

## Process of Language Curriculum Development

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### Article History

Received: 08.11.2019

Accepted: 09.11.2019

Published: 10.11.2019



**Abstract:** There are various frameworks for the process of curriculum development. According to Graves (1996), many frameworks have been proposed for the process of curriculum development and course design through which they are broken down into their components and sub-components. Such frameworks are useful since they provide an organized way in understanding a complex process; they provide domains of inquiry for teachers, through which each component brings up ideas and raises issues for the teacher to pursue; and finally they provide a set of terms currently in vogue about course development and thus a common professional jargon and provides access to the ideas of others. This paper is an effort to discuss the different models involved in language curriculum development when all of these models highly overlap with each other to some extent. One of these models has been proposed by Tabawho (1962, cited in Dubin and Olshtain, 1986) outlines the steps of a curriculum process which a course designer must follow to develop subject matter courses as: diagnosis of needs, formulation of objectives, selection of content, organization of content, selection of learning

experiences, organization of learning experiences, determination of what to evaluate and the means to evaluate.

**Keywords:** language, curriculum, frameworks, course design, development.

### Introduction:

There are various frameworks for the process of curriculum development. According to Graves (1996) many frameworks have been proposed for the process of curriculum development and course design through which they are broken down into their components and sub-components. Such frameworks are useful since they provide an organized way in understanding a complex process; they provide domains of inquiry for teachers, through which each component brings up ideas and raises issues for the teacher to pursue; and finally they provide a set of terms currently in vogue about course development and thus a common professional jargon and provides access to the ideas of others. Different models have been proposed for processes involved in language curriculum development when all of these models highly overlap with each other to some extent. One of these models has been proposed by Tabawho (1962, cited in Dubin and Olshtain, 1986) outlines the steps of a curriculum process which a course designer must follow to develop subject matter courses as: diagnosis of needs, formulation of objectives, selection of content, organization of content, selection of learning experiences, organization of learning experiences, determination of what to evaluate and the means to evaluate. According to Graves (2000), both classic models of curriculum design as well as recent

models consist of certain components including setting objectives based on some form of assessment; determining content materials and methods and evaluation and he proposes the following framework of course development processes:

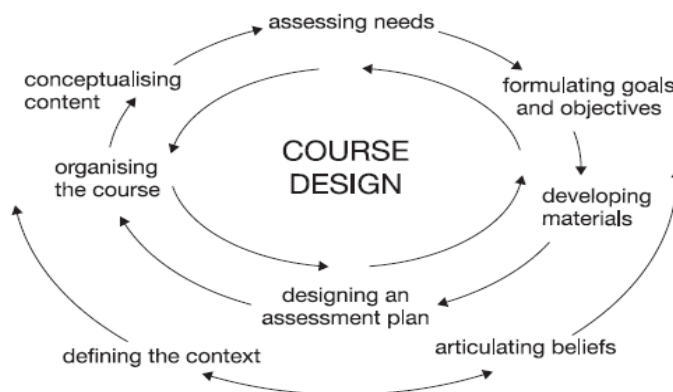


Figure 1 Grave's (2000) model of curriculum design process

Graves (2000) maintains that the components of this framework are interrelated and each component influences and is influenced by other components. “Course design is a system in the sense that planning for one component will contribute to others; changes to one component will influence all the others”. (Graves, 2000, p. 4).

Nation and Macalister (2010) propose their own model of the process of curriculum development and compare their own model to that of Graves’s (2000).

<i>Language Curriculum Design model</i>	<i>Graves’s framework of course development processes</i>
Environment analysis	Defining the context
Needs analysis	Assessing needs
Principles	Articulating beliefs
Goals	Formulating goals and objectives
Content and sequencing	Organising the course Conceptualising content
Format and presentation	Developing materials
Monitoring and assessment	Designing an assessment plan
Evaluation	Designing an assessment plan

Figure 2 A comparative analysis of Graves's model of curriculum design

Another model of curriculum design has been proposed by Murdoch (1989, cited in Nation & Macalister, 2010). Nation and Macalister (2010) have compared this model with their own in figure 3.

<i>Language Curriculum Design model</i>	<i>Murdoch's model of curriculum design</i>
Environment analysis	Resource limitations that affect classroom activity Sociocultural factors and learning habits of relevance to English teaching Learners' age group, present lifestyle and interests Aspects of target culture that will interest learners and can be exploited in materials
Needs analysis	Learners' present level of competence Reasons for studying English and long-term learning aims
Principles	
Goals	Course objectives
Content and sequencing	Language and procedures to be covered by the course Emphasis on particular skills Themes for course materials and texts: choice of suitable textbooks
Format and presentation	Methodology to be used: type and sequencing of activities
Monitoring and assessment	
Evaluation	

*Figure 3. A comparative analysis of Murdoch's model of curriculum design*

Nation and Macalister (2010) propose some considerations in starting the process of a curriculum development:

1. Curriculum designers and teachers can begin with nothing and gather and write the material. This situation mostly happens due to copyright issues with courses that are likely to be published, or where there is no existing course. From this perspective then, the curriculum designer or teacher is thus responsible for all parts of the curriculum design process.

2. Curriculum designers and teachers can take advantage of a bank of existing materials from which they choose the most appropriate material for the course. Such a bank could be (1) copies of activities prepared by them or other teachers for other courses or for previous deliveries of the course, (2) published additional materials like graded readers, grammar activity books, and conversation texts, speed reading courses etc., (3) newspaper or magazines clippings, recordings from the radio or TV, or photocopies from texts or course books materials. The curriculum designer or teacher selects the bits and accumulate them together to make a course. The curriculum designer or teacher thus takes heavy responsibility for content and sequencing, as well as the goals.

3. Some of the curriculum statements and course books deliberately provide only some part of the material needed for a complete course. Curriculum statements usually give the content and sequencing, goals, and assessment parts of the course, and leave it to the teacher to decide on the materials to be used to deal with the format and presentation.

4. The teacher selects a published course book and employs it as the only material or the main material for the course. This starting point is the easiest if a usable course book is available. A usable book is one where at least half of the material in the book can be used in the course. This makes it worth buying the book and gives the curriculum designer time to work on extra material.

Going through the process of curriculum design occurs in different forms. It has been represented in three different models by Nation and Macalister (2010) as the following:

1. Within a waterfall model the output of one stage becomes the input for the next stage. Such process can begin with the study of the environment and needs to considerations of important principles and the setting of goals, followed by choosing from a list of content items, and finally writing of the lessons. Waterfall model is most likely to be employed in designing commercial course books or in a well- funded curriculum design project. Such situation provides developers with time and resources for systematic curriculum design.

2. Within a focused opportunistic approach the format and presentation part of the curriculum design is typically done first. The material is prepared and gathered to teach the course in advance. Through each re-teaching of the course, one part of the curriculum design process is done thoroughly. From this perspective, a proper needs analysis is not carried out until the third or fourth re-teaching of the course. The criticism against this approach, according to Tessmer and Wedman (1990, cited in Nation and Macalister, 2010), from the point of efficiency, is that working thoroughly on one aspect of curriculum design may result in wasted effort since the findings may not be able to be used in other less-elaborated parts of the curriculum design process. The advantage of this approach is that it allows a concentrated focus with possible high-quality improvements to a course. Such approach needs a high tolerance of some inadequacies in other aspects of curriculum design through having in mind that these will be eventually worked on. About the main reason for employing such approach Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 144) put the following:

The major reason for taking this approach is time pressure. The learners have to be taught and there is not time to do a lot of data gathering or planning. Because teaching most immediately involves format and presentation, this is usually done first. That is, the course is taught using whatever material is available or can be made. During the teaching, the teacher may do some kinds of needs analysis to work out if the lessons need some adjustment. Assessment will also need to be developed as the course is taught. After the first teaching of the course, the teacher might consider content and sequencing on the basis of experience and make some changes so that the second delivery of the course is a bit more organized. This do-what-you-can- when-you-can approach is typical of most curriculum design carried out by teachers. It is clearly not ideal but is realistic. It can be effective if teachers have the opportunity to teach the same course several times, and if they know something about curriculum design so that they can make sensible decisions on where to focus the improvement of the course.

3. A “layers of necessity model” tries to cover all parts of the curriculum design process simultaneously. Tessmer and Wedman (1990, cited in Nation & Macalister, 2010) criticize sequential waterfall-type models on the ground that they require that each stage in the sequence should be done thoroughly in detail before proceeding to the next stage. They claim that this is difficult to do and impractical. They further argue that what is needed in meeting the realities of most curriculum design situations is a model which allows for a good enough for now level of quality to be reached.

There are certain factors involved in deciding on the approach to take in the process of curriculum development. According to Nation and Macalister (2010) deciding on what approach to take depends on some factors such as the starting point, the time available for course preparation, the availability of needs analysis information, the availability of a usable course book, and the skill of the curriculum designer. They further maintain that no matter which approach we choose, the advantage of adhering to a systematic approach to curriculum design with its all parts of a model is that parts of the process are all included. Poor curriculum design misses important parts and does not deal with parts in a principled way.

As yet another model for the process of language curriculum development, Nation and Macalister (2010) propose a negotiated curriculum. They maintain that a negotiated syllabus requires the teacher and the learners as coworkers in making decisions through many of the parts of the

curriculum design process. Through such approach high priority is given to the identification of learner needs within a course and to the need to constantly adapt courses while they are running to satisfy changing needs and circumstances. Negotiated syllabuses are also called “process syllabuses” (Breen, 1987, cited in Nation & Macalister, 2010). The word *process* in the term *process syllabus* implies that as the important feature of this type of syllabus, it focuses on how the syllabus is made rather than what should be in it. Nation and Macalister (2010) introduce some criticisms against a negotiated syllabus, such as the fact that learners may lack enough knowledge or experience with such a syllabus and may feel that their teacher’s expertise should guide the course and thus be reluctant to negotiate or to let their classmates negotiate. The drawback is that learners are not familiar with range of options they can choose from and thus may choose unimaginatively. On the other hand teachers may feel that they are surrendering much of their power and authority in the classroom. Reaching agreement on the part of all learners may be difficult to be achieved in regard to what should be done. The second major drawback is the fact that a fully negotiated syllabus requires considerable teacher skill and time in accessing and producing resources.

In this paper I take Graves’s (2000) model of curriculum design process and three major components as representative of other models and I will try to demonstrate how a contrastive lexical approach facilitates these three steps in language curriculum development. Long and Crookes (1993, cited in Nation & Macalister, 2010) call units of progression “units of analysis” and believe that the choice of the units of analysis should be one of starting points of curriculum design. Nation and Macalister (2010) define units of progression (units of analysis) as the items used to grade the progression of the course. As an example, if the unit of progression was language items, in particular, vocabulary, the units of progression would be words and at a broader level word frequency levels which are similar to those used in grading the levels of simplified readers. If the starting point of a course was determined to be topics, then the units of progression would also be topics with progression through the course marked by an increasing number of topics covered. I will try to demonstrate how taking a contrastive lexical syllabus progression units, and as the first step in curriculum design, facilitates some other processes introduced by Graves (2000) in language curriculum development. According to Baleghizadeh (2008), within the last three decades such units of analysis have been proposed, all of them suffering from the same faults previously found with the structural syllabus. One way to integrate all these units of analysis would be choosing contrastive lexical expressions (chunks) as the units of progression. Such an approach takes all the other units of progression into consideration since it involves using lexicon (words), is analyzable into grammatical structures, is closely related to functional role of language (through being situation bound utterances) and pragmatic aspects of language, provide an understanding of different types of a language (genre) and be employed together with other learning strategies.

### **Beliefs about the nature of language and language learning**

Gray (1990) maintains that new attitudes to syllabus design are in the air due to changing frames of reference; our views of language, teaching methodology, and learner contributions are all changing. Grave (2000) believes that in designing a course, beliefs must be articulated and in answering to the question: which beliefs must be taken into consideration.

Graves (2000) maintains that your view of what language is or what being proficient in a language means determines what you teach and how you teach it. The nature of language has been defined in many ways, e.g. as pronunciation, grammar, lexis, discourse, or as form, meaning, and use. Being proficient in a second language has been considered as having communicative competence which include grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. In this regard Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) claim that if knowledge in language learning is seen largely as consisting of thing-like entities it is of no surprise that the most prevalent exercise type in FLT

materials concentrate on the accumulation and manipulation of items. This view of how knowledge is acquired seems to be so strong that any methodology with an emphasis on a non-analytic view toward a foreign language may be considered as unacceptable. Graves (2000) maintains that sociolinguistic issues bridge language and social context in that they are concerned with how language is adapted to match the social context. Socio-cultural issues deal with the relationship between language and culture and include different dimensions of culture such as social values, attitudes, norms, customs, and products. Learning can be considered as realized in many ways such as problem solving and discover, a deductive process, as a cognitive process, involving mental activity, or an affective process involving emotional activities and risk taking, and a social process involving learning with others. Teaching can go on two extremes of teachers as sole providers of knowledge or as learners' co-negotiators of knowledge, methods and skills of learning. Taking language as constructed of formulaic expressions brings the concept of language, culture and pragmatics together. It is claimed that as rich sources of pragmatic (mostly pragmalinguistic) knowledge, prefabricated expressions and comparisons of such expressions between L1 and L2 are highly effective in bringing second/foreign pragmatic acquisition and second/foreign language acquisition together in which whenever pragmatic failures occur, through a metapragmatic process, prefabricated expressions are revised in the light of their L1 equivalents in order to fulfill functions in the context. From a speech act theory viewpoint also it can be claimed that prefabricated structures (as locutionary forms) are the main building blocks in producing meaning (as illocutionary force) in our achieving of particular functions (as perlocutioary effect). Kecskes (2000) relates the concept of formulaic expression to pragmatics through introducing situation-bound utterances (SBUs) as factors effective in knowledge in use. It is argued that L1 can be employed as a very powerful and effective source in order to like SBUs as forms to SBUs as pragmatic meaning. The stance taken is that of Wierzbicka (1992, cited in Kecskes, 2000) who holds that "universal human cultural concepts are lexicalized in various forms in different languages" (Kecskes, 2000, p. 608). He defines SBUs as "highly conventionalized, prefabricated units whose occurrence is tied to standardized communicative situations" (Kecskes, 2000, p. 606).

### **Conceptualizing the Content**

Conceptualizing the content according to Grave (2000) involves articulating what you will explicitly teach or will explicitly concentrate on in the course and justifying choices that you make. Through presenting learners with contrastive formulaic expressions (CFEs) they feel that they can put what they learn into immediate use due to the functional and pragmatic nature of such structures. Graves (2000) proposes three categories for conceptualizing the content. Focus on language includes such components as linguistic skills, topics/themes, situations, tasks, communicative functions, competencies, and genres. Research has shown that formulaic expressions promote all four language skills (Wood, 2007; Wood, 2006; Erman, 2009; Chen & Baker, 2010). Formulaic expressions facilitate transactions and interactions within situations (introduced in a situational syllabus) due to being flexible as fixed rote-learned utterances capable of being manipulated (Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998) and also for being situation-bound utterances (Kecskes, 2000, 2010). All lexical phrases are social interactions, topics, and discourse devices (Wray and Perkins, 2000; Wood, 2002). In regard to communicative functions some claim that formulaic expressions are much more than strings of words linked together through collocations, and communicative contents of language are highly composed of these phrasal structures. Such expressions are linked to single meaning/pragmatic function (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008), and promotes communicative competence (Miller, 2010), and serve as communicative strategies (Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998; Agulio, 2001) realized in standardized communicative situations (Kecskes, 2000). According to Graves (2000) competencies unite situations, linguistics skills, and functions. Formulaicity obviates one criticism proposed by Graves (2000) who contends that in most human interactions we cannot predict the path interactions will take or the language used to get there since formulaic expressions compensate for lack of competence in target language rules (Myles,

Hooper & Mitchell, 1998). Formulaicity facilitates performing tasks due to their balanced form-meaning relations, and their potentiality in saving effort in processing (Wray, 2000). As mentioned before, all lexical phrases, according to Wood (2002), are social interactions, topics, and discourse devices. Nekrasova (2009) maintains that according to Biber, Conrad and Cortes (2004) the four primary functions of lexical bundles identified in English academic registers and conversation includes (a) stance bundles which are involved in conveying interpersonal meaning like attitudes and assessment (e.g., it is important to), (b) discourse organizers which shows the relationship between prior and coming discourse such as topic introduction and elaboration (e.g., nothing to do with, on the other hand), (c) referential bundles which are involved in performing ideational functions and are employed to make direct reference to concrete or abstract entities such as time, place, and text references (e.g., is one of the, in the form of, as a result of), (d) special conversational bundles that are mostly employed in conversation to convey politeness, inquiry, and report (e.g., thank you very much, what are you doing, I said to you).

Such contentions prove the efficiency of formulaic expressions in teaching and learning genre. As the second category, Graves (2000) introduce focus on learning and learners with subcomponents of affective goals, interpersonal skills, and learning strategies. Motivation as one aspect of affective goals is promoted through employing formulaic expressions (Feng-xia, 2009) and promote learners' confidence in learning and speaking (Xingping&Keisheng, 2007; Aguilo, 2001). In regard to interpersonal skill, formulaic expressions are highly interactional structures (Nekrasova, 2009) and represent formula for certain social interactions (Kecskes, 2000). Wray (2000) introduces two functions of formulaic sequences. The first one is saving effort in processing. The second function is achieving interactional functions. And finally in regards to learning strategies it can be asserted that the use of formulaic expressions can be considered as a communicative strategy, employed by learners to compensate for their lack of competence in target language rules (Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998; Aguilo, 2001). The third category proposed by Graves (2000) is a focus on social context which is comprised of sociolinguistic skills, socio-cultural skills and sociopolitical skills. In regard to sociolinguistic (pragmalinguistic skills) it can be claimed that formulaic expressions can provide units of analysis in regards to the appropriate use of language, and an L1-L2 comparison of such expressions provides a good basis for sociolinguistic comparisons between the two languages. Formulaic expressions can be taken as good sources of socio-cultural information in presenting values, norms, and expectations. Comparisons of L1 and L2 cultural norms provide a critical stance to exercise intercultural competence.

### **Assessing Needs**

Munby (1978, cited in Berwick, 1989) believes that the most crucial problem at present in the field of foreign language syllabus design and material production is how to validly determine the target communicative competence. This would result in a reluctance to begin with the learner rather than the text and the lack of a rigorous system for discovering the communicative needs that are prerequisite to the proper specification of what is to be taught. Berwick (1989) maintains that the definition of need is the basis of any needs assessment. Unfortunately, an operational definition needs to be constructed afresh for each assessment since its elements will change in accordance with the values of the assessor or influential constituents of an educational system. According to White (1988), it is important to be aware that different models of curriculum represent the expression of different value systems and thus of quite varied views on education. In fact it is hardly surprising that views on these issues will be value-laden, given the fact that curriculum studies attempt to answer quite fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of education. The general definition involves a gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state. Brindley (1989) maintains that since learners do not have the opportunity to learn the whole language in any certain course of instruction, choices must be made.

If instruction is to be realized around the learners and pertinent to their purposes, then information about their current and desired interaction patterns and their perceived difficulties is quite helpful in determining program goals which in turn can be turned into learning objectives. Grave (2000) contends that needs assessment is a systematic and continuous process of obtaining information about students' needs and preferences, interpreting information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs. It is based on the belief that learning is not simply a matter of learners absorbing pre-designed knowledge the teachers gives them, bur is a process in which learners can and should take part. It believes that needs are multifaceted and alterable. For a course to satisfy learners' needs it is necessary to gather information about the current state of the learners, where they are in terms of language ability, learning preferences, and the desired goals or change, and where they would like to be or what they want to achieve, change, and so on. Formulaic expressions can be taken as main determinant of learners' current state of affairs since the theoretical basis of the fact that formulaic expressions promote fluency (Miller, 2010; Wray & Perkins, 2000; Erman, 2009; Wood, 2007, 2006, 2002) and accuracy (Boers, Kappel, Stenger & Demecheleer, 2006; Ellis, Simpson-Vlach & Maynard, 2008) in language learners has been already well established in literature and also the positive relationship between one's knowledge about formulaic expressions and his/her general language proficiency (Nekrasova, 2009; Wood, 2007; Boers, Kappel, Stenger & Demecheleer, 2006) has been proved.

### **Final Remarks**

Frameworks proposed so far for the process of language curriculum development are useful in providing a systematic approach to a complex process. Different models have been proposed for processes involved in language curriculum development and all of these models highly overlap with each other to some extent. Graves (2000) maintains that through a course design process planning for one component will contribute to others, so proving that one certain perspective to some components of curriculum development promotes and facilitates this process would result in the belief that such improvement influences the other components as well. The claim is that through taking contrastive lexical bundles as units of analysis at least three major components of language curriculum process are facilitated, and thus contribute to the general process of language curriculum development. In regards to beliefs about the nature of language and language learning, the claim is that considering language as composed of prefabricated items facilitates bridging the gap between language and social context in that they help language adapt to match the social context, and this is realized due to the situation-bound nature of formulaic utterances. Contrastive formulaic expressions satisfy all the categories proposed by Graves (2000) in conceptualizing the content of a language curriculum process. Formulaic expressions can be taken as main determinants of learners' current state of affairs since the theoretical basis of the fact that formulaic expressions promote fluency and accuracy in language learners has been already well established in literature and also the positive relationship between one's knowledge about formulaic expressions and his/her general language proficiency has been proved.

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