

## Syllabus Design in Teaching Literature

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**Abstract.** There has always been a chasm between the two branches of English Language as a major, English Literature and English Teaching, each of whom can help the other in many respects; for instance, the latter is certainly able to be useful for the former in methodology, testing, linguistics, and so on, as today academic environments work on interdisciplinary fields. However, what is going to be presented here would not suggest an interdisciplinary program, but how we can and should utilize various methods and approaches of English Teaching to better undertake our literary pedagogy. The excuses of our colleagues teaching in English Literature are as follows: The natures of the two fields are different; one deals with pure theoretical foundations, but the other is linked with culture and its innumerable possibilities, which are too burdensome to bring under any specific classification. In English Teaching, courses are more often than not teacher-oriented and text-based, yet English Literature usually lends itself to be managed by self-study with different approaches in literary criticism that are not restricted to text-based methods, but reader-response orientation, historical or author-intended meaning, psychological approaches, and so forth. Nevertheless, the task of a literature teacher is to conduct various updated theories in his methodology in order to be more effective, as far as he/she is concerned.

In this paper, the writer will pose theories from diverse scholars and theorists in the matter of syllabus design and curriculum development, as well as their differences. They would be, then, applied and fitted to English Literature courses according to the essayist's experience and some scholars' research results. The findings confirm that a professor acquainted with the theoretical bases for syllabus design would be more successful in knowing what, how, when, where, and to what extent he/she should pose for his classes in order to motivate much better, instruct more efficiently, and gain the intended influence and feedback sooner.

**Keywords:** Teaching literature, syllabus design, curriculum development

### 1. Introduction

There has always been a chasm between the two branches of English Language as a major, English Literature and English Teaching, each of whom can help the other in many respects; for instance, the latter is certainly able to be useful for the former in methodology, testing, linguistics, and so on. What is going to be presented here would not suggest an interdisciplinary program, but how we can and should utilize various methods and approaches of English Teaching to better undertake our literary pedagogy. A literature teacher ought to stir students' emotions and thoughts; this is what pedagogues excavate under the topic of motivation. Linguistics and philosophy of language have commingled with literary criticism during the last century through formalism, structuralism, and post-structuralism. Textual analysis of literary pieces deems it necessary to deal with syntax, grammar, and structures to understand what the text likes to inform us, just to mention a few interrelations.

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restricted to text-based methods, but reader-response orientation, historical or author-intended meaning, psychological approaches, and so forth. Nevertheless, the task of a literature teacher is to conduct various updated theories in his methodology in order to be more effective, as far as he/she is concerned.

There has always been concern why professors in literature, generally, and of English Literature, specifically, have been negligent to methodology, one significant part of which is syllabus design. Having, or on a higher level of expectation, designing a syllabus means that the professor knows what he/she is going to teach, why, and how. In what follows, the researcher will erect his theoretical building by benefiting from diverse scholars' ideas in the matter of syllabus design and curriculum development; he would, then, bring the theories associated with his experience and the research results of his colleagues, who have made an endeavor to study on this newly-fledged ground, into the edifice in order to make an English Literature class in which the courses are met.

## **2. Argument**

### **2.1. Syllabus, Curriculum, and Methodology**

To begin with, we need to know what a syllabus is. As definitions have always been controversial, we pose some contradictory ones in order to give a more comprehensive angle of view. Widdowson is of the opinion that a syllabus is the framework of activities and becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference (26). By this definition, we understand that syllabi are flexible and change is forever at hand. Syllabus is, according to Allen, the selection of materials based on objectives, duration of course, and level (64). The "problem" begins with the subsequent definition which determines syllabus or curriculum as the content, structure, parts, and organization (Stern 10-11). Indeed, borders between syllabus design and curriculum development have been removed in recent studies; moreover, the term methodology is called into play.

However, in traditional terms there were some distinctions among the three. There, curriculum involved the philosophical, social, and administrative factors in an educational program. In practical terms, this is what the academic or higher education committees in decision-making institutions issue and all universities are obliged to observe.<sup>2</sup> Yet, syllabus is a subpart of the curriculum, which specifies WHAT units will be taught and finally, methodology tells HOW the units should be taught (Allen 61). Nonetheless, the possibility of separation between content, that is syllabus, and method, or even assessment is questioned (Candlin 32). Therefore, not only are the boundaries between curriculum and syllabus called into question, but also the differentiation between syllabus and methodology becomes difficult.

### **2.2. Classification**

Next, we come to the classification which aids a teacher what syllabus is appropriate for the course he/she will teach, regarding what he/she and the curriculum necessitate and aim. The first type which is called "additive" or "grammatical syllabus" introduces one item at a time before moving to the next in order to prepare the ground for the latter (McDonough 21). In this sort, the arrangement of materials could be based on topics, themes, settings, and situations (Nunan 158). An example might be the course Literary Criticism in which it seems impossible to teach structuralism while students have no idea about Russian or American formalism; or, instructing deconstruction when nothing is known around structuralism.

The "analytic" versus "synthetic" make a binary; in the former, different parts are taught separately (Wilkins 13). The difference between this and the previous one is lack and existence of order respectively. Examples for this kind are the Ph. D. Literary Criticism and Shakespeare Studies; in the critical course, probably nothing happens if we replace "subjectivity" with "race" as two topics; that is to say, if up to the

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2. In Iran's Ministry of Sciences, Research, and Technology there is a Supreme Counsel for Programming in which each field of study has a committee that decides on the curriculum contents every five years, if any change is needed.

Mention ought to be made if any course is named without providing the reader of the academic level, B. A. is purposed.

It should also be noted that the names of the courses in English Literature at different levels are predicated on curriculums passed in the Ministry of Sciences, Research, and Technology of Islamic Republic of Iran. As in this research courses names are not significant, but the nature of the course is intended, no other curriculum in other countries was worked on.

present time we were teaching postcolonial ideas first to reach the psychoanalytical matters, now a change is not troublesome. Likewise, in the event that we alter the sequence of instructions on Shakespeare's poems and plays there may not come any disaster. In the synthetic, the content is divided into discrete items; learners should reintegrate the elements (2). For instance, if the professor of the Ph. D. Literary Criticism assigns his/her students to write an essay applying the critical idioms "author" and "reader" or "gender" and "race" together, we will have a synthetic syllabus.

There is another binary: the "product-oriented" in contrast to the "process-oriented". In the first one, the focus is on the knowledge which learners should gain as a result of instruction; while in the second, the concentration is on learning experiences (Nunan 27). In exemplary terms, if there are different courses for one genre or topic, such as Simple Poetry, An Introduction to Literature 2, and Advanced Poetry in the Iranian curriculum, students have some experiences which would be in process. The teacher in his process-oriented syllabus should not go beyond the necessities of the course; a poem like "Eagle" by Alfred Tennyson is proper for the first step, Simple Poetry, while T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" may be proper for the next phase, and some excerpts from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* for the last. In reality, it is here that syllabus and curriculum are interconnected; for instance, regarding teaching *Paradise Lost* in B. A., it is impossible to do that in one term having the necessary reading along with extraneous matters as well as different critical perspectives in mind. Consequently, it should be distributed in different courses in the curriculum. On the other side, Literary Schools needs a product-oriented syllabus, since it is the only course for such ramification of literature in the curriculum.

"Procedural syllabus" makes the distinction between WHAT and HOW become difficult to sustain (Nunan 7). In other words, formalism is said to be fit for poetry, but Philip Stevick poses "novel in miniature" (15); therefore, when we teach fiction by this approach, we are using a procedural one. Moreover, as there is no culture-free subject (Jordan, Carlile, and Stack 94), in teaching all materials cultural-response syllabus should be considered; this method will be explained later. If historical novels are not to be investigated only by the historical approach or new historicism, or if LANGUAGE poetry is not to be analyzed only by a postmodern reading are among other examples.

The "task-based" is the ultimate one familiarity with which is essential for a literature professor. It is usually taken to be synonymous with the procedural; however, here, we have another controversial definition in opposition to the previous one; in the meaning of the procedural, the emphasis was not on tasks. In essence, if a syllabus is organized around tasks (Richards, Platt, and Weber 289), it can have coexistence with all previous six ones.

The researcher intends to offer some new kinds of syllabi that meet the needs of English Literature. One could be the "analogical"; in some courses like Literary Criticism 1 there are many thinkers who should be regarded in comparative studies, such as Plato and Aristotle or Wordsworth and Coleridge, whose ideas share something in despite of their differences. The same case applies the same course at M. A. in which comparing and contrasting Freud's, Lacan's, and Kristeva's theories will be substantially beneficial. In addition, in Literary Schools neoclassicism and romanticism, realism and naturalism, or surrealism and Dadaism co-consideration make pupils' understanding easier and better.

Another might be a "historical syllabus". Indeed, in A Brief Survey of English Literature History (*Norton Anthology*) first we should study Old English and Middle Ages in order to reach at the Renaissance. The difference between this species of syllabus and the additive is in history and understanding. There, if we did not pave the way for the next steps students would get puzzled; here, however, if we do not broach Old English, modernism would not be beyond students' cognition. The same thing happens in teaching Novels, Dramas, Short Story, and the likes. Comprehension of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) has nothing to do with Hardy's *Tess of D'Urbervilles* (1891), but as a matter of history, we teach them in order.

The opposite way makes another kind of syllabus which I may call the "chronological". In the event that we set off from contemporary poetry to the classic, the route is chronological but not historical. This method is highly suggested for better appreciation in poetry courses, since both language and subjects become more up-to-date (Lockward 68); after students' adaptation to structure and atmosphere of poetry the instructor can

assuredly move back. As a matter of fact, a B. A. freshman, who is unfamiliar with English poetry, will be confronted with problems if we follow a historical syllabus.

### **2.3. Components**

We come to the components of a suitable syllabus. In this regard, Nunan counts aim, resources, procedure, and evaluation as parts (137); yet, Mills takes title, objectives, background, problem statement, procedures, resources, as well as assessment into account (13). The essayist's and his friends' experiences dictate that another important compartment is the expression of the teacher's expectations. Rules should be clear: as a sample, if you are going to assign student-writing poems, you need to make it clear to the students at the start of the course (Showalter 72). Or, in the course Fiction determine how many pages per session should be covered. Proposing digital or audio-visual files, further reading, and websites for each session would also be of great help if included.

There remains some key points, before going to methods. First, a syllabus designer is not (necessarily) the teacher of the course (Yalden 14); our colleagues may get help from their friends who are specialized in English Teaching. Second, "grading" is the arrangement of syllabus content from easy to difficult. Next, needs analysis should be practiced before developing any curriculum and designing any syllabus (Nunan 158). Then, "integration", which means to incorporate a technique, for instance technology, into the normal syllabus design (Chang and Kuo 208), should be highly considered if we are going to discuss performance poetry. Finally, "sequencing" is the order of contents in syllabus according to difficulty, frequency, or needs of learners (Nunan 159).

A big difference between literature syllabi and language ones is the time of issue. In fact, for literary courses it is absolutely necessary to inform students of the content before the term, because in drama and fiction the length would be problematic and out of their time and power. In poetry, although sometimes length matters, the main question is preparation; teachers have to ask students to read the poem before the session for looking up new words.

### **3. Methods**

The last section of this article deals with methods by which or according to which syllabi are designed. The most relevant one is the "cultural-response method"; it is described as designing a multicultural syllabus to fit all students' interests (Ostrowski 4; Dong 367-382), especially to include the literature written about or by minorities (Willis x). The syllabus designed by this method not only motivates students to speak on their origins, but also incites them to study better and more confidently on the subject matter.

"Active learning" is literature alter ego; it was born with literature, because it dictates self-instructional materials or better to say self-study courses (Rowntree 82-83). On this path, the teacher should help learners find their way into and around the subject, by repeating sections where appropriate in remedy classes. Here, the howness is also worked on; students may understand the theories but they usually have problems with application of critical methods. We engage them in activities which make them work with the subject, rather than merely reading about it. If they have any problem, for instance, in the application of critical theories, you would better focus on that area. Providing proper materials is of paramount significance, for the reason that materials as their background readings tell them what they need to do before tackling the lessons. Among other tips is explanation of the subject matter in such a way that learners can relate it to what they already know. As a sample, expound Barthesian post-structuralism by referring to his structuralism. Give feedback on the activities to make them judge for themselves whether they are learning successfully. At the end, help them sum up their learning when the lesson finishes.

The last designing method we excavate in this essay is "the stylistic". As meaning is created in the interaction between the reader and the text, the professor here makes students respond to and interact with the text. This would also activate the students' "top-down processing", that is relating this information to what he/she already knows. Selection of text is particularly important in this regard; in other words, those texts that lend themselves to be read stylistically are the best. Literature is a discourse with its own rules of language; on that ground, we develop sensitivity in students to the way in which literary language is

distinctive, by comparing examples of literary with non-literary descriptions. This is connected with “bottom-up processing”, to say in other words, decoding the linguistic items on the page. Stylistics is a systematic way of exploring how the language in the text patterns creates particular meanings. Ultimately, to design exercises that alert students to the stylistic choices in the text and to encourage them to explore the effect of these choices on the meaning should be noted.

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