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TITLE:
TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE COURSE SYLLABUS

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

We have read ADA's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of our knowledge, the content of this paper, entitled "Teachers' and Students' Understanding of the Course Syllabus" is all our own work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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Abstract

The course syllabus is a document that contains every necessary information. It includes a list of the subjects you will cover as well as the deadlines for any homework assignments, such as tests, quizzes, or examinations. While syllabi can help students feel engaged and provide a productive learning environment, debates about their usefulness are seldom found. In light of recent studies and theories on syllabi, for this Capstone project our aim was to find the perceptions of instructors and students about syllabi in higher education settings in Baku. The researchers employed interviews to identify the instructors' and students' definitions of the syllabus, instructors' experiences of designing the course syllabus, and students' suggestions and expectations of the course syllabus.

According to the findings of this study, teachers often utilize the syllabus as a framework to decide what to accomplish and teach. Despite being aware of the several kinds of syllabi, most of them were unable to identify which kind it was. Findings indicate that students use the course syllabus to learn about the subject matter of the lectures and the test dates, which also serve as a course map. The majority of students were unaware of the course objectives and expectations, despite some professors emphasizing their relevance.

As a result, as a Capstone team, we chose to create training for teachers. One of Baku's higher education institutes will host the workshop. This workshop's major objective is to increase public knowledge of the value of the course syllabus in the process of teaching and learning. The objective, advantages, and methods for involving students in using the course syllabus will be explained to instructors.

Keywords: Syllabus, Syllabus design, taxonomy

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Course syllabi are tools that provide valuable information which creates the opportunity for students and instructors to have meaningful interaction (Tokatli, 2009). Generally speaking, a syllabus is a plan that outlines precisely what students at a school or university should study in a specific course (Tokatli, 2009). A well-crafted course syllabus can fulfill a variety of functions, including establishing an understanding between the instructor and the student, conveying honesty and objectives, outlining the overall course's strategy for the course, and providing students with a conceptual framework of the subject matter (Matejka & Kurke, 1994). This has also been explored in prior studies by Harrington and Thomas (2018) that a well-designed syllabus can deal with student apprehensiveness and set the tone for positive learning experiences. Other researchers describe the role of the syllabus as a facilitator which gives guidance to the students about how to plan for the tasks and experiences of the semester, how to evaluate and monitor one's performance, know whether or not they are prepared for the content the course involves and to learn broader lessons (Parkes & Harris, 2002). As Grunert O'Brien (2008) stated, the syllabus may actually assist students in becoming more deliberate learners by guiding them far from this concept and introducing them to the delights and advantages of studying purely for the purpose of learning.

Background

According to recent studies, one of the ways to design a syllabus effectively is to support syllabus design with additional resources. Additional resources for supporting syllabus design include a syllabus template, the curriculum committee or administrator, and self-reflection (Wagner et al., 2022). Providing a syllabus template by a department or university for use by faculty increases the effectiveness of syllabi since it increases consistency across courses thus making it easy for students to reach important information and for the faculty to hold students to similar standards across courses (Wagner et al., 2022). Instructional scholars have advocated that teachers be agile in designing and adapting course curricula, especially the course syllabus, to captivate

students in the classroom (Hosek & Titsworth, 2016). Wagner et al. suggest adjusting the syllabus annually and reflecting on aspects that need to be modified for the next delivery of the course improves effectiveness. While Wagner et al. states the importance of self-reflection on syllabus design Fink (2012) suggests that teachers may keep copies of their syllabus to evaluate their growth and changes that have occurred over the years.

Statement of the Problem

In the light of reported research, it is conceivable that a syllabus is multiple agreements between, the institution, the instructor, and the students (Carlson, 2005). The syllabus is more likely to be effective if course objectives are clearly outlined, and they are linked to the vision and purpose of the subject matter at a particular educational level (Kazimi, 2019).

Despite being experts in their fields, professors seldom teach syllabus building in graduate programs (Fink, 2012). Fink (2012) also stated that senior instructors are consulted by teachers for advice on how to develop a syllabus and what to include in it.

According to Dilanova (2013), the syllabus helps to understand the course objectives, requirements, and learning experiences. Mahmudova (2020) stated that one of the main functions of a syllabus is to provide guidance about how to achieve the learning goals of a course, but none of the researchers described the techniques to design a syllabus more effectively.

Despite the fact that we majored in pedagogy throughout our undergraduate degrees, we did not receive any instruction on how to develop and use a syllabus. We were not aware of the course's objectives, its evaluation methods, or the benefits it provided at the conclusion. Due to these difficulties, we were unable to develop our curriculum for the teaching and learning process, which had an impact on our experience as teachers.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how instructors design their syllabi and how they and their students perceive the syllabus. Although Western literature is rich with

studies that focus on different techniques to improve the effectiveness of the syllabus, they are not mentioned in Azerbaijani literature. The goal of this study is to identify what techniques are used to improve the effectiveness of syllabi. By conducting this research we hoped to create awareness of techniques to enhance the efficacy of the syllabus.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of instructors and students about syllabi in higher education settings in Baku?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The syllabus can be beneficial for facilitating learning and fostering a positive learning environment in the classroom. It is becoming a key instrument in the teaching and learning process. There is a large volume of published studies describing the purpose of the syllabus in the teaching and learning process. Many writers emphasize the syllabus's multiple roles and objectives as a learning instrument, as a cognitive map, as a contract, or more plainly as a communication tool, underlining its potential value for students, their instructors, as well as for their department and

institution (Thompson, 2007). Others have highlighted the purpose of the syllabus as a way to assess the quality of the instruction. According to Woolcock (2003), whether it is purposeful or not, the quality of the syllabus, which serves as the course framework, is a useful indicator of the quality of education and learning that will occur during the term. Other researchers, however, who have looked at the purpose of the syllabus, have found that for example, Palmer (2016) writes that the syllabus is essentially a written document that outlines the major organizational components of a course and serves as contractual, record-keeping, and/or communication purposes. Palmer (2016) also noted that it is the location where professors outline the topics they will cover, the books and articles their students will read, the assignments they will turn in, the deadlines for everything, and all the rules and regulations that are meant to keep everyone on the right track and out of trouble.

Tokatli (2009) claims that a well-developed syllabus can fulfill a variety of purposes, including establishing an understanding between the teacher and the student, conveying seriousness and expectations, outlining the overall plan of action for the course, and providing students with a cognitive map of the subject matter. Littlefield (1999, as cited in Farrow, et al., 2021) proposed seven purposes for a syllabus it establishes the tone for a course, encourages students to set challenging but realistic goals, works as a guiding document for faculty, organizes students' work throughout the semester, aids faculty in planning and meeting course goals on time acts as a contract between professors and staff about what they can anticipate from each other and serves as a portfolio artifact for tenure, advancement, or job offers.

What's more, a well-crafted course syllabus can help to avoid misconceptions regarding the goals and objectives of the course, the criteria for evaluation and assessment of the grading procedures, student or teacher behavior, tasks, materials, activities, and any other policy information. (Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010; McDonald et al., 2010). Likewise, Gannon (2018) stated that in most situations, students' initial interaction with instructors and the course will be through the syllabus. Thus, instructors have only one chance to create a first impression, as the saying goes. Gannon (2018)

also added that a well-designed syllabus promises that, as a consequence of our course, students will be able to perform a lot of things either for the first time or at least better than they could before, rather than focusing on what they can't do.

In the teaching of language, selecting a syllabus is a crucial choice. Language education syllabi may be used in a variety of instructional contexts and fall under a number of different categories. Lect (2022), suggested the following six categories of language syllabus:

- a) **Structural syllabus** in which the content of language teaching is a collection of forms and structures, usually grammatical elements such as verbs, nouns, past tense, and so on.
- b) **A notional/functional syllabus** is one in which the content of the language is a collection of the functions that are to be performed when language is used, or of the notions that language is used to express.
- c) **A situational syllabus** is one in which the content of language teaching is a collection of real or imaginary situations in which language is used. For example, seeing the dentist, asking for directions in a new town, buying a book in a bookshop.
- d) **A skill-based syllabus** is one in which the content of language teaching is a collection of specific abilities that may play a part in using language.
- e) **A content-based syllabus** is not really a language teaching syllabus. In content-based language teaching, the main purpose of the instruction is to teach some content using the language that the students are also learning. The subject matter is primary, and language learning occurs incidentally to the content learning. An example of content-based language teaching is a science class taught in the language the students need or want to learn.

- f) **A task-based syllabus** is one in which the content of the teaching is a series of complex and purposeful tasks that the students want or need to perform with the language they are learning.

An essential component of delivering a successful course is creating an effective syllabus. The action should be deliberate and have specific instructional goals that always relate to the course's objectives. And it should be enjoyable, going well beyond just presenting course material to create the ideal environment for successful teaching and learning (Soonpaa, 2018). According to Hess (2008), a successful syllabus may serve as documentation of design choices, serve as a contract between students and instructors, convey vital information, and set the tone for the course. Almost every paper that has been written on syllabus design includes a section relating to the factors and parts while designing the course syllabus. Hess (2008) and as well as Soonpa (2018), suggest five factors to consider while designing a course:

(1) Goals, which specify the concepts, abilities, and principles that students should acquire over the course;

(2) Materials: locating pertinent literature and online resources;

(3) Assignments specifying readings and extracurricular tasks must be performed;

(4) Methods deciding on instructional strategies;

(5) Evaluation selection on the grading system, which may include tests, quizzes, papers, and participation.

(6) Policy: Including instructor's professor-specific policies in addition to the system- or school-based regulations. While writing policy for the syllabus Soonpa (2018) suggests reflecting on the following questions while designing the policy of the course:

- How do you handle absences? How do you respond to early or late arrivals?
- Do you permit or prohibit technology? What happens if a student's cell phone rings during a lesson?

- What are the proper channels and locations for submitting assignments?
- On the due date, are assignments due at any time or by a certain time?
- Is there a penalty for submitting late papers?
- What occurs when a student is habitually late? Unprepared?

(7) The main behaviors are expected of students in terms of their roles and responsibilities: preparation, participation, effort, respect for the instructor and other students, contribution to a productive learning environment, and cooperation with other students and the group.

It is suggested by Gannon (2018) that while the syllabus is still fresh in teachers' minds they should critically evaluate their syllabus (and the course itself) at the conclusion of the semester to determine what worked and what didn't even though the conclusion of a semester is frequently a rush of marking and other activity. It's important to maintain track of any adjustments being made to the institutional or departmental environment.

According to the literature, students initially considered the course's subjects and the quantity, date, and kind of exams (Zucker, 1992, as cited in Leduc, 2011). Students preferred a syllabus that contained clear and significant material. Moreover, Marcis and Carr (2004) found that exams, grading procedures, and due dates were crucial.

The difference between what instructors believe students' expectations of a syllabus and what students really expect from a syllabus must be understood or kept in mind by instructors. Studies (Garavalia, 1999; McDonald et al., 2010) have shown that students and instructors frequently have different perspectives on what information is most crucial. A higher education institution's framework involves components like people (students and teachers), buildings, and books in addition to its syllabus. Syllabus construction, however, "continues to remain under-theorized" (Cardozo, 2006). Despite being experts in their fields, Fink (2012) claims that professors seldom teach how to design the syllabus in graduate programs.

The gap in the literature

Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that, the aforementioned reviewed literature on various syllabus designs and their influence on students are diverse in their breadth and depth. No extant research has explored the importance of syllabus-design courses in higher education. No one conducted any research related to this topic in Azerbaijan. The existing gap in the literature justifies the need for this research to examine the effect of course syllabi on the teaching and learning process in the English language teaching faculty of Azerbaijan universities.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was applied for this study as the fundamental purpose of qualitative research is to explore human experiences from a humanistic, interpretative perspective (Jackson, 2007). The qualitative methodology chosen to explore English Language teachers' experiences and students' perceptions, of course, syllabi offered an effective way for researchers to hear their experiences, understand their perspectives, and comprehend their meanings (Cobb, 2002).

In this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted to investigate English teachers' experiences and students' definitions, and motives regarding syllabus design (Gill, 2008; Silverman, 2021). One-on-one interviews enabled us to study English teachers' and students' perceptions of the syllabus in their natural contexts and account for situational characteristics of syllabus design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Research Site and Population

The study was conducted at the public University in Baku, Azerbaijan. The population of the study was the English language instructors and the students at the university.

Sample Size and Sampling Strategy.

The type of purposive sampling strategy was applied as the aim was to collect English language instructors' perceptions of the syllabus design. The purposive sampling strategy made it

possible to locate reliable information sources and conduct appropriate interviews (Creswell, 2012). Students and instructors from one of the public universities were selected as a target group that could help with finding out about syllabus design and the role of the syllabus. Additionally, permission letters explaining the study were distributed to the institutions. When they agreed, we interviewed instructors and students. Before the interview, each participant got a consent form on the purpose of the study, the investigator's role, reciprocity, using ethical interviewing techniques, safeguarding privacy, and working with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data collection

Data collection referred to selecting individuals suiting the purposes of the study, having their permission with regard to their involvement in the study, and gathering the information by asking or observing the selected participants (Creswell, 2012). To investigate our research topic and reach a conclusion, we utilized the online interview method of data collection (p. 217). When data was presented through words, it was labeled qualitative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To obtain the relevant data, we involved instructors and students from one of the state universities in Baku. According to the experience of our undergraduate years and the information we acquired from our peers, teachers in the university have been using syllabi to create a better understanding of subjects. Therefore, we went to the university to ask permission from the head of the faculty to connect us with at least five or more participants to collect data from teachers and students. And we discussed this with students and instructors for their involvement in the data collection process. However, we involved 12 instructors and 7 students to gather extensive data enabling us to develop the research. As December and January were the exam months at the universities, instructors, and students communicated to begin the process in the middle of February.

Interview

As the research was qualitative, we acknowledged that interviewing participants was the most pertinent option. Hence, interviews were the method of gathering data in our study. One of

the primary advantages of interviews was that an interviewee may voice experiences without being constrained by any standpoints (Fox, 2009). On the other hand, the interviewer has unlimited control over the process, for he or she can request information through specific questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

Although semi-structured interviews were costly because they are time-consuming, it was ideal for accessing relevant participants and gathering specific information (Fox, 2009). That being said, we involved instructors and students in the interviewing process on an individual basis as online. Thus, participants felt comfortable discussing their perceptions and experiences without being shy in front of their colleagues. In addition, we respected the anonymity principle and did not disclose the names of the participants to the public. We used the English language during interviews to facilitate the data collection process. The duration of each interview was about 10 minutes when we acquired the data by questioning a participant. To preserve the ideas of instructors and students, and to improve them for the analysis part, we recorded the interview on smartphones.

Data Analysis

To analyze the acquired data, we executed numerous steps. First, we organized the data by transcribing the interviews from smartphone recordings. Transcription, in this regard, refers to the conversion of audiotapes into written texts (Azevedo et al., 2017). The further process of the data analysis was coding the data by examining the written texts to find overlaps and redundancies in the opinions and experiences of instructors. As a result, coding allowed us to establish broad themes for the analysis of the information where ideas overlap and differ based on the same background. Eventually, description helped to reveal the meanings of the established themes (Creswell, 2012). To represent the findings, we used narrative analysis by which researchers may summarize the reduced themes in detail.

Validity and Reliability

Seale (1999) discussed trustworthiness as the validity and reliability of good-quality research. Validity and reliability are the concerns that are supposed to be approached through careful attention to produce trusted findings in any research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the categories of techniques to ensure trustworthiness. Qualitative inquirers generally employ validation procedures such as member checking and triangulation to check the accuracy of the research (Creswell, 2012). Following those assumptions, we will use triangulation and member-checking techniques to ensure the credibility of this study.

Triangulation

It is significant to assess the validity of the research through its credibility/ internal validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation is a strategy to enhance the validity and reliability of research (Mathison, 1988). The use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple, investigators, and multiple theories are types of triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

Among the triangulation of the multiple methods are the data collection strategies such as interviewing, data analysis, and memoing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Member Checking

One of the effective ways to ensure internal validity is member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is crucial for the establishment of credibility and authenticity. The most common ways for member checking are interview respondents being sent for review, comment, and/or correction: (a) a transcript of their own interview, (b) a copy of emerging findings, and (c) a draft copy of a research report (David, 2017). After transcribing the interviews we needed to make corrections in some of them as the meaning was not clear in some sentences. For this reason, we sent some transcriptions to the participants to find out what they meant.

Ethical Considerations of the Research

In qualitative research ethical conduct is one of the vital requirements of trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While ethical considerations are crucial in any type of study, it becomes more salient in qualitative research (Arifin, 2018). A qualitative researcher is responsible for ensuring participants have the power of freedom of choice to participate in the study, protecting the participants' identity throughout the recruitment and dissemination stage, and promoting clear and honest research reporting without deception to readers (Arifin, 2018). As qualitative researchers, we also protect the privacy of participants and recruit those who did not mind participating.

Chapter 4: Findings

The focus of this capstone project was to explore how the instructors and students perceive their syllabi to support students in the teaching and learning process.

The present study focuses on the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the instructors and students about the syllabus in the higher education settings in Baku?

During the research, we gathered information through one-on-one interviews. The goal of the study project was to find the answers to the research questions, and this chapter covers the results obtained after interviewing instructors and students. There were 16 questions for the students and 9 for the teachers throughout the interview. The questions were mainly related to how teachers and students perceive the syllabus. Participants in the interview were instructors (see appendix 1) and students of one of the higher institutions.

We designed this chapter under the following three themes and subthemes:

Theme 1: Teacher's Definition

Subtheme 1.1: Purpose

Subtheme 1.2: The Type of the course syllabus

Theme 2: Syllabus design

Subtheme 2.1: Key components

Subtheme 2.2: Taxonomies

Subtheme 2.3: Challenges

Subtheme 2.4: Changes

Theme 3: Students' definition

Subtheme 3.1: Purpose

Subtheme 3.2: Expectations

Subtheme 3.3: Suggestions

Theme 1: Teacher's Definition

During the interviews, we asked questions about the purpose of the course syllabus.

Subtheme 1.1.: The Purpose of the Syllabus.

Most of the instructors indicated that it is a guide and a roadmap for the course that serves as a form of framework that assists in the making choices and handling of what to teach and what to cover within the course as well as the selection of content. Instructors indicated that it is the guide to be systematic in the teaching process, not to lose the ways, way not to lose time. Another related response stated by Instructor 4 was that the syllabus is the skeleton of the topics that they teach during the course. In addition to that Instructor 7 emphasized the following:

So it really helps us because nowadays, we'll have a lot of teaching materials, we'll have a lot of resources, books, research books, and so on papers. And sometimes we really get lost in the number of materials we have. So the course syllabus, it's a kind of a frame that helps us to decide and to manage what to teach and what to do within the course and to choose the material appropriate for our students for their level, for their interests, and so on.

In conclusion, the instructors defined the aim of the course syllabus as a guide, a tool to select appropriate resources efficiently, and to know what to teach and do during the course.

Subtheme 1.2.: The Type of the Syllabus

Another question we asked was which type instructors know and which type they use for their courses. The majority of the instructors stated that they know grammar, lexical, functional, notional, functional, and multi-standard types of syllabuses. Instructor 3 added that there are different types such as

notional, functional, structural, and grammatical. However, she added that she is teaching theoretical subjects and that is why she uses mainly topic-based syllabuses. She also added:

And I think that now, in language teaching mainly mixed type is used, which includes in itself, both grammar, vocabulary, and dowers. Also, I think that this mixed type is useful, especially in practical lesson teaching types.

Moreover, most of them also stated that they are using the same template provided by the faculty. In light of this Instructor 1 mentioned:

Honestly speaking, we use only one type of it. And we're familiar only with one this type of syllabus. Unfortunately, not all teachers, how to say preparing their syllabus on their own. Sometimes, not sometimes usually, course supervisors prepare the syllabus and send it to the teachers and other teachers get it also, they just change their names and maybe the email addresses and they use it, but they don't know how to do that, unfortunately, how to prepare the syllabus.

Likewise, Instructor 5 declared:

So we just don't have such kind of possibility or choice to do which one we want. As I mentioned they gave us just a ready and prepared template and we are going with them as I know.

The majority of the instructors stated that they use the one template of the syllabus sent by the faculty. Despite using one template of the syllabus, they had varying opinions regarding what type of syllabus it is. Findings revealed that instructors are aware of the various types of syllabi. Yet, they are using a fixed template which is called topic based.

Theme 2: Syllabus design

Subtheme 2.1: Key Components of the Syllabus.

In order to know which key components the instructors include in their syllabus we asked the open-ended question during the interview. As we mentioned in what in that the type of syllabus they use, instructors stated that they use only one template of it. Consequently, the overall response to this question was the same. Instructor 7 mentioned:

We usually use the course description I will ever give short information about the course. We have learning aims we have course outcomes. We have the assessment. Under the section there, we have the description of individual work a kind, of course, what the students are to submit. At the end of the course, we also have a short description of the teaching methods and approaches we use in the course. And one of the main and final parts is the content of the course.

Correspondingly they all listed the components below:

- Course outline
- Prerequisites
- Course Aim
- Course outcome
- Assessment Procedures and criteria
- Evaluation components
- Participation
- Independent work
- Teaching and Learning approaches
- Learning support
- Required resources
- Course evaluation/Student feedback
- Course content

Additionally, as was noted in the first topic, all instructors utilize the predetermined template that the institution provides. Because of this, they don't alter or add anything to it.

Subtheme 2.2: Taxonomies

During the interviews, we asked the instructors what educational taxonomy is used in their syllabus design.

The data suggest most of Bloom's taxonomy is used in the templates that are provided for teachers. They make use of the revised taxonomy of Bloom's while writing lesson objectives and course outcomes. Although those teachers are sent readily-available syllabi they choose measurable verbs of Bloom's taxonomy that help them to set clear lesson objectives and course outcomes.

Instructor 1: I prefer Bloom's Taxonomy. It makes the syllabus more advanced, and maybe more professional. I want to say that lots of teachers know how to write learning outcomes because there we need to use some special verbs when we write learning outcomes. And that is called Bloom verbs. We see that they didn't apply this rule and they wrote different verbs that they wanted. And here, we need to pay attention to this especially we need to use verbs like define, describe, classify, and practice, and we need to apply these groups of verbs.

Instructor 2: When we design the learning outcomes, we have to be very careful to use appropriate verbs, because we shouldn't use verbs like to know or to learn. Some of these verbs are taken from Bloom's taxonomy. So we write these verbs in our learning outcome.

The findings suggest the majority of the teachers are aware of the fact that Bloom's taxonomy is used in their syllabus template and they apply Bloom's action verbs to write learning outcomes in their syllabus.

Subtheme 2.3: Challenges

In the interview process, we asked the instructors what challenges they face.

The findings show that finding effective learning materials that can help to reach desired results is highly challenging for most teachers. The lack of materials that are aligned with course objectives does not let teachers create authentic learning experiences.

Instructor 1: When I write teaching aims or course aims maybe because sometimes we change the resources. For example, this time we started to use a new book. And in this case, it can be challenging to find aims, and again, outcomes.

The data suggest that required reading materials cover content that is not closely related to the content of the subject matter and teachers have difficulties replacing those materials with more effective ones due to a shortage of resources.

Instructor 2: They are mainly related to the subject itself because as I mentioned before, I'm teaching theoretical subjects mainly. And in teaching theoretical subjects, we have to mix, you know, that lecture types with some workshops. And from this point, it's a bit challenging.

The data illustrate that determining anticipated problems and finding possible solutions to those problems are among the challenges that some teachers encounter.

Instructor 3: As I mentioned before we have in our modern syllabuses we have and also lesson plans, and anticipated problems. , I just imagined, for example, my students may have some questions. And I put some anticipated problems on my lesson plan, and I tried to find out any solutions to their example, how can I answer their questions.

The findings suggest that considering student needs and learning preferences is also challenging as they are not familiar with students' personal traits while designing learning and assessment tools.

Instructor 4: To be honest, individual works make me feel somehow to say, makes me feel bad feelings. Let's say so because I don't know my students, I don't know their characters. I have written the individual works, but I don't know whether or not they will like them.

According to collected data, the lack of materials aligned with learning outcomes is the biggest challenge for most teachers. Determining anticipated problems and providing possible solutions is challenging for some teachers. Several teachers have challenges while designing individual works since they are not aware of the personality traits of their students.

Subtheme 2.4: Changes

In the process of collecting data, we asked the instructors how often they make changes to their syllabi and whether or not they consider students' feedback while modifying their syllabi.

The data show that the teachers get student feedback on their syllabi throughout the semester. Students comment on assignments and reading materials throughout the learning process. The data suggest that teachers do not get students' feedback by using any tools like surveys or questionnaires but they comment on the assignments and reading materials sometime in the learning process.

As it is mentioned in the first theme instructors get ready syllabi by the department and they use them. The majority of the instructors stated that they collect feedback, and the changes they want to make are sent to the department. After the confirmation they make changes. Changes are mainly related to reading materials and assessment tools.

Instructor 5: We can not do it directly. We collect all feedback. We give it to the department. They accept it sometimes. We can make changes. Depending on hours and manual we can make changes.

Instructor 7: The head of the department should look through your syllabus and then sign it as a document because it's actually a document for us.

One of the instructors stated that for example, if they want to teach a demo lesson instead of writing a paper about teaching principles, the teacher considers this feedback while designing the assessment tools next semester.

Instructor 1: When we start the lesson, I give this syllabus to my students, I say, please look at the syllabus and tell me what you want my syllabus to cover or what I have to include in my syllabus. And this time they say something I change but generally, they don't say anything. They say that we don't want to do, for example instead of individual work, they want to give practical lessons.

According to the findings, teachers consider students' feedback to change reading materials and the nature of the assignments after the faculty confirms it.

Theme 3: Students' Definitions of the Course Syllabus

This section's main goal is to explore students' definitions of the syllabus. By conducting one-on-one interviews, we gathered data. This section will outline the findings we reached after asking 16 interview questions from students at the University of Languages. The open-ended questions largely focused on defining the course syllabus. All respondents are 4th-year students of English Teaching and almost all are in the same age range (see appendix 2).

Students' Expectations from the Course Syllabus; and 3. Students' Suggestions for the Course Syllabus Design; that these findings fall under. We posed a number of questions to the participants throughout the interviews to get their definitions of the course syllabus and how they understand it.

Subtheme 3.1.: Purpose of the Course Syllabus.

We interviewed university students and asked them questions about their purpose for using the course syllabus. Based on our findings most students use the course syllabus for getting information about course material and the topic's name for the next lesson. They note that:

We usually use it before each lesson to find out what the next topic is.

And very few students indicated that they also use the syllabus to know the lesson hours, exam times, and holidays, which are noted in the syllabus.

Just one of them notified us that: *I just look at it to know when I have exams.*

Student 3: *Not every day, but a few times a week to find out which lesson I need to prepare for.*

Student 5: *Actually, I use the syllabus before every lesson, because I can forget which lesson we have done before.*

Student 7: *It helps us to be aware of the topics that will be taught during the semester.*

As it is mentioned in Theme 1 instructors have the same view as students about how students use it. Instructors also mentioned that students mostly use it for topics, exam times, and materials (see appendix 3).

Subtheme 3.2.: Students' Expectations from Course Syllabus.

In this interview, we focused on students' expectations from the course syllabus. And our findings indicate that students expect a more organized syllabus and extra information related to that topic. Student 1 states in her answer during the interview:

I cannot find any extra information related to the topic in the syllabus, I expect additional information about that topic.

Student 3: *It is not enough for us to know only the name of the book and the topic.*

Student 4: *They should review it themselves before giving it to us.*

Student 6: *I think it should be more organized.*

Subtheme 3.3.: Students' Suggestions for the Course Syllabus Design.

Here, we attempted to gather students' suggestions for the course syllabus design in the final section of the interview. By posing this question we tried to find out what they would like to

see in the course syllabus and what they would like to advise their teachers to pay attention when preparing the course syllabus. While they answered these questions, we gathered two critical pieces of information about their course syllabus: 1. Lack of recourses about topics; 2. Using old books.

Two of the students stated: *Teachers should find new editions of course materials, not the materials of the 50-60th years.*

And they also mostly talked about the limitation of resources and the lack of diversity. For example, video resources, foreign resources, websites, or additional books. As an example, student 7 specified:

There should be links to websites. We are now in the 21st century and technologies are developing, and our syllabus unfortunately does not include this list of books or links. Students may want to watch videos to become more immersed in the material.

Just student 2 said: *I do not need any other source or link but the name of the topic because I have internet and I can find everything myself.*

When we consider the responses of the students who participated in the interview, we obtained data about their definitions of the course syllabus. The average response of the 7 interviewed students shows that almost all of them use the syllabus with the same frequency and purpose. And again, more than half of the interviewed students mentioned that the course resources in the course syllabus were limited and lack of diversity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This qualitative research provided the Capstone group with insight into the instructors' and the student's perceptions of the course syllabus. According to our findings, there are both similarities and differences in the instructor's and student's perceptions of the course syllabus.

This study has found that generally, instructors use the syllabus as a frame to know what to do and teach. Despite the fact that they are aware of the various types of syllabi, the majority of them didn't acknowledge which type is it. Unfortunately, instructors do not have a chance to design the course syllabus themselves as they use the fixed template provided by the faculty supervisor.

Likewise, findings show that students use the course syllabus to know the topic of the lessons and the exam dates which also means a guide of the course. Although some of the instructors stated the importance of course objectives the majority of students were not aware of the course objectives and expectations.

After analyzing the findings, we believe that both instructors and students use the course syllabus for the same purpose without being aware of the importance of it in the teaching and learning process. Hence, as a Capstone team, we decided to design a workshop for instructors. The workshop will be organized in one of the higher education institutions in Baku. The main goal of this workshop is to raise awareness about the importance of the course syllabus in the teaching and learning process. Instructors will be provided with information about the purpose, and benefits of the syllabus and how to engage students in using the course syllabus.

Chapter 6: End Product



As the end product, we decided to have a workshop at one of the higher education institutions in Baku. Participants of the workshop will be research participants. Further information about the workshop is in the table below.

Appendix 4:

Workshop Plan

Workshop Title: Teachers' and Students' Understanding of the course syllabus.	
Facilitator Name(s): Turan Mammadova Tajlibayim Aliyeva Madina Huseynli	Date & Time of Session:
Location: ADA University	
Who Will Attend the Workshop? Research participants	
Goal(s) of Workshop: By the end of the workshop participants will be able to: *identify SMART objectives *identify Backward Design and its role in syllabus design *identify Fink's taxonomy	

Workshop Structure

Time: <i>Plan the timing of the session.</i>	Activity: <i>Be specific. What are the directions for each section of your workshop?</i>	Materials Needed: <i>List all materials &/or technology needed for each component.</i>	Purpose: <i>If you can't state the purpose, skip the activity!</i>
30 minutes	Presentation of the findings	Projector Laptop	To present the findings of the research.
30 minutes	Input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining SMART objectives • Defining Backward Design • Demonstrating Fink's taxonomy 	Projector/Electronic Board Laptop Whiteboard/Marker	Help participants to identify the importance of initial steps to design a syllabus
30 minutes	Main Activity/Main Activities Activity 1: Groupwork (15 minutes) Phase 1. Participants are presented with a group of objectives and asked to choose the SMART ones. (5 minutes) Phase 2. Once all the groups finalized their task the facilitators elicit the answers from the participants and write them down on the whiteboard. Then they present the slide showing which objectives are SMART. (10 minutes) Activity 2 (10 minutes): Phase 1: Participants are asked to identify which dimensions of the Finks taxonomy the SMART objectives are about individually. (3 minutes) Phase 2: Participants discuss their answers within pairs. (2 minutes) Phase 3: The facilitators present correct	Projector/Electronic Board Laptop Whiteboard/Marker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help participants identify different dimensions of Fink's taxonomy • Create design authentic tasks to measure how well the objectives are met by learners

2 minutes	<p>answers. (5 minutes)</p> <p>Activity 3: Groupwork (20 minutes)</p> <p>Phase 1: Participants are asked to design an assessment tool for one of the SMART objectives they have chosen before. (10 minutes)</p> <p>Phase 2: They present their tasks and get peer feedback. (10 minutes)</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Participants will reflect on their takeaways from the workshop and give feedback for further improvement by scanning the QR code on the screen.</p>	<p>https://www.mentimeter.com/</p>	<p>To get what the participants take away and see suggestions.</p>
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The detailed structure of the workshop

The first part of the workshop is presenting the Capstone project to the participants. In this part, we will present our findings by emphasizing students' perceptions, suggestions, and expectations of the course syllabus.

Furthermore, in the input part, we will present three main topics:

- 1) Smart objectives
- 2) Backward Design
- 3) Fink's taxonomy

Moreover, participants will work on the given activities.

Activity 1:

Objective:

- **Determining acceptable evidence**
- **Understanding SMART objectives**

As one of our objectives is defining Backward Design we want the participants to understand its importance in syllabus design. An effective syllabus design requires instructors to determine a

desired result in an initial step.

Phase 1. Facilitators present a set of objectives and ask the participants to select SMART ones.

Phase 2: Once all the groups finalize the task, facilitators elicit answers and write them down on the board without judging them as right or wrong. Then they present the correct answers and let groups check their answers and ask questions if they have any.

Activity 2:

Objective: understanding different dimensions in Fink's taxonomy

Phase 1: All the participants have a list of SMART objectives. The facilitators present dimensions of Fink's taxonomy which they have discussed before. The participants are asked to match the SMART objectives to different dimensions individually.

Phase 2: The participants discuss their answers within pairs.

Phase 3: The facilitators present the correct answers and let the participants check their answers and ask questions if they have any.

Activity 3:

Phase 1: This activity requires the participants to design an assessment tool to measure the learning outcomes. They have SMART objectives aligned with different dimensions of Fink's taxonomy. The facilitators group the participants up and ask them to choose any objectives they have listed after the first activity and design an assessment task measuring those objectives.

Phase 2: Each group presents its task and gets peer feedback.

Appendix 1

Instructors' Experience and Subject They Teach.

Instructors	Subject they teach	Experience
Instructor 1	Language skills	8 years of experience
Instructor 2	Senior teacher in a department of foreign language teaching	22 years of experience
Instructor 3	methodology of Teaching the English Language	16 years of experience
Instructor 4	methodology of Teaching the English Language	8 years of experience
Instructor 5	Language skills	30 years of experience
Instructor 6	Teaching English	8 years experience at the University of Languages
Instructor 7	general English academic writing	20 years of experience
Instructor 8	Methodology of Teaching the English Language	5 years of experience
Instructor 9	language skills and methodology	More than 10 years of experience
Instructor 10	methodology of Teaching the English Language	9 years of experience
Instructor 11	Language skills	8 years of experience
Instructor 12	General English	10 years of experience

Appendix 2

Information about students:

Student 1	<i>21 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>
Student 2	<i>21 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>
Student 3	<i>21 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>
Student 4	<i>22 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>
Student 5	<i>22 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>
Student 6	<i>21 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>
Student 7	<i>21 y/o, English teaching, 4th year student</i>

Appendix 3

Students' Definitions of the Course Syllabus

Students' Definitions of the Course Syllabus	Findings
Purpose of the Course Syllabus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about course material • Name of the topic • Lesson hours • Exam times • Holidays
Students' Expectations from the Course Syllabus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More organized • Extra information related with topic
Students' Suggestions for the Course Syllabus Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links for Websites • Foreign resources • New Editions of the Books

Interview Consent Form

Research practitioner: Madina Huseynli, Turan Mammadova, Tajlibayim Aliyeva

Consent to take part in research on “Teachers' and Students' Understanding of Syllabus Design”

Participant:

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- The purpose and nature of the study were explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- I understand that participation in this research involves giving interviews by answering questions related to the research topic.
- I understand that there is no direct benefit for me from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that my identity will remain anonymous in any report on the results of this research. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview.
- I understand that the researcher will retain signed consent forms and original audio recordings until the results of the research are confirmed.
- I understand that the researcher will retain a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed for about 5 months until the results of research is confirmed.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalization, I have legal rights to access the information I have provided at any time.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to request further information.

If you require further information on the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Yunusova, the Capstone Project supervisor, via email shajiyeva@ada.edu.az.

Signature of participant

Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

Date

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