 : Characteristics of Syllabus and Curriculum

Basis for comparison	Syllabus	Curriculum
Meaning	A syllabus is a document that contains all the portions of the concepts covered in a subject.	A Curriculum is the overall content, taught in an educational system or a course.
Origin	The syllabus is a Greek term.	The curriculum is a Latin term.
Set for	A subject	A course
Nature	Descriptive	Prescriptive
Scope	Narrow	Wide
Ste out by	Exam board	Government or the administration of schools, colleges, or institutes.
Term	For a fixed term, normally a year.	Till the course lasts.
Uniformity	Varies from teacher to teacher.	Same for all teachers.

Curriculums and syllabuses are analogous but refer to different levels of the educational process. A curriculum is applied to a program or degree, whereas a syllabus deals with the course. Both of them have objectives, instructional components, and evaluation components.

❖ **syllabus is more specific :**

➢ *Its objectives are clearly defined as knowledge, behaviours, and skills that the learner must attain to complete the course.*

➢ *The instruction is the educational component designed to help the learner meet the objectives.*

➢ *The evaluation is composed of examination tools: there must be at least one evaluation item designed to evaluate each course objective.*

❖ **A curriculum is more broadly defined :**

➢ *Objectives are often stated as goals.*

➢ *It is a list of courses or course groups that must be completed in order to reach the curriculum's objectives.*

➢ *The evaluation is the successful completion of each of the courses or course groups.*

5. Types of Syllabuses :

It is necessary to highlight that are two major types which, in their turn, have sub-categories of syllabuses. They are completely dissimilar in terms of the instructed units, proficiency degree, and explicit goals. Nevertheless, syllabi designers have to be more responsive to embedding authentic linguistic and situational contexts in realizing the targeted teaching programs for all concerned.

5.1. Product-oriented Syllabuses :

This genre of syllabuses endeavours great significance to knowledge and skills of language that learners should acquire during the accomplished learning period.

More clearly, a **product-oriented syllabus** focuses on things learned at the end of the learning process (outcomes) rather than the process itself. Therefore, the syllabus plan is most likely designed and prevised basically on the final results of language courses, such as grammatical syllabuses and functional-notional syllabuses.

5.2. Grammatical Syllabuses :

It could be understood from their appellation that this type consists of grammar structures, the most common syllabuses ; where the gradual selection of the input depends typically on the simplicity or complexity of the grammatical notions. For instance, learning rules one by one solely as a separate sequence of items or structures from the simple to the complex ones, McDonough expounds that «The transition from lesson to lesson is intended to enable material at one lesson to prepare the ground for the next, and conversely for material in the next to appear to grow out of the previous one». (McDonough 1981 : 21)

The assumption behind McDonough's vision is mainly reflecting how learning is progressed in this category of syllabuses i.e. the acquisition of one formal aspect of language,

in a given time, then learners would rehearse the aforesaid process for the consequential aspects. The central question to be addressed in this situation is, will learners be able to use these accumulated entities in genuine communication outside the learning settings ?

In seeking an answer to the preceding question, it has been determined that focusing on formal grammar, the structurally-graded syllabuses, and miss-use language is a complex phenomenon. Moreover, the complex nature of language is practically distorted especially when the communicative purposes are almost overlooked.

This strategy has tended to limit a single relationship between the form and the content, something that is not illustrated in the criteria of the communicative functions. That is to say, a particular function can deliver more than one form. More attractively ; a given form can also have different functions. However, the aftereffect might be concretized in a mismatching beyond what is learned and what is taught.

5.3. Process-Oriented Syllabus :

Contrary to the previous genre, the process syllabuses insist on the way knowledge and skills are acquired. The shift from instruction outputs to the stages and procedures of language learning; that is to say from product to process.

Process-oriented syllabus type comprises all the learning stages, thereby the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curricula which need to be considered as unified constituents of effective learning. The process syllabus is summarized by Legutke and Thomas as: «the 'strong version' of communicative language teaching, in which content and procedures, and language learning and language use, are intimately linked». (Legutke and Thomas,1991)

Obviously, a preferential attitude toward specific kinds of syllabuses depends upon the purposes, context, and environment for which language is to be taught. Widdowson cites that :

> *Structural syllabuses are designed on the assumption that it is the internalisation of grammar coupled with the exercise of linguistic skills in motor-perceptual manipulation (usage) which afford the most effective preparation for the reality of communicative encounters us.*   (Widdowson, 1983 : 68)

Hence, these arguments figured out that grammar syllabuses need to be designed to gain certain knowledge which should be assimilated to language skills : listening, speaking, reading, and writing to achieve certain communicative purposes most of the learners fail to reach in the real world. The procedural syllabuses are generally developed in Task-based and content syllabuses.

5.4. Task-Based Syllabuses :

The most comprehensive definition of the term task was done by : Richard, Platt, and Weber (1985) «…it is an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding a language. (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing a map, while listening to an instruction and performing a command… A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task». (p 289)

Additionally, in task-based syllabuses, duties are performed after conceiving a guiding language accompanied by instructors' assistance to complete activities positively and successfully. Meanwhile, the task-based syllabuses overlap both real-world and pedagogic tasks.

That is to say, within certain tasks, the learner has to grasp particular knowledge for interacting and getting across real life such as phone conversations, asking for direction/ location, letter writing, etc. whereas pedagogic tasks are used so as to carry out better language learning. «The two approaches are seen differently for designing syllabuses where Candlin (1987) chooses to articulate pedagogic criteria for task selection while Long (1985) advocates a form of needs analysis as a starting point». (Nunan, 1985 : 45).

5.5. Content Syllabuses :

They are mainly derived from distinct and well-marked points of departure in developing syllabuses: subjects for school curricula (biology, social, history…) or extending along the special area of the study correlated to the academic and technical domains, for example, (engineering, computing, marketing…).«We cannot achieve this goal if we assume that language learning and subject-matter learning are totally separate and unrelated operations». (Mohan 1986 : iii).

Although it is still believed that is possible to make a separation or division between language learning and the technical fields of study, content syllabuses advocate the necessary knowledge to design a syllabus for a specific context of language learning. That is to say, they create a foundation where a type of language is used in learning precise subject matter to achieve the principle objectives.

5.6. ESP Syllabus

Generally, syllabuses designers give great importance to grammatical, phonological, and vocabulary notions in implementing teaching programs. They are graded according to the level of learners who are supposed to master all these disciplines in the field of study. Richard and Rodgers (1986 : 49) assume that «Learning a language, it was assumed, entails mastering the elements or building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence».

Fairly recently, communicative perspectives have started to inquire about sensitive views. For instance, what do the learners want to do with the target language ? Hence, the research on learners' needs has played a fundamental role in the shift of the syllabus content to more specified subjects of language study.

> …*Specification of a teaching programme or pedagogic agenda which defines a particular subject for a particular group of learners. Such specification provides not only characterization of content, the formalization in pedagogic terms of an area of knowledge or behaviour, but also arranges this content as a succession of interim objectives.*

(Widdowson, 1987 : 65)

ESP teaching led strictly to realizing syllabuses in terms of instruction outcomes, with more specification on learning tasks and activities. This movement has advocated the learners' data to achieve the desired objectives in designing syllabuses and curricula. « ….a major trend in language syllabus design has been the use of information from and about the learner in curriculum decision-making». (Nunan, 1989 : 13)

It has been assumed that learning purposes in the foreign language's domain and precisely in ESP can have noticeable and concrete effects on the shape and the content of syllabus design. Furthermore, the development of language skills is due to the learning purposes, the subject matter, and timing restrictions as well. « Syllabus designers focused, not only on language functions but also on experiential content" (that is, the subject matter through which the language is taught». (Nunan, 1988 : 11)

For collecting data coming out of ESP learners a large set of tools and techniques are employed in syllabus design to analyse their needs like interviews, checklists, etc. These procedures are adopted in many learning and training institutions.

6. Planning Syllabus Strategies :

In the linguistics arena, analytic and synthetic are well-known dimensions of syllabuses analyses. The preliminary viewing given by Wilkins describes the synthetic approach by saying,

> *A synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which the different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up.*
> (Wilkins, 1976 : 2)

Synthetic strategy is based on breaking down the language into separate units to facilitate the process of learning, up till the language blocks will be constructed. Yet, in practice, the

widespread consensus is that the syllabus input has to be graded according to complexity or easiness levels in terms of pedagogic convenience.

Additionally, Wilkins carries out his description to define the analytic syllabuses: « ...are organized in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet those purposes». (Wilkins, 1975 : 13)

Alternatively, the analytic syllabus comprises language structures with various degrees of difficulty where the primary stage deals with the communicative purposes rather than the grammatical system of language, aimed at meeting the special needs of a particular learning audience.

7. Syllabus Design Criteria :

There is an increasing need to evaluate syllabus form and content to increase the quality and usability of teaching/learning processes, as cited by Harmer (2001 : 295) «whatever type it is, every syllabus needs to be developed based on certain criteria». These criteria are supposed to help make decisions about the selection and graduation of the content, in items to include, when, and where it should be included. He designates four important criteria :

Figure 3 : Criteria of syllabus design
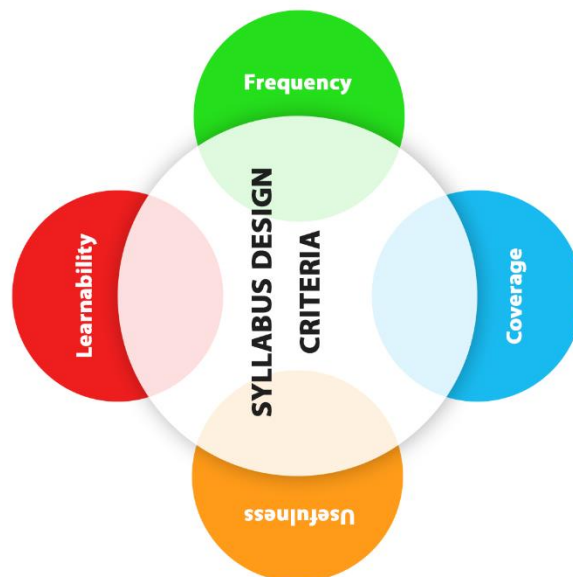
➢ **Learnability** *: some structures or lexical aspects are easier to learn than others. This is why Teachers should start with easy structures which are best grasped by the learners, then, move to more difficult ones as the learners advance through the syllabus.*

➤ **Frequency :** *it includes the items that are more frequent in the language and not used only occasionally. Each field has its own vocabulary and register which should be introduced to the learners.*

➤ **Coverage :** *Some words and structures have a larger scope of use than others ; they are used more repeatedly than others; the teacher should teach those words and structures.*

➤ **Usefulness :** *Teaching the type of vocabulary that is used depending on the utility of learners, i.e. words that the learners use more often to enhance their learnability.*

The arena of communicative competency receives various criticisms and improvements and most of them are getting deeper in its delimitation, in the way that acquiring a language is more than knowing its codes and forms, even so, what to say, to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation.

Hence, from all that has been explained in this paper, it is clearly shown that language proficiency subsumes grammatical competence, textual competence, and pragmatic competence, which consolidate illocutionary as well as sociolinguistic competence. To a great extent, language studies make further efforts to widen the communicative competence, definition, and components so as to make it knowable and understandable.

It is quite important to highlight that English use requires the mastery of macro-skills, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, and micro-skills which include Grammar, Vocabulary, Spelling, and Pronunciation. It is known that a good speaker can achieve his communicative purposes by proving competencies through the combination of these aspects accurately and fluently.

Obviously, in any educational institution, teachers rely on an official curriculum, plus a precise syllabus to teach variant subjects in different fields of study. Each type of syllabus has its own structure, objectives, and congruency with the aims assigned to the profile set, interests, and needs of the learners. So the language designers of syllabi and curricula could not make use of a single type of these academic documents to meet the needs of the language learners to develop their communicative skills in target languages.

Therefore, an assortment of syllabi should be on display, that is to say, any subject curriculum has to contain a variety of syllabi sorts to reach the teaching/learning target objectives.

It is clear that the communicative and learner-centered approaches could not be taught separately, whereas; they should rather be viewed in a more holistic approach, for the content of the communicative skills consists of linguistic plus sociolinguistic competencies, information gap, and textual competence.

Purposefully, in learning English, the focus should be on the analysis of needs, skills development, and the recognition of the learners' interests, in addition to the problems that face their learning. Given that, the learner-centered approach promotes dependent learning and places the learner in the primary active role through the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.

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