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## Negotiated Syllabus on General English Course at University Level: Adjusting between Students' Need and Learning Goals

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### Abstract

Negotiated syllabus refers to syllabus which is designed based on discussion about how learning and instruction are arranged and carried out in the classroom that will be decided by the lecturers and students. It is important to have negotiated syllabus because there are many problems may be found related to syllabus that has already designed earlier. It needs to adjust the syllabus with things that the students actually need on their learning. Moreover, English is learnt by various students at university level as general course which comprehend their language ability in form of communicative and educational purposes. The students probably have different ability and background knowledge about English as foreign language. They also have various purposes in learning English as a course in university level. Therefore, this essay aims to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of negotiated syllabuses in general English courses, where they can be viewed from two different sides. First, it is considered based on students' need which are various because of their background knowledge and basic language ability. Second, it is viewed from learning goals as the main target of a lecturer in designing a course. Therefore, negotiated syllabus is needed to be implemented in conducting general English courses even it has advantages and disadvantages on the implementation progress.

**Keywords:** Negotiated Syllabus, General English, Students Need, Learning Goal

### Introduction

Teaching English at university level has different challenge where it is totally different with teaching English at school level. Generally, the students at university level already have various background knowledge and ability. They also have different purposes in learning because they commonly get English as general subject on the early semester and as specific purposes based on their focused study in the next semester. Teaching English as general subject means that teach the students in order to know about English as global language which is learnt as foreign language in Indonesia.

Therefore, syllabus have to be designed preparedly in order to achieve the learning goals successfully. Syllabus is generally described as a descriptive outline and brief of topics that should be covered in an education or training course. The syllabus usually offers specific information about the course and is commonly drafted by the lecturer who will handle the course. A syllabus is also defined as a document that summaries all the essential information about a course. It lists the topics that will be learned by the students, includes the planned dates of any coursework such as tests, quizzes, or exams.

It is important for the lecturers to have syllabus when they are going to start the courses. On the first meeting, the lecturers usually start the course with giving the brief explanation about the purposes of the course, the rules on the classroom, and other related aspects which support in achieving the goals. However, most of the lecturers may get unpredictable cases on their first meeting where the syllabus which previously designed is not suitable with the students that will learn the material on the course.

Designing a syllabus usually begins with determining students' needs, developing the aims and learning objectives to fulfill the needs. It also sets the course structure, types of teaching methods that

will be used, materials that will be delivered, and ends by carrying out an evaluation. By using a clear, orderly, short, and summary manner, the syllabus aims to put the subject and the material associated to it into context. It should not be restricted to only the subject (Rubio et al., 2022). On the other hand, syllabus design as a part of curriculum development shares several facts that look like a process in curriculum development.

For example, a curriculum specifies a purpose, but a syllabus specifies knowledge, skills, values, and experience (Content) offered to reach intended learning outcomes. A syllabus shows an order when each content may appear (Order of content). A syllabus also specifies how teaching and learning is planned and measured. It is clear now that curriculum is distinct from syllabus. We can say that syllabus is part of curriculum, in other words curriculum includes syllabus, not vice versa.

One curriculum may contain several syllabuses. The objectives of curriculum design are to create a course that has useful goals, fulfills those goals, is user-satisfying, and does all of this in an effective manner (Nation & Macalister, 2010). In each curriculum, they have syllabus for specific classes or levels. The journey of how syllabus design in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has led to language curriculum development as may be witnessed in present practices can be understood by first understanding what a curriculum and syllabus are.

Hence, in order to balance the needs of the students with the objectives of learning, a negotiated syllabus must be adopted. It is usually designed on the first meeting on the course where there are most unavoidable cases cannot be solved. In a negotiated syllabus, lecturers and students collaborate to decide on many aspects of the curriculum design process (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

A syllabus that has been negotiated provides for full student engagement in the selection of the course's subject matter, method of instruction, route of instruction, method of assessment, and other factors. By doing so, it ought to demonstrate the fundamental idea that the requirements of the student come first. The current argument is that the strong version of the negotiated model, which includes full student participation, would, practically speaking, be impossible to implement anywhere other than in very small groups or one-on-one settings. Operating such an extreme negotiating approach would be very challenging for both students and professors.

Moreover, negotiated syllabus has strength and weakness on the implementation just like other syllabus because debatable topics on the syllabus include what elements can be negotiated. It is possible when the syllabus is being negotiated, some problems may be solved while other problems will arise. So, this article aims to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of negotiated syllabuses in general English courses, where they can be seen from two distinct angles.

First, it is considered based on students' need which are various because of their background knowledge and basic language ability. Students who learn English as general subject at university level usual comes from various department which absolutely have different language ability. They also have various purposes in learning English as foreign language. Some of them may learn English only to know English as a global language that they have to be learnt in order to accomplish the subject. The others may learn English in order to gain their knowledge and ability because they know that English plays an essential role in their lives as it helps in communication.

Second, it is viewed from learning goals as the main target of a lecturer in designing a course. The lecturers are usually designed the syllabus before they starting the class on the first meeting. Typically, they establish the learning objectives that the students are expected to meet by the end of the course. The information that will be distributed to the students, the exercises and assignments that will be provided to them, and the exams that will be used as a measure of success were also established.

Therefore, negotiated syllabus is needed to be implemented in conducting general English courses even it has advantages and disadvantages on the implementation progress. It because both of the view of students and lecturers are usually contained several unavoidable problems which make negotiated syllabus need to be used. For this reason, it can be argued that a negotiated syllabus for General English at the university level that is implemented carefully and in a planned manner may have various benefits for professors and students.

### **Why do We Need to Have Negotiated Syllabus on General English Course?**

English is learnt as general subject at university level besides it is also learnt as specific purposes depends on the curriculum used on the university. The students made the decision to learn English for a variety of reasons. One of the most influential factors seemed to be the students' family members such as mother or father or both. They affect them in making the decision. Then, the students began studying English because it was a required subject in school. Only a few pupils acknowledged that they loved learning English and thought it was important and required for surviving in the modern world (Klimova, 2011).

Given its enormous acceptability and comprehension on a global scale, English's significance cannot be emphasized. Whether a student is pursuing their education, a future profession, or simply being accepted into society, the importance of English in university cannot be overlooked.

Moreover, students firmly believe that learning English is important for their future. They believe that since English is a universal language, students who travel overseas will need to know it. They also believe that it might be necessary for their future employment. It cannot be accepted that knowing English well is a requirement for basic human knowledge and that English was originally a computer language (Klimova, 2011).

Therefore, the syllabus is crucial since it serves as a road map for how to go forward with learning. A syllabus is a type of instructional tool that establishes expectations for what will occur throughout the entire course session (Rahimpour, 2015). It specifies the subjects and ideas that will form the basis of the final exam questions for the students (Rubio et al., 2022). The functions and concepts that are used to evaluate students' performance are contained in a syllabus, which essentially acts as a contract between the students and the lecturers.

In keeping with this, some professors have the opportunity to create their own curricula. While some argue that those with specialized knowledge should be responsible for developing the syllabus. But if lecturers are to succeed, it is thought that they should receive the proper training to provide them with the knowledge and abilities to create their own curricula. They should nevertheless consider the curriculum flexible and changeable (Rahimpour, 2015). In fact, the curriculum should be agreed upon by instructors and their pupils after an appraisal of their demands.

In many ways, the idea of negotiated syllabus is a development of universal design. The fundamental tenet is that students have autonomy over the learning tools they select (Smallman, 2020). The negotiated model completely differs from previous curricula in that it enables full student engagement in the choice of subject matter, method of instruction, path of instruction, assessment, and other factors (Andriani et al., 2021). By doing so, it ought to demonstrate the fundamental idea that the requirements of the student come first. The current argument is that the strong version of the negotiated model, which includes full student participation, would, practically speaking, be impossible to implement anywhere other than in very small groups or one-on-one settings. Operating such an extreme negotiating approach would be very challenging for both students and professors.

There are various justifications for the implementation of negotiated syllabuses that briefly address the circumstances raised by Breen & Littlejohn (2000). First, when the professor and students come from diverse backgrounds, a negotiated syllabus must be put into practice. One of the frequent occurrences in the majority of these university-level language teaching contexts is the environment that develops at the start of the academic year when the lecturer and the students have completely unrelated backgrounds and don't know anything about one another. Because they come from various socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and are meeting for the first time in class, they typically have little concept about each other's perspectives at first. No matter what demographic characteristics the lecturer and the students share, they eventually get to know one another because of their differences.

On general English subject, lecturers often found students with various background where it may affect the strategies and techniques that has been design on the syllabus. The students also have different level of basic English ability which may affect materials that have been prepared on the syllabus. Therefore, on that situation, the lecturers need to have negotiated syllabus in order to re-adjust the strategies, techniques, materials and even the references that has already designed before starting the class.

Second, negotiated syllabus is needed if there is short time to design the syllabus and it becomes the most beneficial choices should be made. It often becomes challenging issue for some lecturers in making decision about designing the syllabus especially when limited time available arise as the problem. When the professor and students come from diverse backgrounds, it is first necessary to establish a negotiated syllabus. One of the frequent occurrences in most of these university-level language teaching environments is the mood that develops at the start of the academic year when the lecturer and the students are strangers to one another and come from completely different backgrounds. Since they come from diverse socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and are meeting for the first time in class, they frequently have little concept about each other's perspectives at first. Regardless of the lecturer's and students' demographic characteristics, they eventually get to know one another because of their differences.

Obviously, limited time always become common problems found by the lecturers on running the General English course. It because their responsibility is not only related with teaching and learning process, they have to do other tasks besides lecturing such as doing a research. This problem makes them do not have enough time to prepare the syllabus well that make them to use negotiated syllabus as the best solution.

Third, notably at the university level, there is a fairly diverse set of students which has various background and level of knowledge. There is a requirement to find common ground where the lecturers need to put the aims on the different group of students. After graduating from high school, students in Indonesia take an entrance exam for universities, choosing the ones that best suit their interests. The students in a certain university come from different cities and regions in Indonesia which means the students in a university are very various social, cultural, ethnic and economic elements.

Fourth, in certain condition, it is not possible to have the need analysis. One of the key steps in the curriculum design process is to conduct a needs analysis, which offers important information on student profiles in terms of their needs, lacks, and preferences in the language teaching process. However, a course may not have the opportunity to do an initial requirements analysis while building their curriculum and choosing the syllabus that will be suitable for their pupils. Students often enroll in their programs at the start of the semester once the university's course calendar is announced. The majority of the time, it is impossible to conduct a need analysis for students at the beginning of the semester due to this time constraint and a variety of other issues such a severe workload and a lack of capacity.

Therefore, negotiated syllabus may have been conducted if the lecturers found one of the problems above. It means to fulfill the students' need in learning English a general subject and also to achieve the goals which generally to make the students are able to communicate by using English as foreign language. Absolutely, in this kind of syllabus, the lecturers should consider the main goals of learning that stated on curriculum.

### **The Advantages of Implemented Negotiated Syllabus on General English Course**

The agreed-upon implementation unquestionably has advantages that might be characterized as positive effects. A negotiated syllabus offers an alternative to the usual position of lecturers, which is an authoritarian one in which they are the authority in the classroom and independently decide how it will be run. In a negotiated syllabus, lecturers in general English courses can decide with their students on classroom processes such the kinds of assignments, exercises, and evaluation components.

By doing this, these lecturers might play a more assisting and directing role, which is what lecturers should be doing according to modern pedagogy. The negotiation process in these classes enables the lecturers to get to know the students they have just met, increasing their awareness of their requirements, wants, and deficiencies. Knowing these characteristics, lecturers plan tasks, activities, and supplemental resources that the students will find engaging. The negotiating process will assist lecturers identify the topics, issues, and subjects that interest their students so they may plan more effective classes. A conscientious approach to preparing for a school year like this will also help lecturers advance personally.

The negotiated syllabus may also benefit the students in a number of ways. Many of these courses don't make any mention of consulting with their students when designing their curricula or

curriculum. In these situations, the majority of decisions about classroom activities and the requirements of potential students are made by lecturers. According to Boon (2011), lecturers or administrators work alone to predict, interpret, and map out a pre-designed syllabus that is intended to lead students to a specific state of knowledge over a specific amount of time. As a result, students are not involved in the important decision-making process. Many misunderstandings arise at this moment, which could hinder learning for many kids.

The objectives, content, management, and methods of evaluation are, however, actively negotiated by the students in these courses thanks to a negotiated syllabus. Students in these classes can benefit from this by setting their own goals and becoming extremely motivated to accomplish them.

Additionally, a subject's syllabus should contain additional information that is important for a proper comprehension of the subject in the context of the degree or master's degree for which it is taught, rather than only reflecting the teaching guide (Rubio et al., 2022). Through negotiated syllabus, goals and learning objectives on every degree of education will be more comprehensive and support the students' need in learning English even it is learnt as general subject.

Students approach learning tasks accordingly because they are aware of what to anticipate and what is required of them. Involving the students in developing the syllabus has a significant impact on motivation, contentment, and dedication to the course, as shown by Nation & Macalister (2010). They assume more responsibility for their own education, which strengthens their capacity for learning and autonomy throughout the learning process.

Hence, it can be summed up that negotiated syllabus bring some advantages for the lecturers and students. Both of them can take the turn to be optimized the syllabus to achieve the learning goals. The students' need also can be accomplished even there are some problems found in negotiated the syllabus.

### **Problems may be Found in Implementing Negotiated Syllabus**

Even while a negotiated syllabus has many benefits for both students and lecturers, it also has several issues that may arise in actual use. The first issue is with the students who could find it awkward to speak with the lecturers. The students usually received the instruction about the lecturing from the lecturers, but on negotiated syllabus they are encouraged to speak up more in order to show their ideas about the syllabus. They also may do not know how to explain their ideas related to the goals that should be achieved on the subjects. As a result, it can make negotiated syllabus can not achieve the goals as expected before.

Moreover, the other problem can be found is some goals that has been designed earlier may not be achieved because the content on the syllabus has been negotiated. For example, the lecturer has prepared syllabus which expect the students are able to write a scientific article. In the first meeting, it was found that the students have low writing ability that make it impossible to conduct writing articles as the material. It makes the lecturers should make the goals suitable with the students' ability.

It is noted that a negotiated syllabus has a few flaws that can be classified into two categories (Nation & Macalister, 2010). The first arises from a lack of understanding or prior exposure to such a course. Because they believe that the lecturers' competence should be directing the course, students may be reluctant to negotiate or to let their classmates negotiate. A completely negotiated syllabus necessitates significant instructor skill and time in order to acquire and provide resources, which is the second big drawback. This workload can be partially divided when there are multiple lecturers teaching classes that are similar.

Therefore, because of the issues above, the other problem also arises where the lecturers should re-arrange the assessment and evaluation. It is impossible to give an assessment in form of long essay if the students are not able to write short essay. This condition makes the lecturers to design again the assessment or evaluation form in order to adjust with negotiated syllabus that has been conducted.

Here are some implementation issues with a negotiated syllabus, broken down into issues with students and lecturers.

**Table 1. Implementation Issues with AwNegotiated Syllabus**

Students' Factors	Lecturers' Factors
1. The students have limited awareness of the possible activities.	1. Negotiation takes valuable class time where it usually takes over all the first meeting.
2. The students are perfectly happy to let the lecturer teach.	2. The lecturer's capability will be limited if the lecturer teaches the same lessons to several different classes.
3. The students need training in negotiation.	3. The school expects all students in different classes to follow the same course.
4. There is no course book that makes students do not feel a sense of progress on their learning.	4. What is done in the class needs to be similar to what is done in the other classes.
5. Students' wants are only a small part of their needs.	5. There are not a lot of teaching resources will be used.
6. The needs of the students are too various to achieve the agreement.	6. The lecturer is not skilled enough to handle with short-term planning.
7. Cultural expectations lead the students unenthusiastic to negotiate with the lecturer.	
8. The students have lack of confidence in negotiating with the lecturer.	
9. Negotiation will bring a negative effect on students' attitudes because the lecturer is not taking control of the course.	

However, these problems still can be solved through remaining the lecturers' role as the main part on the course. The lecturers should be confidence in to negotiated and make decision related to the syllabus. The goals should be the appropriate thing on the negotiating syllabus.

### Conclusion

Negotiated syllabus is highly recommended to be applied in general English course if the lecturers found some cases such as limited time to have get initial need analysis or various students' knowledge and language ability. The problems also may arise in implementing negotiated syllabus, but the lecturers should handle and have a control on their class during negotiate the syllabus with the students. Negotiated syllabus will give a better result in achieve the learning goals if it is implemented by considering each aspect on syllabus design.

Additionally, negotiated syllabuses are likely more concerned with student needs than with instructors' preferences. As a result, negotiated syllabuses play a vital role in the teaching and learning processes for both lecturers and students. It will help pupils achieve their language learning objectives and improve their academic performance. For lecturers, it will be useful in choosing the right materials to give to students, especially for a new lecturer who is unfamiliar with the circumstances of the setting and the diverse backgrounds of students. This particular syllabus, though, cannot be used in every circumstance. The circumstances that the syllabus may be appropriate to employ, as described in the preceding section, must be considered by lecturers. The requirements and components of a negotiated syllabus must be thoroughly understood by lecturers as well because they have a significant impact on how well the negotiated syllabus is implemented.

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