INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL AND CRITICAL APPROACHES TO SYLLABUS DESIGN: A THEORETICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *Chronologically speaking, the view to syllabus design has been changed over the decades of development of the phenomenon of second language learning and teaching, as we go through from language centered methods to learner centered methods and to learning centered methods. An attempt was made in this paper to revisit the concept and the types of syllabus approaches in the realm of second language learning and teaching. Topics analyzed included, the definition of syllabus, the categorization of syllabi types, the introduction of an integrative approach to syllabus design and the presentation of the proposed model to syllabus design. In this paper, I focus on the traditional and critical approaches to syllabus design and introduce an integrative approach and finally I present the proposed model to teachers and syllabus designers to apply in practical contexts.*

KEYWORDS: syllabus design, curriculum, approach

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, no one can neglect the significant importance of syllabus design in the process of learning and teaching in general and second language learning and teaching in particular. Review of the related literature reveals that, each era of the second language learning and teaching has had its own methodology with its specific syllabus having specific characteristics. In the history of language teaching and learning, as when we go through the years of the development of this phenomenon, we can see that as the methodology has been changed from language centered methods to learner centered methods and to learning centered methods, the focus of syllabuses also has shifted from structure to situations, functions and notions to topics and tasks. In fact, as Nunan (1988) as cited in Rabbini (2002) suggests, that, the advance of the latter has made haze the traditional distinction between syllabus design (specifying the 'what') and methodology (specifying the 'how').
Therefore, how can we define the syllabus?

Syllabus: Definition
The review of related literature reveals the various definitions to the term, syllabus. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987 as cited in Rabbini, R. 2002) syllabus is a statement of what is to be learnt and mastered that is reflect of language competence and performance. This definition, ignores some important pints about syllabus, for example it just considers the content and sequencing parts of the syllabus design and neglects the other important parts such as goals, format and presentation, monitoring and assessment. Wilkins (1981) claims that syllabus is "specifications of the content of language teaching which have been submitted to some degree of structuring or ordering with the aim of making teaching and learning more effective process". Widdowson (1990) defines syllabus as the arrangement and specification

of a teaching programme or pedagogic agenda which defines a particular subject for a particular group of learner. This definition also ignores other important dimensions of a syllabus such as monitoring and assessment. In another definition, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) make sense of the syllabus as a vehicle by which policy-makers convey information to teachers, textbook writers, examination committees and learners concerning the program. In this definition, syllabus is broadened to cover the socio-political and cultural borders of the society; therefore, it's a comprehensive ideological definition that lacks the important information about the significant details of the parts of the syllabus. Brown (1995), in his words is close to the rational definition about the syllabus and he focus for what should be studied, along with a rationale for how that content should be selected and ordered. The word "what" in this definition refers to the needs of the students and based on the needs which are determined by a careful needs analysis, the content is selected and ordered. Again here, there are lacks of important dominions of syllabus such as format and presentation and monitoring and assessment. Generally, although there is various definitions to the term syllabus in the literature, however some of them as stated above don't take the overall dimensions of syllabus into consideration.

The proposed definition of syllabus

I myself, generally define syllabus as a plan or map of a way. In this simple but important definition there are two important key words or concepts, namely, plan (map) and way. Plan is a detailed proposal for doing or achieving something. Considering second language learning and teaching, its" dealt with deciding about the goals of the course, choosing and sequencing the appropriate material and content, selecting or creating relate technique to present them based on the determined goals and finally deciding about the ways of monitoring and assessing the students to see whether they have mastered the content and materials or not. In this definition the way refers to the process of the second language learning and teaching, the path that leads to the positive outcomes just by designing a predetermined pre-programmed plan. Therefore, both the plan and the way are of paramount importance in the process of syllabus design and they should be taken into consideration.

Syllabi approaches

Generally, there are six types of syllabi in the domain of second language learning and teaching and they are outcome of two or more types of syllabi. They are under the following headings:

A.   *Synthetic and Analytic syllabi*
B.   *Product oriented and Process oriented*
C.   *Type A and Type B syllabi*

Synthetic and Analytic Syllabi

Wilkins (1997, as cited in kumaravadivelu, (2008) separates language syllabi into synthetic syllabi and analytical types of syllabi. The underlying assumption behind the synthetic syllabus is that language items can be canalized into the separate units and then they should be ordered and sequenced and presented to the students. In this case students" responsibility is to synthesize all the separate elements in order to master them. On the other hand, analectic syllabus lies on the essence that, the totality of the language is presented to the students not piece by piece but by its chunks based on the communicative meaning of them and in this case there is no linear sequence of the elements in the syllabus, its" up to the students to analyze the totality to its" related elements in order to master the language items.

Product oriented and Process oriented syllabi

Nunan (1988) makes a distinction between product oriented syllabus and process oriented syllabus. The product oriented syllabus deals with the outcome of the process of the second language teaching and learning, by outcomes, we deal with the knowledge, strategies and skills that our learners are going to master and achieve as a result of the instruction and learning. By process oriented syllabi we deal with the processes by which our learners go through to achieve the desirable outcomes. Rabbini (2002) claims that, The Product oriented syllabus is also known as synthetic approach and the Process oriented syllabus as analytic approach.

Long & Crooks, (1920 as cited in as cited in Thakur, K. R., 2013) classified Synthetic/Product-oriented syllabuses as following;

1. Structural/formal syllabus
2. Situational syllabus
3. Notional-functional syllabus.

Analytic/Process-oriented syllabuses are classified as following :(as cited in Thakur, K. R., 2013)

1. Task–based functional
2. Procedural functional
3. Contend-based syllabus
4. Negotiated syllabus (Learner-Led Syllabuses)
5. Proportional syllabus

Type A and Type B syllabuses

White (1988), distinguished between type A and type B syllabi and put all current through syllabuses under these two types. Type A syllabi deal with what should be learned in a second language classroom. The emphasis is only upon subject, content and series of objectives and „pre-package" of the language by dividing it into small, discrete units. All synthetic syllabi are considered Type A syllabi. On the contrary, Type B syllabi are concerned with how the language is learned and how this language is integrated with learner"s experiences. The emphasis is upon the learning process. The elements of the syllabus come out from a process of negotiation between learners and teachers. Objectives are decided during the course and based upon the needs of the learners. White categorizes content or skill-based syllabi as Type A and method–based as Type B.

Synthetic/Product-oriented syllabuses

The Structural (formal) syllabus

According to Rabbini (2002), historically, the most prevalent of syllabus type is perhaps the grammatical syllabus in which the selection and grading of the content is based on the complexity and simplicity of grammatical items. The learner is expected to master each structural step and add it to her grammar collection. As such the focus is on the outcomes or the product.

The Situational syllabus

According to Rabbini (2002), the principal organizing characteristic is a list of situations which reflects the way language and behavior are used every day outside the classroom. Thus, by linking structural theory to situations the learner is able to induce the meaning from a relevant context. Alexander (1976) differentiates three types of the situational syllabus:

• Limbo situational syllabus - which includes the information of the specific setting is of little importance

•   Concrete situational syllabus - which includes information about the specific and concrete setting and the language associated with it

•   Mythical situational syllabus - which includes the information depending on fictional storyline, frequently with a fictional caste characters in a fictional place.

The Notional/Functional Syllabus

Wilkins criticized the structural and situational approaches because of the fact that they answer only the 'how' or 'when' and 'where' of language (Brumfit and Johnson. 1979). Consequently, the starting point for a syllabus is shifted from structure and formal futures to the communicative purpose and conceptual meaning of language i.e. notions and functions, as opposed to grammatical items and situational elements which remain but are relegated to a subsidiary role. Examples of functions include: agreeing, apologizing, requesting etc.; examples of notions include size, age, color, and so on. (Nunan 1988).

Needs analysis plays a significant role in notional-functional syllabuses. The needs of the learners will have to be analyzed by the various types of communication in which the learner has to confront. Although needs analysis implies a focus on the learner, critics of this approach suggest that a new list has replaced the old one. Where once structural/situational items were used a new list consisting of notions and functions has become the main focus in a syllabus. White (1988) claims that "language functions do not usually occur in isolation" and there are also difficulties of selecting and grading function and form. Clearly, the task of deciding whether a given function (i.e. persuading), is easier or more difficult than another
(i.e. approving), makes the task harder to approach.

Analytic/Process-oriented syllabuses
The Content-based Syllabus

Krahnke (1987) defines content-based syllabus as the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or indirect or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught. Content-based syllabus is considered as a subcategory of process-oriented and analytic syllabus (Nunan, 1988). Snow et al (1988) believe that the rationale behind the integration of language and content is that language is learned most effectively for communication in meaningful, purposeful social and academic contexts. In practical life, people use to talk about what they know and what they want to know more about, not to talk about language itself. The integration of content with language instruction provides a substantive basis for language teaching and learning. Content can give both motivational and cognitive bases for language learning.

Procedural syllabus

The most distinguishing example of a procedural syllabus is Prabhu's 'Bangalore Project'. His work is based on the principles that the learning is best carried out when attention is concentrated on meaning. Here, the question concerning 'what' becomes subordinate to the question concerning 'how'. The focus shifts from the linguistic element to the pedagogical, with an emphasis on learning or learner. Within such a framework the selection, ordering and grading of content is no longer wholly significant for the syllabus designer.

Arranging the program around tasks such as information- and opinion-gap activities, it was hoped that the learner would perceive the language subconsciously whilst consciously concentrating on solving the meaning behind the tasks. There appears to be an indistinct boundary between this approach and that of language teaching methodology, and evaluating the merits of the former remain complicated (Rabbini 2002). Task-Based syllabus

Rabbini (2002) points out that, a task-based approach assumes that speaking a language is a skill best perfected through practice and interaction, and uses tasks and activities to encourage learners to use the language communicatively in order to achieve a purpose. Tasks must be relevant to the real world language needs of the student. That is, the underlying learning theory of task based and communicative language teaching seems to suggest that activities in which language is employed to complete meaningful tasks, enhances learning. As
Candlin (1987), cited by Nunan (1988), mentions the characteristics of a good task:
• Promote action to meaning, purpose and negotiation
• Encourage attention to relevant data
• Draw objectives from the communicative of learners
• A problem to be worked by learners, centered on the learners but guided by the teacher
• Provide opportunities for meta-communication and meta-cognition.

Learner-Led Syllabuses (negotiated syllabus)

In this type of syllabus, the learner and his needs, suggestions and opinions are taken into consideration. The learners cooperate with teacher or syllabus designer to devise a syllabus.
As Rabbini (2002), claims, by being fully aware of the course they are studying it is believed that their interest and motivation will increase, coupled with the positive effect of nurturing the skills required to learn.
Critics have suggested that a learner-led syllabus seems radical and utopian in that it will be difficult to track as the direction of the syllabus will be largely the responsibility of the learners. Moreover, without the mainstay of a course book, a lack of aims may come about
(Rabbini 2002).

The Proportional Approach

The proportional syllabus basically attempts to develop an overall competence. It consists of a number of elements with theme playing a linking role through the units. This theme is designated by the learners. It is expected initially that form will be of central value, but later, the focus will veer towards interactional components; the syllabus is designed to be dynamic, not static, with ample opportunity for feedback and flexibility (Yalden, 1987).
Yalden (1987), considers the following three principles in proposing the proportional balanced syllabus;
• a view of how language is learned, which could result in a structure-based syllabus
• a view of how language is acquired, which could result in a process-based syllabus
• a view of how language is used, which could result in a function-based syllabus It is a type of syllabus which offers a close interweaving of structural and non-systematic elements over time (White, 1988). He emphasizes on proportional syllabus that „it is a model that can be used where neither immersion not the sheltered classroom format is possible, but where development of overall competence is desirable". The syllabus is designed to be dynamic, not static, with ample opportunity for feedback and flexibility.

Other types of syllabi
Skill-based Syllabus

Skill-based syllabus is organized around the different underlying abilities that are involved in using a language for purposes of such as reading, writing, listening and speaking i.e. four language skills. While designing a skill-based syllabus, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach and integrate the various skills. It is felt that if learners master the art of „how to learn", he would have no problem with „what to learn". (Thakur, K. R., 2013). According to

Mohsenifer (2008) - "in a skill-based syllabus the content of the language teaching is a collection of specific abilities that may play a part in using language". In similar way, Richards (2001) puts it "approaching a language through skills is based on the belief that learning a complex activity such as „listening to lecture" involves mastery of a number of individual skills or micro-skills that together make up the activity".

The Lexical Syllabus
 Wills et al, 1990 pleads that "taking lexis as a starting point enabled us to identify the commonest meanings and patterns in English and to offer students a picture which is typical of the way English is used". The emergence of lexical syllabus was a reaction against traditional structural syllabus. The basic principle on which the syllabus is based is that students must be able to understand and use lexical phrases. In this regard, Lewis (1993) says that "an important part of language acquisition is that the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as analyzed wholes, or „Chunks", and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar"

The Process Syllabus
The design of this syllabus is based on how learners approach learning. It provides a bridge between content and method. This syllabus is designed for classroom work. It explicitly attends to teaching and learning and particularly the interrelationship between subject matter, learning and the potential contributions of a classroom. It gives the participants opportunity to do these things by themselves and create their own syllabus in the classroom (Breen, 1987).

Flowerdew's categorization of syllabus design
Lynne Flowerdew (2005) puts the process of syllabus design in another (*critical*) category. His category includes three comprehensive approaches:
•	**Task-based** syllabus which is concerned with purposeful activities which learners might be expected to engage in real-life situations. As Ellis (2003) points out, this type of syllabus also puts emphasis on meaning and communication, where students are primarily "users" rather than "learners" of the language. Learners may switch their attention to form when performing a task, but the code is seen as peripheral to the focus on meaning.
•	**Text-based** syllabus, which as its name suggests, the content for such a syllabus is based on whole texts. Another key element of this type of syllabus is that this content is selected in relation to learner needs and the social contexts which learners wish to access. In this approach, the pedagogy is very much influenced by the concept of empowering disadvantaged learners to make progress through mastery of key genres, i.e., those genres necessary for advancement in the workplace. The text-based syllabus also has aspects in common with the task-based approach in that it sees language as a functional rather than formal artifact, to be used as a resource for meaning-making and for achieving purposeful goals. In fact, proponents of this type of syllabus are keen to point out that it can be considered as a type of mixed syllabus.
•	There are three well-known models of **content-based** syllabus: thematic, sheltered and adjunct, which are all designed to help students with their university content courses. However, they differ in their orientations towards language and content.

Needs-based syllabus design: an integrative approach
Flowerdew introduces the needs-based syllabus design as an integrative approach. DudleyEvans and St John (1988) in *developments in English for specific purposes* put a great

emphasis on needs analysis as a primary step to syllabus design. They produce evidence based on which and by starting from needs analysis, the process of syllabus writing and development would result in tangible outcomes. Referring to Holliday and Cook (1982) they also try to conceptualize another adjunct process to needs analysis, known as *Means analysis*. By means analysis it is meant that before even going through the process of syllabus design, the designer should consider the environmental factor of the course. Criteria of needs analysis are established as in figure 1:
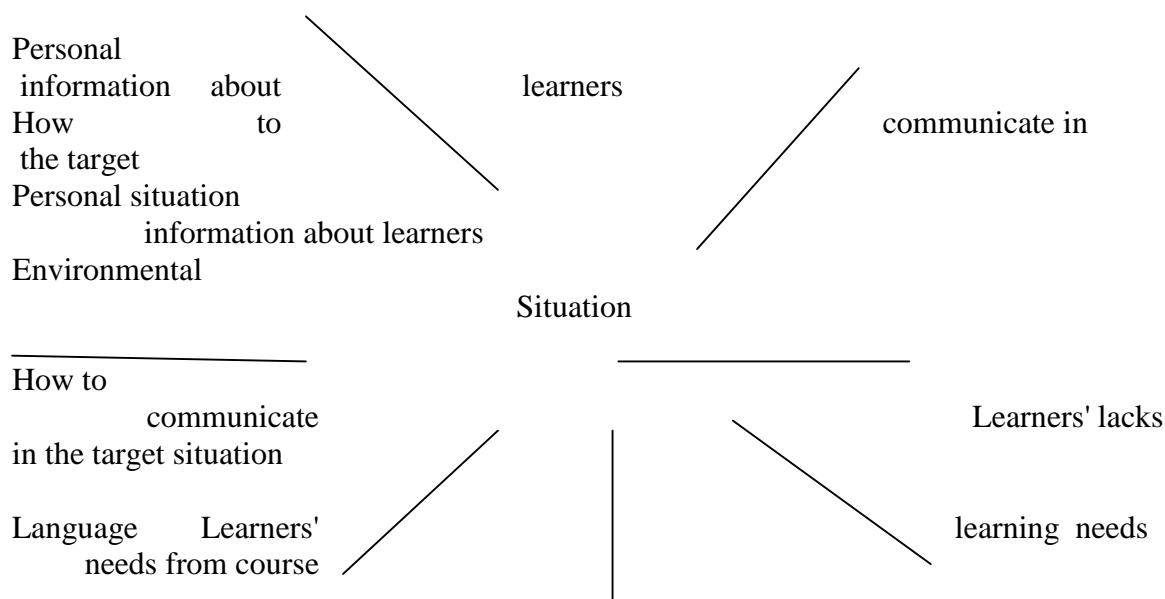
Figure 1: Dudley-Evans and St John (2005): **What needs analysis establishes.**

Therefore according to this figure by Dudley-Evans and St John (2005), Following characteristics and conditions should be met in the process of the syllabus design:

1.   Target situation analysis and students objective needs. The tasks and activities learners are/will be using language for.
2.   Subjective needs and wants. Factors affecting the students‟ ways of learning such as; cultural information, learning experiences and etc.
3.   Present situation analysis. Taking the students‟ current skills and language use into consideration.
4.   Lacks. The gap between present situation analysis and target situation analysis.
5.   Learning needs. The effective ways of learning the language
6.   Linguistic analysis, genre analysis and discourse analysis. Knowledge of how language and skills are used in target situation should be taken into consideration.
7.   What is wanted from the syllabus
8.   Means analysis. Information about the environment

At the first glance, it's seems that there is no need to consider issues such as environmental conditions in syllabus design. Maybe we think that it's the dimension related to the overall curriculum design. But these issues and the other issues related to the broader curriculum design effect the syllabus design in an indirect way and they should be taken into consideration in the process of syllabus design.

## The proposed framework for syllabus design

The following diagrammatic representation delineates my proposed framework of syllabus design. As a matter of fact this framework is a combination of some dimensions used in other models and an introduction of two new dimensions, namely input and interaction. At the first glance the frame work might be seen as a curriculum design model but it's worth mentioning that although there are some similarities between this model and other curriculum design frameworks but there are some differences between them that l briefly explain them.

In this diagram, I have put two factors related to curriculum development which are environments and needs, because I think that they affect the process of syllabus design but in an indirect way. Because syllabus design is an ingredient of the curriculum development therefore without considering environments and needs, we cannot come up with a comprehensive syllabus design model.

Considering this Model, after the goal of the syllabus design is determined by an environment analysis (means analysis) and needs analysis, the process is gone through by taking account of the principles. The principles are related researches on language teaching and learning that should be used to guide decisions on syllabus design. The principles affect the three substantial and maybe simultaneous steps of content and sequencing, format and presentation and monitoring and assessment. In this regard, by gaining guidance from the principles, we choose the content and carry out the model of gradation. Then we select the methodology of our teaching and the activities that will be used in our classes. Finally, we devise suitable tools for assessment to see whether our learners have mastered the materials or not. In So far as syllabus design is concerned my proposed framework is like the one proposed by Nation, I.S.P and Macalister, j., (2010). However, in my proposed framework there are two other dimensions namely, input and interaction. Although these two dimensions are under the title of principles in Nation and Macalister model but there is less emphasis on them in their framework. Here in this model I separated them because I think this two concept are very important and direct the process of syllabus design. According to the research in the domain of input, syllabus designers should have in mind that, only meaning focused input or only form focused input does not lead the course to the positive outcomes. But the combination of form focused and meaning focused reasonably challenging input should be taken into account by syllabus designers. Because Accuracy and fluency can just be mastered by integration of two types of input. In the case of interaction three means of interaction, namely, textual interaction, interpersonal interaction and ideological interaction can lead the syllabus to tangible and positive outcome. These three types of interaction have a dynamic and reciprocal relationship with input. Input and interaction by cooperation with each other shape and lead the steps of content and sequencing, format and presentation and monitoring and assessment. If syllabus designers just consider form focused input the shape of their syllabus will be a kind of structural and this omit the effect of the interaction. If they just consider the meaning focused input, their syllabus will lose the value of focus on form instruction and the process of learners" language acquisition leads to fossilization and inaccuracy of output. Furthermore, In the case of interaction if they just consider one types of interaction for example interaction as a textual activity and neglect the other types namely interaction as an ideological and interpersonal activity, the three steps of content and sequencing, format and presentation and monitoring and assessment will be affected in a way that, social norm, socio-political dimensions of language , cultural dimensions, individualized learning , experiential learning, exploratory learning wouldn't be taken into account in these steps. Therefore, Input and interaction plays a significant role in the process of syllabus design. Finally, it is worth mentioning that by using this model, syllabus

designers can draw insight in order to devise a syllabus suited in the specific environment and based on their learners" roles.

The process of syllabus design
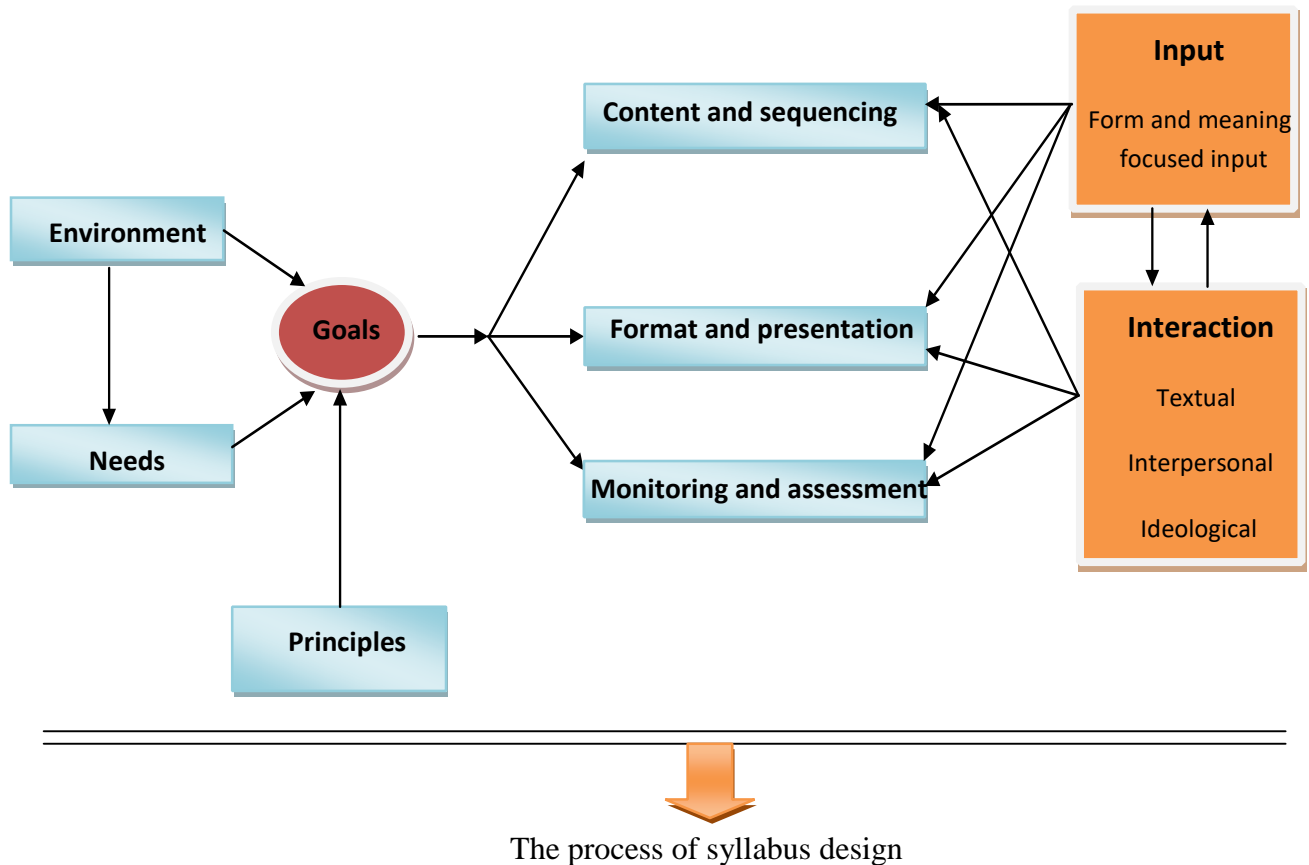
Figure2. The proposed syllabus design model

CONCLUSION

There are vast amounts of information in related literature about the established syllabi types that have been proposed throughout the history of second language learning and teaching. All of the syllabi types stated above have had a significant importance on the methodologies used in second language teaching and learning classes. Although all of the syllabi types have had some advantages for syllabus designers but we should not forget their disadvantages. From language and learner centered, synthetic syllabus types such as structural and functional-notional syllabus to learning centered, analytic syllabus types such as task based syllabus; syllabus can be conceived of a phenomenon subject to syllabus designers" views and the environmental-societal issues. In my opinion, the worth mentioning point here is that, each of these syllabi types just take into account one or some type of required syllabus characteristics not all the required necessities and conditions. As a matter of fact, one very influential syllabus might not be applied in the variety of settings. Therefore syllabus designers should take into account lots of issues that cover all of the important ingredients of existing conditions. Therefore A well designed language teaching syllabus according to Breen (2001) should have the following Characteristics:

•   A clear framework of knowledge and capabilities selected to be appropriate to overall aims;

•   continuity and a sense of direction in classroom work for teacher students;

•   a record for other teachers of what has been covered in the course;

•   a basis for evaluating students" progress;

•   a basis for evaluating the appropriateness of the course in relation to overall aims and student needs, identified both before and during the course;

•   Content appropriate to the broader language curriculum, the particular class of learners, and the educational situation and wider society in which the course is located.

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