

## The Foreign Language Syllabus: Design, Evaluation and Renewal

### Abstract

As any educational activity, teaching a foreign language requires a planning of a set of steps that are made of teaching elements, which are selected and graded according to particular approaches. The arrangement of these elements takes place within the scope of what is known as 'syllabus'. This article attempts to shed light on the complex task of syllabus design, evaluation and renewal. To this end, contributions of several scholars in this domain would be pinpointed.

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### ملخص

تحتاج عملية تعليم اللغة الأجنبية مثلها مثل أي نشاط آخر إلى اعتماد خطوات محددة تختار من خلالها وحدات تعليمية و تصنف تبعاً لمذاهب تربوية معينة. يأتي هذا التصنيف في إطار ما يعرف بالبرنامج. ما المقصود بكلمة 'البرنامج'؟ كيف نقوم بتطويره، تقييمه وكذا تحديثه؟. يهدف هذا المقال إلى الإجابة عن هذه الأسئلة وذلك باستعراض أهم المساهمات النظرية المستقاة من التجارب التطبيقية لأصحابها في هذا الميدان التربوي ومنه تسليط الضوء على العملية المعقدة لتطوير التقييم، و تحديث البرنامج.

'The best way to help a learner is not to help him' says a proverb. It seems, however, that this is not always the case- at least as far as foreign language teaching is concerned. In fact, the learners are being, today, granted a lion's share in terms of a growing interest in their needs and characteristics on the part of educators. One outcome of this interest is to be seen in the huge movement of syllabus renewal that is taking place all over the world. This phenomenon came as a result of a complex situation where disciplines such as Psychology and Linguistics were behind the emergence of new guidelines for the selection and grading of teaching items. What is a syllabus and how do we design, evaluate and renew it? This article attempts to tackle these questions in terms of highlighting the theoretical and philosophical foundations of this subject matter. To this end, several contributions of major scholars and researchers in this realm would be pinpointed.

### 1. Syllabus Design:

#### 1.1. Definition: 'Syllabus' versus 'Curriculum':

According to Brumfit (1984; cited by White, 1988), a syllabus is a delineation of a specific department's work. It is arranged in terms of sub-

divisions describing the works of a special class or group. The syllabus is time bound, linked to particular objectives, and founded upon a grading that emerges following the theory of language to be assumed and the administrative needs. It is flexible in terms of negotiation and adjustment. It is concerned with the teaching content, and is an account of it. Nunan (1988: 6) maintains that 'a syllabus is a statement of content which is used as the basis for planning courses of various kinds'.

The word 'syllabus' is to be distinguished from the word 'curriculum' with which it is very often confused. In fact, in Northern America, these words are used interchangeably. The difference between syllabus and curriculum is expressed by Robertson (1971); quoted by Yalden, 1983:18) who says:

*'the curriculum includes the goals, objectives, content, processes, resources, and means of evaluation of all the learning experiences planned for pupils both in and of the school and community through classroom instruction and related programs... the syllabus should be viewed in the context of an ongoing curriculum development process'.*

So, according to Robertson, the syllabus is subsumed by the curriculum. Robertson's view is shouldered by that of Allen (1984; cited by Nunan, 1988) for whom the syllabus is a subsection of curriculum whose aim is to specify the units to be taught. Richards et al. (1992) proposes to consider 'curriculum' as having two meanings. If we mean by this word an educational program, which outlines the ends, the means of implementing the content, and its assessment, the curriculum acquires its full sense. However, if we mean a selection and grading of grammatical items, lexical elements, situations, and communicative functions and meanings for the sake of describing a course of instruction, then the word curriculum equals the word syllabus.

### **1.2. Approaches to Syllabus Design:**

In the opinion of Rodgers and Richards (1987), there are four types of approaches to syllabus design, which can be grouped along a continuum from centralised to, decentralised.

- **The State- based Approach:** Here, there is a process that includes the needs identification, the application of research, the design of prototype teaching and learning materials, the testing and revision of the prototypes in enlarged cyclical trials, the mass provision of the finished materials and implementation of the final version. It is the most centralised type of syllabus design and it is carried out by the state in the form of national projects. One major drawback is the absence of an active participation of the teachers and learners in the process.

- **The School- based Approach:** In an attempt to encourage teachers to participate in syllabus design, the state gives responsibility to the school through its headmasters and department heads to bring changes in the syllabus. Indeed, they supervise educational teams as operational units in charge of implementation. It has been attacked on the basis that there results a decrease in terms of appropriate expertise and resources.

- **The Teacher – based Approach:** As its name suggests, it focuses on 'the classroom as the context for educational planning and the individual teacher as the

educational planner' (Rodgers and Richards, 1987: 18). This is mainly due to the actual contact the teacher has possession with the learning situation. Teachers' lack of time, resources and specialisation were seen to be the major shortcomings of this approach.

- **The Learner- based Approach:** This approach is rooted in the most recent trends. The learner is given a lion's share here. His needs, interests and inclinations are no longer anticipated by the teachers but assessed. The learner's participation in his learning process is actively looked for here. One major shortcoming of this approach is to be seen in autonomy and the dangers it entails ( such as pidginisation).

Rodgers and Richards (1987), in an attempt to seek an eclectic compromise among these approaches, propose a model of optimising distribution of functions. Syllabus design is viewed as an interweaving of processes to four sets of considerations knitted together with knowledge, instruction, learners and administration. Gray (1990) deems it important that the syllabus designer answers three questions: what linguistic elements should be taught ( a linguistic perspective), what does the learner want to do with the language (a learner perspective) and what activities will stimulate and promote language acquisition ( a learning perspective)?

### **1.3. Types of Syllabuses:**

#### **1.3.1. Synthetic versus Analytic Syllabuses:**

Certain types of courses have a grammatical organisation. Others adopt a vocabulary-oriented approach. A third group makes use of situations and/or functions. According to Wilkins (1976), in spite of the fact that these approaches are not mutually exclusive (from a linguistic point of view), we can group them into two different categories of approaches: synthetic and analytic. Wilkins goes further proposing that any actual syllabus can be placed somewhere on the continuum between the wholly synthetic and the wholly analytic poles. However, the procedure followed is the selection of items of the syllabus, which show that it tends toward one of the two poles.

By synthetic language teaching is meant a procedure whereby various sections of language are inculcated separately through stages. Acquisition of language here is a step-by step gathering of the sections so that the entire organisation of language is synthesised. The learner is compelled to build up the language that has been dissected into smaller pieces for facilitating the acquisition. The synthetic approach to syllabus design leads to the production of the structural syllabus which is made of a list of grammatical structures and a list of lexical items. The structural syllabus was criticised on the grounds that it lacked the contextualization of meaning.

Analytic approaches, on their part, reject the linguistic control over the learning environment. Language here is not divided into building blocks. Variety in structures is allowed right from the start, and the learner is asked to approach the global language by approximating his own linguistic behaviour to it.

The Semantic Syllabus is an outcome of the analytic approach. It is based on the communicative competence. The Situational Syllabus and the Notional Syllabus are two examples of the semantic orientation.

#### **1.3.2. Content Based Syllabuses Versus Method Based Syllabuses:**

### 1.3.2.1. Content Based Syllabuses:

The main characteristic of this category of syllabus is the fact that they answer the question: what is to be learnt? In other words, their major concern is the content, its selection and gradation. The 'interventionist approach' (which is against the learner-centred orientations) that lies behind content based syllabuses was criticised on the grounds that it directs the learners towards conformity without leaving them any possibility of independence. The most known types of syllabuses belonging to this category are the Structural Syllabus, the Situational Syllabus, the Notional Syllabus, the Functional Syllabus, the Topic Based Syllabus, the Skills Based syllabus, the Sentence Based syllabus, and the Lexical Syllabus.

**-The Structural Syllabus:** It is founded upon selecting structural elements present in a given language and ordering them in a way that suits the teaching process. This ordering follows criteria such as frequency, difficulty, and usefulness. The structural syllabus is the most traditional type of syllabus. It has been criticised, however, severely during the 1970's, for it did not fulfil the new parameters of the communicative competence such as appropriateness, feasibility and probability.

**-The Situational Syllabus:** Here, syllabus designers use the criterion 'situations' in selecting, organising, and practising language. The 'situation' involves the setting, the participants and relevant objects. These answer the questions where, who, when and what? Situations are chosen. The linguistic items associated with them have to be selected. Very often, dialogues are made use of in order to create these situations. One main shortcoming of the Situational Syllabus is the absence of the functional component.

**-The Notional Syllabus:** It is a syllabus where the input is organised around the meanings needed by the learner to communicate and the functions he uses the language for. The notional syllabus was the first model proposed in the scope of communicative language teaching to solve the problems encountered with Structural and Situational Syllabuses. The Notional Syllabus is also called Functional – Notional Syllabus.

**-The Functional Syllabus:** It provides a language content organised in terms of functions or acts. The main drawbacks of designing a syllabus around functions, as seen by White (1988), are first of all, the definition of functions lacks the necessary precision and clarity. Second, there is absence of a direct relationship between function and context, and function and exponent. Third, functions do not occur in isolation.

**-The Topic Based Syllabus:** It is based upon the thematic approach to language input organisation whereby the content is organised around topics. White (1988) argues that there are two justifications for the Topic based syllabus. The first one is to be in terms of educational participation in the whole curriculum. A topic such as 'the brain' may serve the Language course as well as the Biology one. The second justification is the motivational addition that may result from its use. Topic based syllabuses are seen to be efficient in the case of ESP situations because it is believed that 'students who learn language for a purpose learn it better' (Straight, 1998: 1).

**-The Skills Based Syllabus:** It considers language as an accumulation of skills. To acquire a language is primarily a problem of acquiring these skills. Skills based syllabuses have not received the same degree of interest as did the other types of content-based syllabuses. However, and as a result of the new findings in Education

and Psychology, a growing importance is beginning to be demonstrated towards this type of syllabuses.

**-The Lexical Syllabus:** It takes Lexis as a starting point. Willis (1990) argues that we have got to specify a list of the most frequent words expressing the most frequent meanings around which a syllabus is to be built. This kind of syllabus 'draws on the COBUILD research which provides an analysis of a corpus of natural language of twenty million words' (Willis, 1990:125).

#### **1.3.2.2. Method Based Syllabuses:**

This category of syllabuses answers the question: How language is to be learnt? They emphasise the process of learning. This fact presupposes that they follow an experiential and 'natural growth-oriented' approach. The most famous syllabuses under this category are the Process Based Syllabus, and the Task Based (Procedural) Syllabus.

**-The Process Based Syllabus:** It is associated with the proposals of Breen and Candlin (1980; cited by White, 1988) who called syllabus designers' attention on the gap which exists between intention and reality. They argued that any 'pre-designed plan ... is inevitably and continually reinterpreted by ourselves and by our learners'. To solve this problem, they suggested a unified planning where both the teachers and the students can contribute to syllabus design. The result, then, would be a syllabus which is process-based and which takes into account classroom works. Breen (1987; cited by White, 1988) summarises this type of syllabus (also called negotiated syllabus) saying that its goal is to answer the question: who does what with whom, on what subject matter, with what resources, when, how and for what learning purposes? The process-based syllabus is founded upon four levels. At level one, general aims, procedure and content are discussed by the teacher with the class so that decisions related to classroom language learning are made. At level two, the procedures necessary to reach the agreed upon aims are selected by the teacher and the student. At level three, activities are chosen according to the decision made at level one. Each activity will be made of some tasks, which are negotiated at level four. ESP situations seem to be the most suitable field of application of the negotiated syllabus because only 'a group with homogeneous goals is likely to be able to achieve anything approaching consensus' (Clarke, 1991: 19). It has been criticised on the grounds that the assessment of this model does not exist in practice; that it needs enough competence on the part of the teacher, which is not always the case; that the proposal and levels suggested are context -free- in that they ignore such facts as cultural barriers; that the participation of learners in decision makings leads them to responsibility and effort which they may not be capable of assuming and which may injure the teacher's authority. It has also been argued that, practically speaking, a syllabus of this type involves keeping away the simple textbook, a fact which may lead to the problem of relying on a textbook which is the traditional reflection of the syllabus. Finally, the procedures are stressed at the expense of the probable results, and this makes the syllabus too aimless to be assumed by the means-ends language pedagogy.

**-The Task Based (Procedural) Syllabus:** It originated from the work of Prabhu (1980s; cited by White, 1988) which was based on a learning centred view of language teaching. Prabhu's reaction was against the structural-oral- situational method, which dominated the 1960's. He claimed that if enough attention is paid to meaning, then the form will be handled in a better manner, hence the importance and usefulness of tasks compelling the learner to follow thinking processes whose emphasis is going to be on the fulfilment of the task rather than the acquisition of language. The result was a syllabus organised in terms of tasks. A task

*'is an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e., as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command may be referred to as tasks'.*

Richards et al; quoted by (White, 1988: 17).

The selection of these tasks should proceed along the learners' needs and their real world specifications. In the eyes of Nunan (1988), They can have:

- A grammatical focus: learners use wh-questions in controlled drills.
- Functional focus: learners express agreement and disagreement.
- Macro- skill focus: learners identify the main point in a spoken text.
- Learning skill focus: learners monitor and rate their performance on spoken tasks.
- Cognitive focus: learners extract relevant information from a spoken text and label the accompanying dialogues.
- Cultural focus: learners compare their behaviour in an interview situation with that in their native country.
- Topical focus: learners obtain relevant information about public transport.

The task-based syllabus has been criticised on the grounds that:

*' it requires that tasks should be immediately applicable in the world outside the classroom. Such a constraint limits its application to second language learning situations and thus eliminates the whole world of EFL...'*

Sheen (1994: 127).

In addition and on the strength of Skehan (1996), the teacher is obliged to master additional skills such as task selection and sequence, appropriate pre- and post- task activities organisation and adaptation of task difficulty taking into account individual differences. Seedhouse (1999) believes that task performance is a narrow concept and that it would be a mistake to limit communication to it.

## **2. Syllabus Evaluation:**

### **2.1. Evaluation versus Assessment:**

Brown (1989:223) defines evaluation as:

*'the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within the context of the particular institutions*

involved'.

However, frequently confusion between the terms evaluation and assessment takes place. According to Nunan (1992:185), they should not be used interchangeably:

*'To me there is a clear distinction between the two concepts. Assessment refers to the processes and procedures whereby we determine what learners are able to do in the target language. We may or may not assume that such abilities have been brought about by a program of study. Evaluation, on the other hand, refers to a wider range of processes which may not include assessment data'.*

It follows that assessment is subsumed by evaluation and evaluation cannot be resumed to assessment. Indeed, while assessment is mainly concerned with one component of the educational situation ( i.e.; the learner), evaluation is much larger in scope and aims. This importance was behind its institutionalisation, i.e. ' the creation of institutions or formal organisations to promote its development, to direct it, to control it and often eventually to monopolise it' (Nisbet, 1987: 166). Relying on his long experience made of years of contact with projects for ELT covering areas of curriculum development, syllabus design, materials production, teacher education, and test design and administration, Hargreaves (1989) summarises its action in terms of twelve factors which are to be seen as interdependent:

- **Target Audience:** The results of an evolution of a project programme are to be addressed to a target group. Depending on the members' qualification and status, the focus, criteria, and presentation of results are to be different following the cases.
- **Purpose:** Evaluation is undertaken either during the fulfilment of the project or after it is completed. Following this, evaluation is either formative or summative in purpose.
- **Focus:** Hargreaves (1989) finds it suitable to divide focus into direct and indirect. A direct focus for evaluation occurs when, for instance, a group of learners are presented with a particular program or textbook to evaluate the changes that takes place. On the other hand, indirect focus evaluation refers to the effects produced thanks to that experiment and which were not expected to be achieved.
- **Criteria:** Generally speaking, it is well established that any evaluation of any kind should go hand in hand with a set of criteria that help determining the success or effectiveness of the program or textbook. According to Hargreaves (1989), there are two kinds of criteria: global and relative. These two labels are the two ends of a continuum from global to relative. The more we approach the second end, the more are situations and circumstances specified and precised. It is on this basis that criteria are developed.
- **Method:** Here, a broad distinction occurs between a priori and empirical methods in evaluation. While the first category is concerned with the testing of an aspect product of a material or a program, the second one deals with the comparison of pre-implementation and post-implementation situations in order to highlight the changes.
- **Means/Instruments:** There is a variance in empirical means according to whether the results that are searched for are of a quantitative or qualitative kind.
- **Agents:** Agents are all the persons who take part in planning, carrying out and following through an evaluation. They are subdivided into internal agents (they are directly or indirectly involved in the project) and external agents (outsiders who can even ignore everything about the project). There should be a kind of collaboration

between the two groups of agents for the benefit of evaluation.

- **Resources:** They include agents, assistance with testing, interviewing, data collection and analysis.
- **Time Factors:** They can influence in many ways the choice of methods, means, instruments, and resources.
- **Findings:** They can modify the process of evaluation itself. So, whoever the authors of those findings are (internal or external agents), it is recommended that they are taken into account.
- **Presentation of Results:** Following the type of target audience, the amount of time allotted and purposes of the evaluation, the presentation of results is going to vary.
- **Follow up:** An evaluation should lead to recommendations for future action in, for example, innovating a program, changing a textbook, or supplementing future projects, with advice.

As any other kind of scientific research, evaluation must obey ethical rules since ‘central to the concept of evaluation as usually understood is the attribution of worth’ (Hamilton, 1982: 90). Indeed, it has its threatening aspect that may result from the outcomes it leads to. According to Adelman and Alexander (1982; cited by White, 1988) evaluation is to be regarded as being political, for it is mainly concerned with value judgements which are of interest to decision makers who:

*‘need to distinguish useful current programs from ineffective and inefficient ones, and to plan, design, and implement new efforts that effectively and efficiently have the desired impact on community members and their environments’*

( Rossi and Freeman, 1993: 5).

Simons (1979, cited by White 1988) points to three knotty questions here: whenever there raises a situation where we have got to reconcile irreconcilable judgements, whose views are to be taken into account, how is the redistribution of resources (including people) going to be undertaken, and how should we confront the results of the individuals’ appraising and the institution on? He suggests that the evaluator obeys five main rules when undertaking his work: impartiality, confidentiality and control over the data participants, negotiation among all parties involved, collaboration by all concerned, accountability by all levels in the organisational hierarchy. White (1988), on his part, deems it vital that issues not individuals receive interest.

## **2.2. Approaches to Syllabus Evaluation:**

According to Brown (1989), approaches to program evaluation can be organised into four categories: Goal attainment (or Product-oriented) Approaches, Static characteristic Approaches, Process oriented Approaches, and Decision Facilitation Approaches.

### **2.2.1. Goal Attainment (Product-Oriented) Approaches:**

The main concern of this category of approaches is to see whether the goals and instructional objectives of a program have been achieved. This view is shouldered by linguists such as Tyler, Hammond, and Mentfessel and Michael.



Tyler (1942; cited by Brown, 1989), departing from the view that stated that program's foci should be on clear-cut defined goals (as far as students, society, and subject-matter are concerned) and measurable behavioural subjects, maintained that evaluation should be concerned with those objectives, to determine the degree of their achievement.

Hammond (1960's, cited by Brown, 1989), claimed that five steps are to be followed for the sake of evaluation:

- Identifying precisely what is to be evaluated.
- Describing the descriptive variables.
- Stating objectives in behavioural terms.
- Assessing the behaviour described in the objectives.
- Analysing the results and determining the effectiveness of the program.

Mentfessel and Michael (1967, cited by Brown, 1989) presented detailed steps:

- Direct and indirect involvement of the school community.
- Formation of a cohesive model of broad goals and specific objectives.
- Translation of specific objectives into communicable forms.
- Instrumentation necessary for furnishing measures allowing inferences about program effectiveness.
- Periodic observations of behaviours.
- Analysis of data given by states and change measures.
- Interpretation of the data relative to specific objectives and broad goals.
- Recommendations culminating in further implementation, modifications and revisions of broad goals and specific objectives.

Brown remarks that these steps are process oriented. However, he observes that the second, third and seventh points are exclusively product oriented.

### **2.2.2. Static Characteristic Approaches:**

This category is part of what Worthen and Sanders (1973; cited by Brown, 1989) name 'professional judgement' evaluations. Outside experts are solicited to have a visit to an institution to evaluate its records as well as static characteristics (for example, the number of library books and language laboratory tapes, the number of Master's degrees and PhDs among the staff etc...). The main purpose here is to accredit a particular institution (including its programs and textbooks) as a member in good standing. Popham (1975, quoted by Brown, 1989:226 ) criticises this form of evaluation saying: *'a major reason for the diminishing interest in accreditation conceptions of evaluation is the recognition of their almost total reliance on intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors. Although there is some intuitive support for the proposition that these product factors are associated with the final outcomes of an instructional sequence, the scarcity of empirical evidence to confirm the relationship has created growing dissatisfaction with the accreditation approach among educators'*.

### **2.2.3. Process -Oriented Approaches:**

Process-oriented approaches emerged as a result of the new tendency to consider that evaluation can play a role in facilitating curriculum change and renewal. Scriven's

(1967; cited by Brown, 1989) contributions may be summarised in three facts; first, he drew a distinction between formative and summative evaluation. Second, he emphasised the fact that goals are to be evaluated not only in regard to their achievement but also in regard to their worthiness. Third, he claimed that unexpected outlets of the program should be discovered and studied (goal –free evaluation).

Within his ‘countenance model’, Stake (1967; cited by Brown, 1989) makes a rationale, descriptive operations, judgmental operations at the levels of antecedents, transactions, and outcomes. These distinctions implied that evaluations should be concerned with pure description and judgmental activities, and that the transaction ingredient (interactions between participants) should be named in contrast with antecedents and outcomes, which are static.

Brown and Pennington (1991) propose six categories of procedures for evaluation summarised in the following table:

Evaluator’s Role	Categories	Procedures
Outsider looking in	Existing Records	Records analysis Systems analysis Literature review Letter writing
	Tests	Proficiency testing Placement testing Diagnostic testing Achievement testing
	Observations	Case studies Diary studies Behaviour observation Interactional analyses Inventories
Facilitator drawing out information	Interviews	Individual Group
	Meetings	Delphi technique Advisory Interest group Review
	Questionnaires	Biodata surveys Opinion surveys Self-ratings Judgmental ratings Q sort

**Table 1: Categories of Procedures for Evaluation (Brown and Pennington, 1991:6)**

Brown and Pennington (1991) explain that there are twentyfour different procedures to gather data about the program under use and people who are interested in its success. These procedures can be grouped under six categories, which are themselves grouped following the role of the evaluator himself.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (1996: 129) suggest for the sake of evaluating the curriculum the following questions to be answered:

**Aims and objectives**

- Are they clear, worthwhile, useful, and appropriate?

**Curriculum content.**

- Is it intellectually significant?
- Is it appropriate for the objectives?
- Is it appropriate for the skills to be learnt or practised?
- Is it appropriate for the teaching and learning styles?
- How far does the content address new knowledge?
- How far does the new knowledge relate to existing knowledge?
- How far is the new knowledge appropriate and useful?
- How far does the content provide enrichment and application of existing knowledge?
- How far does the content provide consolidation and practice of existing knowledge?
- How far does the content provide revision of previously learned knowledge?
- How far does the content introduce new skills?
- How far do the new skills reflect the students experience and development?
- How far does the content develop students attitude- what are they?
- How interesting is the content?
- How far does it allow for understanding?
- How can the students use the knowledge?
- How far can students share the new knowledge and skills?
- How far does the content provide for breadth, balance, depth, relevance, coherence, continuity and progression?
- How far does it meet individual needs?
- How well matched to the child is the knowledge?
- What criteria are being used to address matching?

**2.2.4. Decision Facilitation Approaches:**

This category of approaches views program evaluation as being mainly serving the purposes of decision makers. In other words, the evaluators are engaged in gathering information for the benefit of decisions and judgements makers. According to Mackey (1965), there are four major questions to be answered whenever we aim at analysing a syllabus. First, we have to consider the question: what does it include? i.e., what objectives are included in the syllabus in terms of language systems and skills. Second, how specific is it (i.e., specification), or is the instructions on the skills and systems vague or are they detailed? The third question relates to the reasons given in the syllabus to justify its content. Why does it include what it does (i.e., justification)?. The fourth question concerns the attainability for the majority of the learners for whom it is intended. Are the objectives realistic, in other words, do they match the learning conditions, the learners' abilities and needs, and the teachers' qualifications?

**2.3. Dimensions of Evaluation:**

The term 'dimension' is used by Brown (1989) to indicate that the following dichotomies can be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

- **Formative versus Summative:** The backbone of the distinction between formative evaluation and summative evaluation is made of the purposes for information gathering

and the kinds of decisions generated. Formative evaluation takes place during the running of a program or a curriculum. The main goal is to collect data which are going to be used to improve the curriculum, the decisions resulting are small scale and numerous. They will generate modifications of the existing curriculum. Summative evaluation occurs at the end, that is to say when a program has been fulfilled. Here, information is gathered to see whether the program has been successful. The decisions emerging from this type of evaluation will to a certain extent operate and will generate sweeping changes. We can say that there is no extreme version of summative evaluation since language programs, conveniently, never end. To draw a distinction between these two types of evaluation, Long (1984) suggests that we consider differences in terms of focus, timing and purpose. Formative evaluations focus on factors like attitudes towards curricular innovations and usability of new elements in the instructional materials, assess the strengths and limitations of a new program during its development and implementation and seek data ‘with a view toward modifying a program as it is being implemented or formed (hence “formative”)’ (Long, 1984:417). Summative evaluations measure students’ achievement taking into account factors such as cost-effectiveness, take place after the development and implementation process is complete and ‘attempt to summarise (hence “summative”) the results of a program, once implemented’ (Long, 1984: 417).

- **Product versus Process:** The distinction here is based upon differences in what kind of data is going to be considered. Product evaluation is concerned with the achievement of the goals (product) of the program. In this respect, it is subsumed by summative evaluations. Process evaluation focuses on what is going on in a program (processes) which helps to achieve the goals (product). In this respect, it is subsumed by formative evaluation, since the latter are concerned with studying and improving those processes. Bachman (1989) used the term objective-based evaluation and Program-free evaluation. The Objective-based evaluation equals Product evaluation. Program-free evaluation is different from Objective-based evaluation in that it is concerned with the outcomes, both stated and unexpected, and the degree of their realisation.

- **Quantitative versus Qualitative:** Here, the distinction is made on the grounds of the type of data evaluation relies upon. Quantitative evaluation relies upon data that are measurable in terms of using numbers and Statistics. The main purpose here is to detect existing and useful patterns. This can be achieved through the use of descriptive and inferential Statistics. Qualitative evaluation leans on data that cannot be turned into numbers and Statistics. It is often argued that they lack ‘scientific’ credibility. However, Brown (1989) says that they can provide valuable information if they are used in a guided and systematic manner.

#### **2.4. Models of Evaluation:**

According to White (1988), ELT specialists classified models of evaluation into three model: the Illuminative, the Professional, and the Case Study.

The Illuminative Models lean on observations made by the evaluator as a participant –observer. To this end, he uses ethnographic techniques particular to the socio-anthropological fieldwork. Parlett and Hamilton (1976) suggest that illuminative evaluation should be viewed as a sum of impressionistic accounts related to a new

syllabus package being made use of in the classroom. The main drawback, here, is the subjectivity that is going to be evidently present since objective means of gathering data are disregarded.

In the Professional Models, the teacher is the researcher. This category is knitted together with the works of Stenhouse, Elliot, and Cohen and Manion in early 1980's (cited by White, 1988).

The Case Study Models are concerned with yielding data, which is 'strong in reality' and can be presented in a way that enables readers to make their judgements by themselves. The strong point, here, lies in the fact that Case Models pay a great deal of attention to the complexity of the case itself.

The best eclectic combination among all these approaches and dimensions of evaluation could be seen in a matrix which has been introduced by Johnston and Peterson (1994). It consists of processes, which are involved, in the conduction of the program and the elements that make the program. Each cell or group of cells is a manifestation of a defined component of the program:

		LEARNING			SUPPORT		
		Learners	Teachers	Curriculum	Materials/ equipment	In-school administration	Controlling authorities
LANNING	Initial research	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
	Design	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6
	Selection	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
IMPLEMENTATION	Initial implementation	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
	Formative evaluation	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6
	Development	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
REVISION	Summative evaluation	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
	Replanning	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6
	Reimplementation	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6

**Table 2: The Program Matrix (Johnston and Peterson 1994: 68)**

### 3. Syllabus Renewal:

#### 3.1. Definition:

According to Cronbach (1963; cited by Stenhouse, 1975: 98), there are three types of decisions for which evaluation is used:

- Course improvement: deciding what instructional material and methods are satisfactory and where change is needed.
- Decisions about individuals: identifying the needs of the pupil for the sake of

planning his instruction, judging pupil merit for the purpose of selection and grouping, acquainting the pupil with his own progress and deficiencies.

- Administrative regulation: judging how good the school system is, how good individual teachers are, etc...

All these aims serve a final outcome of evaluation: syllabus renewal. Syllabus renewal is a set of reforms and changes decision makers operate at the levels of syllabus content in terms of input selection and gradation. The term renewal is sometimes replaced by the term innovation which is more general in scope in the sense that it means 'a new idea or practice that is designed to improve a specific educational setting' (Hadley, 1999: 92). Its meaning should not be limited to change which 'though sometimes the result of innovation, can also be regressive, or come about as the result of unintentional actions' (Hadley, 1999:92).

Syllabus innovation is, usually, seen as related to curriculum development. Tamir (1985: 6) proposes the following model, which demonstrates this relationship (see Diagram 1).

For their part, Lake and Smoak (2000) view syllabus renewal within the following review cycle which incorporates also roles of all participants – called here stakeholders (see Diagram 2).

### **3.2. Approaches to Syllabus Renewal:**

According to Clark (1987); in the realm of syllabus - and at a wider scope curriculum – renewal, there are three main tendencies: Classical Humanism, Reconstructionism and Progressivism.

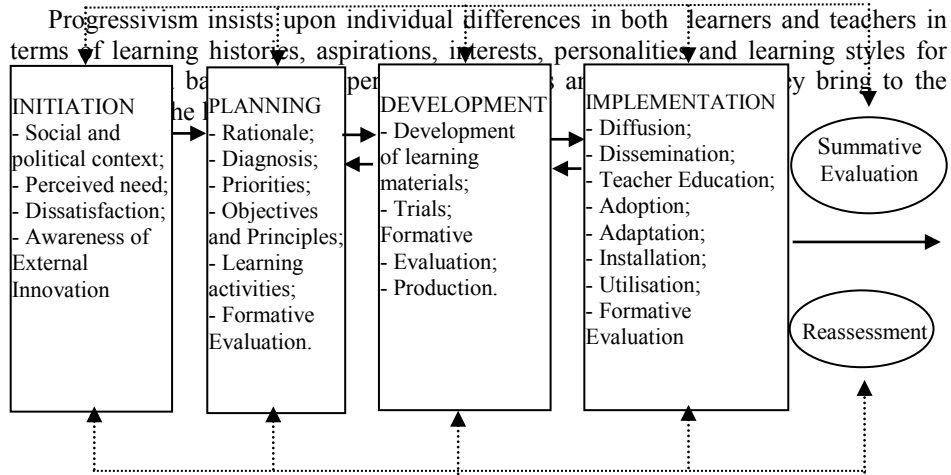
Classical humanism

*'adopts a policy, in which change is to be brought about slowly, through examination reform authorised by the guardians of the nation's wisdom in universities and by the spreading of good practices by the guardians of the nation's standards in the inspectorate'. Clark (1987: 92).*

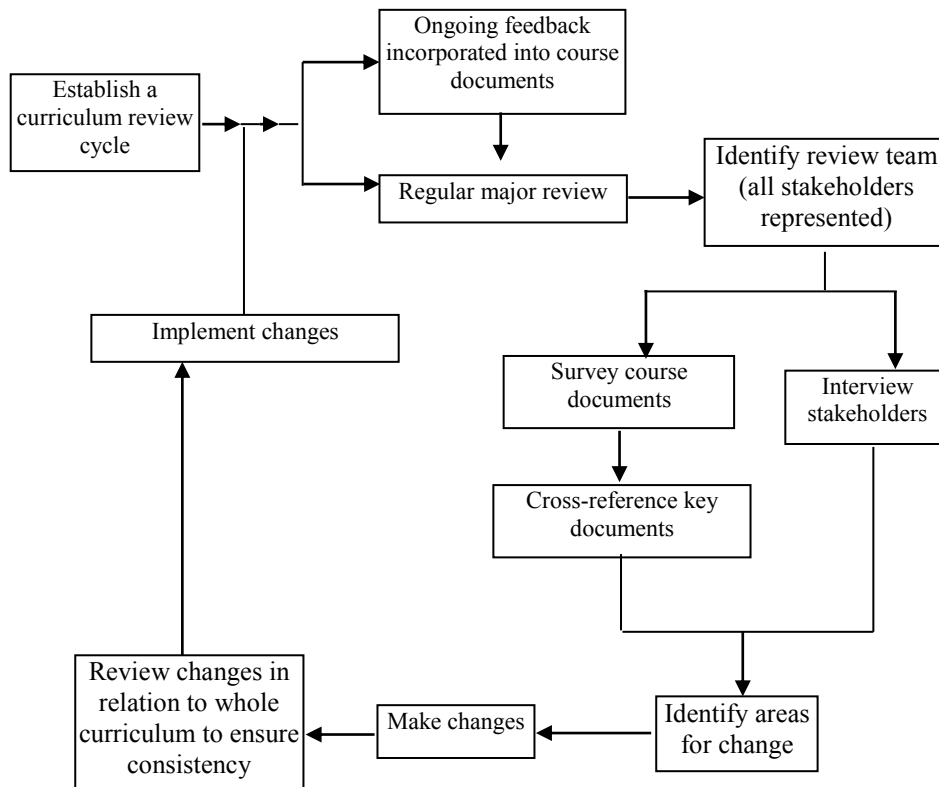
This means that a corpus made of inspectors and academicians is given power to evaluate learning / teaching situations and detect good practices. Annual in- service sessions are organised and heads of departments are to attend them so that they can spread the information. Among the teachers later on. The main shortage of this approach is to be seen in the fact it shows little concern for the practical everyday contributions of the teachers. The latter do not either put up the purse as far as the materials are concerned.

Reconstructionism requires that a group of experts selected and gathered under the heading of a committee develop a syllabus and its adapted materials. Then, they send it in the form of drafts to be piloted with representative samples of teachers, students and institutions. A final revision occurs and the documents are finalised. The teachers are then invited to seminars where they are trained to use them. One main drawback seen here is the fact that:

*'the teacher and the learner become servants of the curriculum, which has been determined in advance outside the particular classroom in which the teaching and learning are to take place'. Clark (1987:85).*



**Diagram 1: A Model for Curriculum Development and Innovation (Clark, 1987:6).**



**Diagram 2: The Curriculum Review Cycle (Lake and Smoak, 2000: 3).**

*Teachers are assisted to observe their own classrooms, to analyse their own problems and to devise and evaluate strategies for overcoming them in a mutually supportive but critical climate'. Clark (1987: 92).*

	<b>Classical humanism</b>	<b>Reconstructionism</b>	<b>Progressivism</b>
<b>Style of curriculum renewal</b>	Top-down, with the two major agencies for change outside the classroom, i.e. the examination board that is largely dominated by university interests and the inspectorate who produce reports and policy documents, and organise one-off annual in-service courses.	Top-down, research, development and Diffusion form of curriculum renewal where the target agent for change is outside the classroom, i.e. committees of 'experts' set up by government to develop new policies and curricular packages in accordance with certain guidelines.	Bottom-up school based curriculum renewal. The agent for change is inside the classroom i.e. teachers who come together to renew their curriculum. They may be assisted in this by a local advisory service.
<b>Form of Innovation</b>	New examination syllabuses, which are then embodied in new course materials published commercially.	A new policy and/ or curriculum package, usually in the form of a new course book or set of materials embodying a new syllabus. This is handed down for schools to implement.	Small scale attempts to improve different parts of the curriculum jigsaw in a never-ending process of renewal.
<b>Strategies for teacher development</b>	The production of official syllabuses and guidelines for teachers to implement. Annual in-service courses at which good practices are spread.	In service courses designed to assist teachers to 'adopt' a new curriculum package, or to implement a new policy.	In-service workshops at which teachers come together to analyse their own problems, search for and discuss possible solutions and experiment with them in the classroom. Teacher development and curriculum renewal become one and the same thing.

**Table 3: Approaches to Syllabus Renewal (Clark, 1987: 98).**

One technical application of progressivism is the problem-posing approach, which enhances a more learner-centred contribution in syllabus renewal. Interesting topics for the learners are identified and presented to them using visual (e.g. pictures) or linguistic input (e.g. dialogues and texts). The topics must represent situations that can be



recognised by the learners and that pose problems without solutions. The learners are then required to discuss options and possibilities. They will, then, generate a range of vocabulary and structures of which the teacher takes advantage in designing activities and applications within the scope of instructional units. The final result would be a syllabus renewal and innovation engaging 'students' English language skills as they address interesting and meaningful issues' (Shleppegrell and Bowman, 1995: 299). One has to be aware of the fact that the drawbacks that may result of the application of this approach have not yet been delimited because this form has rarely been applied in reality.

Clark (1987) proposes the table to contrast these approaches to syllabus renewal (see table 3).

Finally and to reach a reconciliation among these approaches, Clark (1987) advises us to be eclectic in our choices because resorting to the extreme versions of any one of them would be counterproductive. Indeed, it would be

*'Reasonable to seek through an educational system to maintain and develop the wisdom and cultural traditions of the past, to attempt to work together in a deliberate way towards a fairer and better future for and to foster diversity among individuals in the ways in which they find fulfilment now and in that better future'.*

Clark (1987: 100).

### **Conclusion:**

This paper has argued that at the heart of foreign language syllabus renewal, there lies the issue of evaluation which takes into account the personal beliefs of specialists in the realm of syllabus design. In this sense, we take it as granted that although a huge literature has been written on this subject matter, there are still many areas that need exploration and investigation.

Finally, we can assert that the changes that are taking place in the world of education – up to and including technological advances will certainly have an influence on future directions in the field of syllabus design, evaluation and renewal. This fact may constitute a reliable matter of discussion in a future paper.

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