

**Evaluating a Communicative Syllabus in a Mexican EFL
context.**

By Elsa Fernanda Gonzalez

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Centre For English Language Studies

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1. INTRODUCTION

Syllabus design is an important element of any language course. However, this element raises much controversy in relation to its design approach and implementation in the actual language classroom. As an EFL teacher I consider that while researchers define syllabi in many ways and provide different syllabus taxonomies (grammatical, functional, topical, situational, etc), language instructors and language program administrators prevail with a difficult task: establish specific learning goals and make a decision in relation to which type of syllabus will fulfill those goals.

This paper has the purpose of describing a specific language course syllabus and evaluates its design and implementation in the teaching context it is being used. Specific factors will be discussed throughout this paper: syllabus type and design as well as factors influencing the implementation. The syllabus will be evaluated according to Brown's (2007) list of important elements of a communicative syllabus. I decided to consider these characteristics as evaluation criteria as a way of seeking to fulfill my program's main goal, which is to provide students with tools that will allow them to perform communicative competencies to their level of proficiency.

I will begin this paper by providing a literature review in which background to syllabus design, definition, types, and evaluation criteria of a syllabus will be described. Then, I continue by describing the language program and the syllabus with which I work. Finally, I will conclude by sharing my points of view and my insight in relation to how successfully or not the syllabus is implemented in my teaching context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background to Syllabus Design.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the question of what to teach and what to include in a syllabus arose much debate. Syllabus designers began selecting grammatical and vocabulary units (Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001) that they considered were necessary to teach.

Those who decided to focus on vocabulary selection used 5 different criteria to determine word lists: 1) teachability, 2) similarity, 3) availability 4) coverage and 5) defining power (Richards, 2001). Then, “A General List of English Words” developed by Michael West in 1953 provided a list of 2000 “ general service” words that were considered as the most important to develop language courses (Ibid).

Grammar selection, on the other hand, considered the importance of “gradation” essential to syllabus design. Besides picking which grammar items to include in the syllabus, it is important to consider in what order they are to be taught based on intuitive criteria such as simplicity and learnability (Richards,2001). These important lists of grammar and vocabulary became to be the basis of language programs in the 1960s (White, 1987).

However, in the 1970s attention towards meaning and functions began to gain importance in ELT and opened the path for the Council of Europe’s Threshold level or T-level project (Ibid). This project created a core syllabus that considered all languages performed the same functions with the use of different structures. Once students mastered communicative functions, they could then specialize the structures of the specific language. Although this project opened an important path for language course developers by considering needs analysis and function-based syllabi instead of structure-based as crucial elements to syllabus design (White, 1988), it is the structural syllabus that prevails as the one which most influences design approaches (Richards, 2001). This type of syllabus will be further described in section 2.4 of this paper.

2.2 Approaches to syllabus design.

In the early 20th century specific elements were considered when course planners designed a syllabus (Richards, 2001). Vocabulary and grammar were the basis of syllabus construction and students' needs were measured in relation to language fragments and units. A specific textbook guided language learning and syllabus design was advocated to the structure of a specific text that aimed to focus on foreign language teaching. Table 1 further develops Richard's points of view.

Table 1 Assumptions that influenced syllabus design in the early 20th century

Assumption	Description
'The basic units of language are vocabulary and grammar'	The biggest priority in language teaching is grammar and words and they are considered the milestones in syllabus design.
'Learners' needs are identified exclusively in terms of language needs'	It is assumed that learning English will solve learners' problems. The goal is to teach English and not to solve problems with the use of the language.
'The process of learning a language is largely determined by the textbook'	The textbook was the main learning device and language instructors based their teaching on it instead of on the principles of selection and gradation.
'The context of teaching is English as a foreign language'	Most of the information obtained and research studies developed for the development of the grammar and vocabulary selection were developed for foreign language learners. Great similarities can be found between second language learners. However, differences still prevail.

Richards, 2001

In following the British definition, Rahimpour (2010) mentioned three main schools of thought in syllabus design.

- a) **Lancaster School.** Defended by Candlin and Breen, this school of thought opposed the fixed syllabus and considered that it should be open and negotiable among teachers and students.
- b) **London School.** Represented by Widdowson and Brumfit. While Widdowson believed that the main difference between syllabus and

methods is that the former should be structural and the latter communicative, Brumfit stated that a syllabus should consider concepts of language, language learning, and language use.

- c) **Toronto School.** Represented by Allen, this school considers the syllabus to be a tool mainly for the teacher in which goals and teaching procedures are outlined.

In the American view of syllabus course planners can focus on elements such as knowledge and beliefs about the subject area, research and theory, common practice and trends when designing the appropriate syllabus. These are further explained in figure 1.

Figure 1 Syllabus design beliefs.

<i>Knowledge and beliefs about the subject area.</i>	A syllabus gives important insights about what the four communication skills entail.
<i>Research and theory.</i>	Insight from recent research results and methodology theory can help planners pick the most appropriate syllabus.
<i>Common practice.</i>	Practical experience planners and teachers have in language teaching field can support this process.
<i>Trends.</i>	Specific teaching and syllabus design trends “come and go” nationally and internationally.

Adapted from Richards, 2001

2.3 Defining a syllabus.

In an attempt to define a syllabus, this section will describe it from a US vs. UK perspective and from the narrow vs. broad view for these are the ones that prevail in my teaching context.

Before defining a syllabus and its use in a language program, it is necessary to put forward the difference between curriculum and syllabus that have equal or different meanings in specific contexts. While for American contexts they have the same meaning, for British language instructors, authors and teachers, a syllabus is subordinate to a curriculum and focuses on the contents of a specific course or subject (White, 1988). 'In a distinction that is commonly drawn in Britain syllabus refers to the content or subject matter of an individual subject whereas curriculum refers to the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system' (White, 1988: 4). Therefore, a syllabus focuses on what actually goes on in the language classroom (Candlin, 1984 cited in Nunan, 1988).

Globally defining syllabus is a difficult task that specialists approach in different ways depending on the context the syllabus is interacting in. In more classroom-centered terms and following the British school of thought, Rambini (2002) states that a syllabus is a statement of goals that guide teachers' practices and students' learning. Although they are a useful tool he clarifies that the syllabus can enumerate what is to be taught but cannot predict what can be learned.

Although there exist different perspectives in relation to what a syllabus is and what it implies Brunfit (1984a in White 1988:3) considered that there exists a consensus among its fundamental elements such as sequenced contents, starting and finishing goals, administrative needs and a specific time period. These elements portray a syllabus as a document that is negotiable and flexible that serves as a tool to administer a language course. Brunfit further describes these characteristics as in figure 2.

Figure 2 A consensus on syllabus elements

1. A syllabus is the specification of the work of a particular department in a school or college, organized in subsections defining the work of a particular group or class;
2. It is often linked to time, and will specify a starting point and ultimate goal;
3. It will specify some kind of sequence based on
 - a) Sequencing intrinsic to a theory of language learning or to the structure of specified material relatable to language acquisition;
 - b) Sequencing constrained by administrative needs, e.g. materials;
4. It is a document of administrative convenience and will only be partly justified on theoretical grounds and so is negotiable and adjustable;
5. It can only specify what is taught; it can not specify what is learnt;
6. It is a public document and an expression of accountability.

Brunfit ,1984a in White 1988:3

Specialists began questioning the specific focus a syllabus should carry: content elements solely or methods and procedures (Nunan,1988). While authors such as Candlin (1984 cited in Nunan, 1988) and Yalden (1984 cited in ibid) argued that methods/procedures and content should go hand by hand accompanied by evaluation principles others such as Stern (1984 cited in ibid) and Allen (1984 cited in ibid) believed that these should be separated. This is known as *the narrow* (considers a distinction between contents and procedures) and *broad* (tasks and contents cannot be separated) definition of the syllabus (Nunan, 1988). Narrow syllabi focused specifically on the selection and grading of contents and put aside the tasks and activities students were exposed to. Broad views considered that with the use of communicative language teaching activities and tasks could not be left behind.

Once the syllabus is defined, it is necessary to decide what type of syllabus is going to be adopted. In the following section, specific types of syllabi are outlined. Firstly, attention is given to White's type A and B syllabi and relates them to analytic/synthetic and process/product orientations. Then, a wider view

of syllabi is provided by focusing on those such as grammatical, functional, notional, and topical among others.

2.4 Types of syllabi.

Over the years researchers have attempted to categorize syllabi resulting in multiple syllabus categorizations.

For instance, White in 1988 suggested a type A and type B syllabus each of which pointed out the difference between an interventionist and a non-interventionist approach. While an interventionist approach focused on developing learners' linguistic features or other content aspects, the non-interventionist emphasized the need for learners to learn how to communicate without the intervention of pre-organized linguistic features. Research came to name these syllabi as analytic (type A) and synthetic (type B) syllabi (Wilkins, 1976 cited in Long & Crookes, 1992) or product and process oriented (Nunan, 1988). The main distinctions among A and B syllabi are their focus of instruction. While type A are teacher-centered and focuses on analyzing predetermined language content or skills, the type B gives priority to 'natural growth' or experiential learning and provides opportunities for teachers and students to negotiate meaning (White, 1988: 45). Table 2 further describes A and B syllabi.

Nevertheless, some claimed that the A and B syllabuses represented important constraints. For instance, Long & Crookes (1992) argued that the synthetic (type A) syllabus lacked authenticity by focusing on a set of linguistic forms specifically chosen to obtain a specific level of proficiency or product (Nunan, 1988) without considering that they do not represent how language is actually used. Furthermore, when communicative approaches began to gain importance the analytical syllabus (type B) lacked institutional support and teaching materials to accompany it (ibid). I believe that analytic syllabuses give room for a huge amount of language content to arise doubt in students. Therefore, covering all these aspects in a single session can be challenging.

Table 2. Salient Characteristics of Type A and B Syllabi

Type A What is to be learnt?	Type B How is it to be learnt?
Interventionist External to the learner Other directed Determined by authority Teacher as decision-maker Content=what the subject is to the expert Content=A gift to the learner from the teacher or knower Objectives defined in advance Subject emphasis Assessment by achievement or by mastery Doing things to the learner.	Non-Interventionist Internal to the learner Inner directed or self-fulfilling Negotiated between learners and teachers Learner and teacher as joint decision makers Content=what the subject is to the learner Content=what the learner brings and wants. Objectives described afterwards Process emphasis Assessment in relationship to learners' criteria of success. Doing things for or with the learner.

White, 1988 :44-45

In 1995, James Brown emphasized the existence of seven different syllabi (Table 3) based on his teaching experience in the ESL & EFL field. He considered three syllabi proposed by McKay and decided to add four more: structural, situational, topical, functional, skills and task based syllabi. Relating this taxonomy to the previously described structural, situational, topical and functional syllabi would correspond to a synthetic approach or what White (1988) would call a type A syllabus while the task-based approach fits into the analytical or process-oriented syllabus (Nunan, 1988). It is important to point out that although the structural, situational, topical and functional syllabi are product-oriented their basis for syllabus organization is different. While for the structural syllabus the focus is on grammar or vocabulary, the situational organizes content around specific situations such as "at the airport". The functional frame of work focuses on functions of language instead of topics or content, as does the topical syllabus. Table 3, gives further explanation to these types of syllabi.

Table 3. Syllabuses

Syllabus	Ways of organizing courses and materials.
Structural	Grammatical and phonological structures are the organizing principles-sequenced from easy to difficult or frequent to less frequent.
Situational	Situations (such as at the bank, at the supermarket, at a restaurant, and so forth) form the organizing principle-sequenced by the likelihood that students will encounter them (structural sequence may be in background).
Topical	Topics or themes (such as health, food, clothing and so forth) form the organizing principle-sequenced by the likelihood that students will encounter them (structural sequence may be in background).
Functional	Functions (such as identifying, reporting, correcting, describing, and so forth) are the organizing principle-sequenced by some sense of chronology or usefulness of each function (structural and situational sequences may be in background).
Notional	Conceptual categories called notions (such as duration, quantity, location and so forth) serve as the basis of organization-sequenced by some sense of chronology or usefulness of each notion (structural and situational sequences may be in background).
Skills	Skills (such as listening for gist, listening for main ideas, listening for inferences, scanning a reading passage for specific information, and so forth) serve as the basis for organization sequenced by some sense of chronology or usefulness of each skill (structural and situational sequences may be in background).
Task	Task or activity-based categories (such as drawing map, following directions, and so forth) serve as the basis for organization-sequenced by some sense of chronology or usefulness of notions (structural and situational sequences may be in the background).

Brown, 1995: 7

Richards (2001), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of the lexical, competency, the text-based and the integrated syllabus by outlining some important benefits and constraints to each syllabus (table 4). He explains that an integrated syllabus has the advantage of allowing instructors to focus on many needs instead of having an absolute focus. In his description of other syllabi, Richards considers that one of the main constraints of lexical or competency-based syllabi is that there are no specific procedures to follow when specifying the content of each syllabus. Other benefits and constraints are outlined in table 4.

Table 4 Benefits and Constraints of different syllabus orientations.

Syllabus	Benefits	Criticisms
Lexical	Among the first syllabi to be developed. Organized around vocabulary items. For instance, elementary: 1000 words; intermediate: an additional 2000 words; upper-intermediate: an additional 2000 words; advanced: an additional 2000	a. This syllabus can only be a one strand of a more comprehensive syllabus.
Competency-based syllabus	Organized around the competencies students are expected to learn or perform in specific situations or activities and are widely used among work-oriented contexts. It is outcome based and it adapts to the students' changing needs.	a. Specific procedures to develop competency specifications are not available. b. Competencies are described and picked around intuition and personal experience. c. Competencies chosen for syllabus design involve the personal judgment of the course planner of what students are to perform.
Text-based syllabus	Built around the texts to be used. The starting point is the context that leads to the decision of which textbook to chose. It commonly involves features of other syllabuses. This syllabus links spoken and written texts to social and cultural contexts, it allows the design of units of work focusing on skills development, and it provides guided practice as language is developed around the text.	a. Focuses on specific skills rather than communicative proficiency. b. It represents an impractical way of working. Many constraints to this syllabus are similar to those appointed by the competency-based syllabus.
Integrated syllabus	It is very common for course planners to choose an integrated approach to syllabus design. Priorities instead of being absolute can be diverse. Therefore, it is important to decide which will be central and which will be secondary focus of syllabus design .	

Adapted from Richards, 2001

Finally, it is necessary point out the concept of the “negotiated” syllabus explained by Clark (1991). The author states its design is no longer an appointed process but instead it becomes part of the pedagogical component and the learning process. Students’ are directly involved in the syllabus design process becoming a dynamic and flexible (Clark, 1991: 14) learning experience. This is rather a different syllabus that seeks to incorporate students in the design of it acknowledging the importance of active learner participation. Therefore, I consider that its focus on learner-centered education could acknowledge this as a type B syllabus.

Nevertheless, the negotiated syllabus represents important constraints to its implementation. For instance, its design would depend on the cognitive development and the cultural norms of students involved (ibid). On the other hand, student participation in the syllabus design process could represent important time constraints and management skills that teachers and institutions do not have.

Once the a decision has been made in relation to the type of syllabus that fulfills the learning goals, the issue of implementation and evaluation bear in the language teacher's mind. Therefore, the following section focuses on syllabus evaluation according to Brown's point of view (2007). The aspects outlined by Brown gain importance to the purpose of this paper for they seek to develop learners' communicative competence.

2.5 Syllabus evaluation.

It is important to consider evaluation a cyclical process that happens not only when the syllabus has been designed but also when it is being planned and implemented in language lessons (Graves, 2000). Language institutes may choose to focus on a summative evaluation, which is carried out with the purpose of deciding whether or not the course should continue or have it redesigned. Teachers and students can focus on a formative evaluation to adapt it to their classroom needs as their lessons develop (Graves, 2000). On the other hand, when it comes to evaluating a course syllabus White (1988:92) points out that 'a complete syllabus specification will include all five aspects: structure, function, situation, topic, skills. The difference between syllabuses will lie in the priority given to each of these aspects anyone of which can become the leading or organizing principle upon which the others are dependant ' and the different learning goals that the institution wishes to accomplish.

Brown (2007) adds that the importance of a communicative syllabus lies on important elements such as teaching goals and objectives for each unit. He emphasizes the need to include topics, situations, grammar and vocabulary units that correspond to the functions outlined. If content corresponds to communicative functions then it will fulfill its purpose: provide students with tools to develop their communicative competence. Figure 3 further builds on the list of the necessary elements of a communicative syllabus.

Figure 3 Elements of a Communicative Syllabus

1. Goals for the course (and possible goals for the modules within the course).
2. Suggested objectives for units and possible for lessons.
3. A sequential list of functions (purposes), following from the goals, that the curriculum will fulfill. Such a list is typically organized into weeks or days.
4. A sequential list of topics and situations matched to the functions in #3.
5. A sequential list of grammatical, lexical, and/or phonological forms to be taught, again matched to the above sequences.
6. A sequential list of skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) that are also matched to the above sequences.
7. Matched references throughout to textbook units, lessons, and/or pages, and additional resources (audio, visual, workbooks, etc) to be used.
8. Possible suggestions of assessment alternatives, including criteria to be tested and genres of assessment (Traditional tests, journals, portfolios, etc.)

Brown, 2007: 156-157

Although it is a communicative syllabus which Brown outlines, it still corresponds to a Type A due to its focus on pre-determined lists of language units.

I consider that the importance of syllabus evaluation remains in seeking improvement once it is done and to take ongoing decisions concerning whether or not the syllabus is working in the classroom and in each lesson. Therefore, the following sections of this paper seek to evaluate my school syllabus with the purpose of analyzing its design and actual implementation.

I will begin by describing my teaching context, the language course and the specific syllabus. Then, my syllabus will be analyzed according to Brown's list of necessary elements discussed in section 2.5 of this paper and other basic concepts such as syllabus design. Then, other factors such as teacher attitudes and social factors that influence the implementation of my syllabus will be

described. Finally, I will conclude by giving my personal opinion about the syllabus and its analysis.

3. THE CONTEXT AND THE SYLLABUS.

3.1 The teaching context.

An EFL intermediate course taught at a private university in the northeastern part of Mexico was considered for this essay. Twenty-five to thirty students participated in a 45-minute lesson on a daily basis allowing them to obtain 105 hours of EFL instruction at the end of each semester. English at this university is a core course, which consists of 6 semester-long levels portrayed in figure 4. Once they have reached a high intermediate level students are enrolled in a TOEFL preparation course and need to obtain minimum 500 points as a graduation requirement. French is part of the courses offered and those who wish to advance to French need to finish their EFL levels or fulfill the ITP TOEFL requirement.

3.2 The Course and the Syllabus

3.2.1 The course

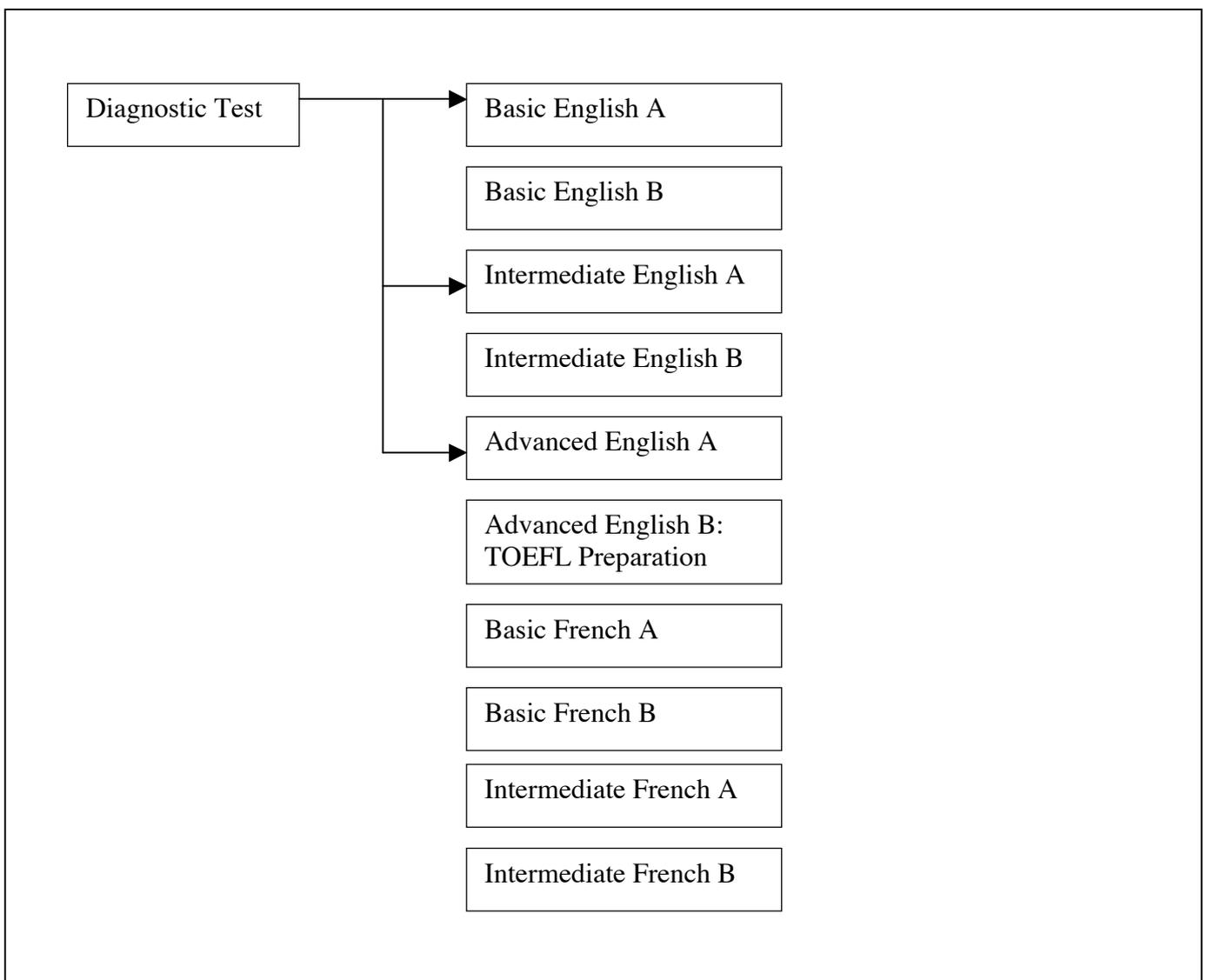
This EFL intermediate course seeks to obtain in students an A2 level of proficiency. It is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFE) and the CAN DO project of the Association of Language Testers of Europe (ALTE) and has the main objective of providing students with tools that will allow them to perform specific communicative competencies to their level of proficiency. To fulfill this purpose, the language administration, without teacher participation, decided to implement a textbook as the main material resource. The textbook “New American Inside Out” chosen for all the EFL courses states that

‘being familiar with most of the grammar and knowing enough vocabulary to “get by” in most situations the intermediate student is already a fairly competent language learner. ...In New American Inside Out we’ve tried to get the balance right between challenging students with new grammar and vocabulary and providing important recycling and consolidation work in more familiar areas. In particular,

there is a clear emphasis on learning new vocabulary- the key to breaking through the intermediate ceiling’ (Kay, Jones & Gomm, 2009).

After working with textbooks for several years, I have noticed that textbook’s methodological description is not always what reality demonstrates. For instance, “New American Inside Out” considers itself to use a lexical approach as stated by the academic consultant in a textbook workshop provided by the book editorial. However, according to the above statement it seems to heavily focus not only on vocabulary but on grammar as well, shifting its approach to a structural one.

Figure 4 Language Course Structure Universidad La Salle, Victoria, Mexico



3.2.2 The Syllabus

The intermediate syllabus (Appendix A) used at my university is provided by the language program coordinator and adapted by each teacher. There is flexibility in terms of the dates and contents as long as the main office is aware of any adapted information. The elements included in the syllabus are

1. Course title
2. Instructor's name.
3. Course objective
4. Course textbook
5. Course content
6. Grading criteria
7. Class policies.

The scope and sequence of the syllabus contents correspond to those established by the textbook being used. As language instructors of this university we are constantly being required to evaluate the contents of the syllabus and asked for specific opinions by the main language office. These opinions and suggestions are considered for improving the language program.

4. SYLLABUS ANALYSIS.

4.1 Syllabus design.

I consider the syllabus (Appendix A) to be *narrowly designed*. It limits itself to specify the contents without including the teaching processes we should approach. As section 2.1 mentions a narrow syllabus specifies a distinction between content and procedures (Nunan, 1988). By not including the teaching procedures to follow, this syllabus is making a clear distinction between these and giving major importance to the contents.

Furthermore, I consider this to be a *synthetic syllabus* for it focuses on grammar and vocabulary instead of providing students the opportunity to analyze and use language freely. In section 2.4 of this paper, it is specified that a synthetic syllabus focuses on linguistic forms while the analytic focuses on the needs for students to communicate in the real world without specific linguistic forms (Long

& Crookes, 1992). My syllabus clearly shows a dominance of grammar items by placing them in the third column before the topics of each unit. Therefore, the structure of this syllabus fits this concept.

Although, the head of the language department provides this syllabus to us we are encouraged to make modifications according to our needs. However, the main traits need to be kept. These main traits are that the language focus needs to be maintained and it needs to be organized based on the textbook contents. Therefore, it is logical to consider this syllabus to be a structural syllabus. As Brown (2007) points out in table 3 of this paper, this syllabus is organized around grammatical or phonological items that are sequenced according to levels of difficulty or usage. In other words, my syllabus could meet the specific characteristics of a Type A or synthetic syllabus.

As mentioned in section 2.5 a successful communicative syllabus should consider certain elements (Brown, 2007). I intend to analyze my syllabus in comparison with these specific elements for two main reasons. Most important of all, our course objective seeks to develop in students an intermediate communicative competence. Therefore, these elements could guide teachers and administrators at my teaching context to design and construct an appropriate syllabus. Secondly, I consider that Brown's (2007) list of components, as listed in figure 3 of this paper, represent a complete and practical way of structuring a communicative syllabus.

4.1.1 Teaching goals.

This syllabus contains a general teaching goal for the course. As mentioned in section 2.5 of this paper, Brown considers that a necessary element of a communicative syllabus is that it states goals to fulfill and if possible specific goals for specific lessons. However, it is noticeable how broad the objectives statement of my syllabus is. It is stated that the course objective is to 'develop students' abilities to speak, listen, read and write at an intermediate level'. It is far from being specific and achievable and it is not clear about what it is precisely that encloses a 'intermediate level'. Perhaps if the objectives were oriented toward specific competencies as the language curriculum seeks to

develop in learners, it would be clearer to us what we are intended to develop in our students. For instance, a clear competency oriented objective could read -to provide students with the tools to express orally and in written form personal opinion about familiar topics.

4.1.2 Objectives for each unit and if possible for each lesson.

As portrayed in appendix A, objectives for each unit are not stated. Providing a specific goal for each unit can provide teachers and students achievable and realistic objectives that could provide meaningfulness to the contents. Additionally, this aspect could facilitate teachers daily lesson plan by having goals stated in advance and give students a sense of achievement.

4.1.3 A list of functions (purposes) organized and sequenced around specific periods of time such as days or weeks.

The main organization principle of my syllabus is time. It specifies the months and days that correspond to each unit. However, it lacks the specific language functions that are to be developed. As mentioned in the previous section, this feature is of major importance if the main goal of the course is to develop learners' communicative competence.

4.1.4 A sequential list of topics and situations that correspond to the functions considered.

Although the topics for each unit are specified, the situations with which each student is engaged in are not clear. By adding specific situations to the topic of each unit, we are adding a real life sense to the contents of the course. For instance, in the topic of "Friends" the situation "studying for math" can give meaningful and life-like input to students.

4.1.5 A sequential list of grammatical, lexical, or phonological forms that correspond to the functions.

The list of grammatical and lexical items is the main basis of organization of my syllabus. A grammatical point is specified for each unit and each topic. However, they are not chosen or sequenced according to students' needs, but according to the textbook that is being used. Additionally, this syllabus does not

specify communicative functions that correspond to the grammatical or lexical focus. Therefore, this syllabus lacks a communicative purpose.

4.1.6 Matched references throughout the textbook including units, lessons, and/or pages and additional resources to be used.

This feature is not included in my syllabus. Integrating extra resources and additional information to consult that correspond to each unit can facilitate learners' learning process. It can provide them with an extra "boost" to become independent learners. Additionally, they provide teachers with tools to aid them in achieving more dynamic and rich lessons.

4.1.7 Assessment alternatives that include criteria to be tested and assessment genre (such as portfolios, journals, tests, etc).

A list of evaluation criteria is included towards the end of my syllabus. However, there exist enormous gaps in relation to the specific aspects that language instructors will look for in student evaluations. Additionally the assessment genres that are to be considered are not included in this syllabus. Providing students with clear and concise evaluation criteria, can give learners a sense of orientation and a clear picture of what they are expected to accomplish in a specific period of time.

4.2 External Factors of the teaching context influential in syllabus implementation.

This private university has a strict policy when it comes to course content and syllabus design. Head of departments are required to put together the course syllabus and instructors are required to revise it and make any necessary adjustments as the course develops. Thus, the importance of formative assessment to improve the design of each syllabus lies in both coordinators and instructors. As mentioned in section 2.5 of this paper, institutions may choose to conduct summative or formative assessment. Therefore, teachers and head of departments can assess their syllabi, as the course develops to see if changes need to be made, engaging in formative assessment (Graves, 2000).

The social behavior of those that handle the syllabus in everyday teaching is

crucial. For instance, language instructors are raised with the belief that we need to obey our superiors and accomplish the teaching goals established by them regardless of the efforts or sacrifices this might mean. Therefore, for many language instructors, including myself, the fact that we were being asked to evaluate our syllabus and make adjustments was totally out of line. However, as months have passed, this evaluation process has improved and constant feedback is being shared among other English instructors and the head of department.

Furthermore, students are required to keep a copy of the syllabus in their notes for further reference throughout the semester. However, they do not count with what I would call “ a syllabus culture”. Instead of burying the syllabus in their notes, it is necessary to train learners that it is their guide to keep at hand and it can be referred to when questions regarding content, evaluation, specific dates and time periods arise. As described by Brunfit (1984a in White, 1988:3) and outlined in section 2.1 of this paper, a syllabus is a public document that facilitates administrative matters and contains sequenced material for future reference.

5. CONCLUSION.

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to portray and evaluate the syllabus with which I am currently working at the tertiary level in a Mexican private university.

Throughout this process I stumbled on important flaws and strengths of a document that is an important part of our foreign language program. While comparing it with information accounted for in the literature review of this paper, I found that instead of pursuing communicative competencies as the program objectives state my syllabus focuses language accuracy. As I describe in section 4.1.5, the syllabus lacks communicative functions that are to be linked to the grammatical and lexical features. Therefore, this syllabus does not seek communicative competence.

Nevertheless, it is a syllabus that is flexible and can be modified to meet each classroom's needs as long as the contents are not modified or deleted. Therefore, this adaptability characteristic is oriented towards timing, design or implementation but not towards contents and teaching approach.

It has come to my attention how this syllabus can be improved to obtain better results in the classroom. It would be interesting to approach a task-based or competency-based syllabus, which could give teachers at my school the opportunity to guide their students throughout a new path to obtain intermediate communication skills. By exposing students to task-based learning, the syllabus needs to be organized around activities and tasks that simulate their use of language in real contexts. These features will allow teachers working at this institution achieve the original communicative competence course objective.

Finally, I believe that regardless the syllabus approach that each institution decides to implement, it is important to design it in cooperation with classroom instructors for we are in direct contact with students and with the syllabus itself. I believe it is important to mention that although in many cases (especially my teaching context) teachers do not have a decisive participation in the development of the syllabus of their particular courses, it is hoped that they have the sufficient freedom to adapt it and modify it if necessary while it is being implemented in their classrooms (Nunan, 1988).

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7.APPENDIXES

7.1 APPENDIX A: MY SYLLABUS

Course Title: Intermediate English A (August-December 2010)

Instructors: Fernanda Gonzalez,

Course Objective: Develop students' abilities to speak, listen, read and write at an intermediate level.

Course Textbook: New American Inside Out (Blue)

Course Content: The following chart describes the dates of class, the units and contents to cover.

	Unit	Date	Grammar/Vocabulary	Topics
AUGUST	1	16 to 20	Question forms. Tense review. Questions with prepositions. Subject questions. Adverbs of frequency.	Friends, Lifestyle, Communication
	2	23 to 27	Present perfect. Simple past and past progressive. Comparatives and superlatives	Experiences, sports & injuries
	3	30 to 03	Dynamic and stative meanings. Present perfect: simple and progressive.	Family, dating & character
SEPTEMBER	4	06 to 10	Phrasal verbs. Future forms. Pronouns: <i>anybody, somebody, etc</i>	Festivals, new year's & parties
	September 13th First Partial Exam			
	5	14 to 20	<i>Used to / would</i>	Food, eating & childhood
	6	21 to 27	Prepositions of time. Modals of obligation and permission.	Time, punctuality & work
OCTOBER	7	28 to 04	Verb patterns. Passive structures	Papparazzi, new stories & crime
	8	05 to 11	Modals of deduction. Past perfect	Trips, places & vacations
		11 to 15	REVIEW	
	October 18th – Second Partial Exam			
	9	25 to 29	Reported statements and questions	Stereotypes, books & movies
NOVEMBER	10	01 to 05	Defining relative clauses. Real conditionals (first conditional). Indirect questions	Children, childhood & parenting
	11	08 to 12	Unreal conditionals (second and third conditionals). Whishes and regrets.	Regrets, age & dilemas
	November 2nd – Holiday			
	12	15 to 19	Adjective order. <i>Have / get something done</i>	Fashion, appearance & routines
	November 22th – Holiday			
	November 23rd – Third Partial Exam			
		24 to 26	Final Review	
November 29th – Ordinary Exam				
December 13th – Extraordinary Exam				

Grading Criteria:

Partial Exams and Coursework	60%
Ordinary Exam	40%
Grade for the Semester	100%

Extraordinary Exam Grade: 100% (Grade for the Semester).

NOTES:

In unit 5, the only language focus that will be covered is **used to/would**. The holiday in the week does not allow for more information to be covered.

Class Policies:

- The minimum passing grade is 7.
- Students should be in the classroom a few minutes before class starts. No permissions are given to leave the class before it ends.
- Turn off your cell phone before each class starts.
- Test dates cannot be changed. Students absent on a test date will have no other opportunity to take the test.
- You may not have more than 8 absences during the course. It is your responsibility to find out in a timely manner the number of absences recorded by the instructor.

You must bring the required books to every class.