

## **DESIGNING A NEW SYLLABUS FOR LANGUAGE BEGINNERS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Human beings convey thoughts and ideas through the use of language. Sirbu (2015) stated that language is a vital way of communication in any society. Any course starts with comprehension. It is highly essential to know exactly who your learners are. Then, the teacher has to decide what does he or she want them learn precisely. Before the teachers decides the assignments, required tasks , activities that will help each learners to learn, the teacher has to decide what kind of material will be taught any why. At the beginning, the teacher has to know his or her students, the teacher has to ask himself or herself what exactly the students are able to do and present. Also, the teacher has to check how will he or she measure and examine the students' abilities. Once the teacher knows how all this will be done, he or she will be able to decide and focus on the students' outcomes.

It is really important that the teacher finds out more about his or her type of students, understand that they have different needs and of course they have distinctive abilities. In addition, it is vital to consider the level of the students with the type of course that will be taught or else they will not be on the same wavelength. It is not embarrassing at all to consult experienced teachers who have dealt with different types of students for a long period of time. Hence, experience plays an important role in shaping the class before designing the material. Since I'm interested in talking about university students and I teach different levels.

Most of Arab students that I deal with on daily basis come from different back ground. Thus, they all have different experiences and they got exposed to learning language differently. Their levels vary to a great extend as some of they are graduated from the American diploma, others are graduated from the international general certificate of secondary education and others are graduated from the national high school. Moreover, some of them got exposed to the English language lately as they used to study in Arabic schools where most of the languages are being taught in Arabic and not in English like other private schools.

As a result, university students come from different backgrounds and their levels of using the English language is quite different. There is no doubt that that designing a syllabus is not any easy task at all as it requires planning, preparing and making sure that the material suits the intended students. It is recognized that there is a difference between curriculum and syllabus. Curriculum is the big umbrella of syllabus. On the one hand, the curriculum deals with the procedures for the planning, implementation, management and evaluation of a course across different subjects in a school or education system. It generally states values and beliefs about learning. It may be a starting point for syllabus content, syllabus design, and teaching methodology or how content is being taught. On the other hand, syllabus is the specification of what is to be taught in a language course and the order in which it is to be taught. It usually contains reading, writing, speaking, phonology, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and functional language.

This is to say, that the learning objectives seek what the student should really learn and do during the course each and every semester. First of all, the syllabus has to seek the learners' needs, so it has to be designed carefully to get the intended outcomes. Needless to say, evaluating the learner's progress in language learning is essential to assess and examine his or her level. However, this could not be achieved without designing a syllabus that is adapted to the intended students.

This research paper attempts to show how designing a new syllabus could help weak university students to use the English language easily. I taught university students who were beginners in using the English language. For them, English is a hard subject that has a lot of obstacles and difficulties. Some of them suffer from psychological complexes regarding to the obstacles they faced in using the language in the past due to bad experiences with acquiring and learning the language. Those students feel that they will not be able to talk fluently like the English movies they watch randomly unless they read the Arabic subtitles.

From my experience with language beginners and before teaching the designed syllabus, I considered the idea that weak students have to trust themselves first. With the help of Syllabus Design and Development 2020 course, I gave an attempt to design an elementary course to language beginners' university students.

In other words, I followed the planned syllabus, so I designed what will be taught and when exactly each item will be taught. In addition to that, I followed the "sequencing" technique according to the learners' communicative needs. Following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is definitely the right way to design a syllabus simply because it is an international standard for describing language ability. Furthermore, it describes language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a

language. Unfortunately, the teacher cannot use CEFR blindly without considering the students' levels. Thus, it is important to refer back to a valid language framework; however, the teacher could use it all without paying unique attention to the students' levels and backgrounds. In a nutshell, the teacher has to adapt and tailor the syllabus to address the intended students.

### **HOW THE NEW SYLLABUS WILL BE USED AND WHY DO WE NEED A NEW SYLLABUS?**

I will share my experience with some weak university students who wish to speak English and communicate confidently. One of the reasons I did not ask the students to get a book to study from is the quantity. Most of weak students regard books as a material of studying, memorizing and having exams. However, my purpose was to learn and entertain, so the amount of page numbers would not put students down. Thus, I decided to type my own material and to prepare a small booklet that does not exceed 20 paged. There is no doubt that I really care about the quality of the material and the quantity. Also, it is advisable to provide much space in the booklet for them to write their own notes in their mother tongue if they feel more comfortable. I used various visual images throughout the course to let the students visualize the scene and understand easily what I'm really talking about. Knapp, Hall, and Horgan (2013, p.27) regard the nonverbal language as a "total communication process", so it is an independent medium in itself or an adequate system.

This nonverbal communication process is presented through gestures, postures, touching, facial expressions, eye behavior, and vocal behavior. Hence, I balanced between utilizing the verbal and the nonverbal modes inside the classroom to deliver the designed syllabus. Berger (1972, p.7) stated that "seeing comes before words", so visual images were used a lot inside the classroom to deliver meaning easier.

The designed material aimed to focus on general topics and daily routine. For instance, in the first session, students learn how to greet each other and how to present themselves briefly and accurately at the same time. More specifically, each student is required to tell his or her name, age, address, nationality, sex, marital status, faculty and the reason beyond studying the English language in particular.

Of course, not all students can do this easily, so I present myself and ask them to do the same. Modeling and drilling help students to pronounce correct and to memorize the new vocabulary words. The repetition technique supports language beginners to speak without being embarrassed and shy. Moreover, role plays, pair work and group work play essential roles in boosting the beginners' self-confidence and self-esteem. In other words, when the student shares his or her personal information first with his group, the presents himself or herself in front of the whole

class, he or she is more enthusiastic and less shy. Thus, the student rehearses with his pair or her group then in front of all his colleagues. Encouraging student to present publically break the ice and push them forward.

Vocabulary words are challenging to understand especially for English language beginners. Imagine you are learning new Japanese or Chinese words, they will be really challenging. It is not any easy task to understand new vocabulary words. Fortunately, vocabulary words could be taught not only through a reading context, but also as single items, particularly useful to very low levels where the item can then be matched to a visual image and then put into a simple sentence. Another way of teaching vocabulary words is to perform or act out what you say. Use your body gestures and facial expressions to deliver the intended word you want to teach. A teacher who can deliver a learning session and keep the students' attentions is a good actor. Thus, acting inside the classroom is a very beneficial technique that grabs the students' attention. The course I taught to language beginners aims to focus on the quality and not the quantity.

In other words, it is not important to cover a lot of grammar and vocabulary words to finalize the course; however, it is more important to make your students digest what you want them to learn in two months for instance. Also, it is more practical to make them use the language rather than study rules and regulations for the assessment procedures. This is to say that students were informed at the very beginning of the course that they have to practice and work inside the classroom. They were told that their assessment is not based on paper exams as usual and they are not obliged to submit a project. They just have to concentrate inside the classroom, take down notes and speak the language as much as they can. This technique helps students to feel more comfortable as they will not have to be examined to pass the course. Moreover, the teacher could use some Arabic words or the learner's mother tongues to balance between the two languages. The teacher will not use the student's mother tongue to compare between the two languages, but he or she will use it to facilitate blocking vocabulary word.

In a nut shell, the course I taught aims to:

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Use a small booklet	To avoid the idea of having much materials Example: Students' book- Students' workbook
No exams	To enhance practice and speaking inside the classroom and this is how they will be graded
Use visual images	To facilitate learning vocabulary

Act inside the classroom	To make students understand better
Use what suit students only from CEFR	To adapt the designed syllabus to address Arab students
Teaching simple materials	To help student learn the basics easily
Encourage students regularly	To boost their confidence and self esteem
Use the learner's mother tongue not to a great extent	To facilitate blocking words

**HOW WILL STUDENTS PRODUCE WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED?**

The students are trained throughout the course to practice using the English language with their pairs, in groups and to present what they have written or discussed with their colleagues aloud in front of the whole class and of course the teacher. Students should feel free and self-confidence should be enhanced or else they will be shy to present inform of their colleagues worrying about their grammatical mistakes or wrong sentence structures. The teacher's role is to help them and advise them to speak without paying too much attention on their mistakes. The teacher has to encourage them on every simple activity they present. In addition, the teacher should not move to a new topic or lesson unless she makes sure that the whole entire group digests what they have been explaining. The students have to produce throughout the whole course and in each and every session by participating actively and sharing in any task the teacher assigns.

To sum up, only for the purpose of this research paper and for language beginners, the teacher has to be tailor in order to design the new syllabus that will address specific type of students. Then, the teacher has to be a professional actor and an alert monitor to make the students understand the purpose of every single session. After that, the teacher has to be coach who encourages beginners as if they are champions. Next, the teacher has to be like a recorder that repeats the information more than once to help students analyze what they learn. The teacher also has to be like an album that gathers visual images to support students remember advanced vocabulary words for instance. The teacher has to assess students according to the assigned tasks inside the classroom and not by giving them exams. I believe this make them more comfortable and boosts their confidence and self-esteem. Finally, the teacher has to design a simple syllable in a small booklet to make students more productive.

**Here is an example of a designed syllabus for language beginners:**

- 1) Presenting yourself
- 2) Number
- 3) Colors
- 4) The seven days of the week
- 5) The twelve months of the year
- 6) The four seasons of the year
- 7) The four cardinal directions
- 8) Family members
- 9) Rooms of the house
- 10) Articles
- 11) Quantifiers
- 12) Jobs
- 13) Present simple
- 14) Past simple
- 15) Future

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**Online resources:**

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