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Designing a Learner-Centered Syllabus
Mehran Sabet

Introduction

"One of the fundamental principles underlying learner-center-ed systems of language is that teaching/learning programs should be responsive to the learners' needs. It is now widely accepted as a principle of program design that needs analysis is a vital prerequisite of the specification of language learning objectives." (Brindley, 1990)

The foundations for a successful and well-designed curriculum largely depend on how well the students' needs and interests have been evaluated. To ignore this vital point is to undermine the goals and objectives of a program. No curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learners' short and long term needs have been taken into account.

Teachers' approaches to needs are heavily influenced by their own experiences as well as their personal opinions on how a second language needs to be taught or learned. But when stu-dents' needs and interests have been given top priority, there is little room to argue with what ought to be taught. One way in which teachers or schools can obtain students' input is through course evaluations and questionnaires. Most evaluations and questionnaires are given at the end of the school year. However, it is a good idea to ask students for their input at the start of the year to find out more about their immediate and long-term needs.

On the other hand, the goals and objectives of a program should not be permanent, and must be evaluated and possibly altered if they contradict with the students' own goals. Needs are not absolute either; they continually need to be examined for validity to ensure that they remain real needs for the students involved.

Types of Needs

Needs vary depending on the members of the target group. A person who is planning to move to an English-speaking country permanently will need the language necessary to buy food, apply for a job, fill in an application at a bank, rent an apartment, check into a hospital, and so forth. A businessperson, who will only be staying for a short time, needs to know more about survival English that has to do with his/her field than anything else. And a tourist, who is not planning to stay more than a few weeks, is more interested to know the necessary and basic language required to deal with situations such as shopping, ordering food in a restaurant, reporting a crime, asking for directions, and so on. Brown (1995) calls these kinds of needs "subjective needs." These kinds of needs are more concerned about the learners' needs in terms of "wants," "desires," and "expectations" and are different from one group to another. "Objective needs" are those needs determined on the basis of students' knowledge and proficiency levels, and where they need to be within a year or two as far as academic standards are concerned. To distinguish between these two types of needs and to try to separate them is not an easy task, because the categories are often interrelated. However, schools and teachers must try to find out as much information about their students' subjective needs as they can, and try to include them in their curriculum and course-syllabus. There are many teachers who believe that learners, especially the ones with lower proficiency levels, do not know what their language needs are, should not be consulted, and cannot be a reliable source of input as to what it takes to be a successful learner. There are also learners from certain backgrounds who are not used to expressing their opinions and participating in a decision-making process. It is the task of educators to determine ways to get input from learners,

and to make decisions as to which of these needs ought to be considered more seriously than the others. To ignore the students' needs completely is not only a sign of professional negligence, but could prove to be educational suicide for educators and decision makers responsible for planning curriculum.
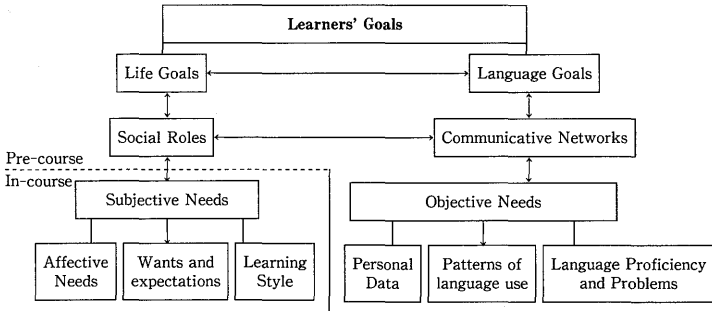
"Learners are, in a sense, clients and their needs should be served, but at the same time, teachers, administrators, employers, institutions, societies, and even whole nations have needs that also have a bearing on the language teaching and learning situation. Learners should be the focus of needs analysis, but many other sources of types of information must be considered in doing a sound assessment of their needs" (Brown, 1995). It is important for a school to be responsive not only to the learners' desired needs but also to society as a whole. As an institution for higher education, universities have an obligation to be responsive to the needs of society by preparing their students for the challenges and tasks they might face once they start working or taking roles as productive citizens.

Sharing information about what teachers' as well as learners' expectations are, students' present proficiency levels, and learners' anticipated future use of the language should help both parties to come to a better understanding of school curriculum. "This information sharing should be an ongoing process and teachers must show more flexibility and willingness to share decision-making power with their students" (Brindley, 1990). The various types of information required by teachers in any learner-centered curriculum are summarized in Chart 1.

As can be seen, once teachers have focused on learners' preferences, other factors such as their cultural and educational background, age, aptitude, attitude, motivation, personality, and future plans need to be considered in developing any curriculum and course syllabus. What is important is that educators must decide what should be included, since needs statements are open

to contextual interpretation and contain value judgments. What is usually established as a need is a result of the mutual consent and judgment of the people involved.

Chart 1 : Information Requirements of a Learner-Centered System

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │     Learners' Goals     │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
              ┌────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
              │ Life Goals │◄────────────►│  Language Goals  │
              └────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
              ┌─────────────┐             ┌──────────────────────┐
              │ Social Roles│◄───────────►│ Communicative Networks│
              └─────────────┘             └──────────────────────┘
Pre-course
--------------------------------------------------------------
In-course
      ┌─────────────────────┐       ┌────────────────────┐
      │   Subjective Needs  │       │   Objective Needs  │
      └─────────────────────┘       └────────────────────┘
┌──────────┬────────────┬──────────┐┌──────────┬────────────┬──────────────────┐
│Affective │Wants and   │Learning  ││Personal  │Patterns of │Language Proficiency│
│Needs     │expectations│Style     ││Data      │language use│and Problems      │
└──────────┴────────────┴──────────┘└──────────┴────────────┴──────────────────┘
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(Brindley, 1990, p. 71)

The Syllabus

Brown (1995) defines syllabus as "ways of organizing the course and materials." A well-designed syllabus is a must for a successful language program, both from the teachers' and the students' points of view. It gives direction to the teachers as to what specifically to teach and in what order to teach it, and it provides students with a better understanding of what their language competency is expected to be at the end of the course. A syllabus provides a focus for what should be studied, along with a rationale for how that content should be selected and sequenced.

At Seigakuin University and Joshi Seigakuin Junior College, the syllabuses for the Seigakuin English Program (SEP) program B and C, are based on the speaking proficiency criteria set for the Intermediate and Novice levels in the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Guidelines (Buck, 1988).

Knowing that most of the students' proficiency level is somewhere between Novice High and Intermediate Mid, approprite syllabus contents and contexts were chosen for these levels, based on the criteria in Chart 2.

Hadley suggests what some of the contexts likely to be included at the Novice and Intermediate levels in general purpose English courses are; basic travel and survival needs (food, clothing, hotel accommodations, transportation, and the like), handling daily social encounters appropriately, and coping with school- or work-related situations. Students can also be taught to handle simple question and answer situations and discuss or write about concrete topics, such as their own background, family, and interests (Hadley, 1993). Although she points out that a syllabus should not be limited to these topics, she says that at lower proficiency levels students feel more comfortable and confident when dealing with familiar and predictable situations.

Chart 2 : Assessment Criteria-Speaking Proficiency

Global Task/ Functions	Context	Content	Accuracy	Text Type
Intermediate				
Can maintain simple face-to face conversation by asking and responding to simple questions	Some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations	Topics related primarily to self and immediate environment	Can be understood, with some repetition, by speakers accustomed to non-native speakers	Discrete sentences and strings of sentences
Novice				
Can produce only formulaic utterance, lists and enumerations	Highly predict-able common daily settings	Common discrete elements of daily life	May be difficult to understand, even for those accustomed to non-native speakers	Discrete words and phrases

(Buck, 1989, Appendix, p. 9)

Keeping the students' overall needs in mind, we could say that the syllabuses for these two levels were designed to be functional, situational, and structural. Functional means that students will learn to use general purpose social English such as: greeting people, giving information about selves, requesting and refusing, and talking about past events. Situational means that the learners will learn to function in situations such as: at a restaurant, at a hotel, and in a shop. Finally, structural means that materials are also based on grammar structures appropriate for students at these two levels.

The Questionnaire

At the beginning of the school year, this writer combined the topics of the syllabuses from both SEP B and SEP C and gave them to 82 students in four classes to be rated. Some additional topics such as academic English, which is part of the SEP A syllabus, and travel English were added to the list, bringing the total number of topics to 34. The students (two classes from the University and two from the Junior College) were asked to rate the topics in order of importance. The manner in which this was accomplished was that the topics which they felt were very important for them to learn for that academic year were given two points, the topics which were deemed slightly important were given one point, and the topics which they felt were not important were given zero points. Copies of the questionnaire were handed out to the students, and they were asked to read and rate them at home and return them in the next class. In order to make the questionnaire more comprehensible, some examples were written for each topic, as in Table 1.

Table 1: Samples from the Questionnaire
Please rate the following topics according to importance.

very important＝2
important＝1
not important＝0

——**Greetings**: Saying hello and good-bye, introducing yourself.
e.g.) Hi, I'm from New York. Pleased to meet you.

——**Work/School**: Talking about work and school.
e.g.) I'm a student. I'm studying English. I work part time, too.

——**Family**: Talking about the family.
e.g.) What does your father do? Do you have any brothers or sisters?

——**Preferences**: Expressing likes, dislikes, and favorites.
e.g.) I like comedies and action movies, but I don't like horror films.

——**Times and dates**: Asking and giving the time, using days of the week, months and dates.
e.g.) What time do you get up? When is your birthday?

Once the questionnaires were collected, the points for each topic were added, and the topics with the highest point totals were logically considered to be the ones that students felt were very important for them to learn. The results are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Student Topic Ratings
1) Travel English/Emergencies

2) Shopping
3) Travel English/Flight Check-in
    Greetings*
5) Travel English/Immigration
6) Restaurants (Ordering Food)
7) Health
    Academic English (Recognizing Key Points)
9) Numbers/Money
10) Japanese/Western Customs
    Vacation/Travel (Past Tense)
12) Academic English (Learning Style)
13) Work/School
    Requests/Messages
15) Directions
    People/Emotions
17) Times/Dates
18) Family
    Schedules
20) Permission/Advice
    Academic English (Note-Taking)
22) Invitations
23) Plans/Future
24) Leisure Activities
25) People/Clothes
26) Weekend Activities (Past)
    Opinions and Reasoning
28) Preferences
29) Living Quarters
    Abilities
31) Predictions/Probabilities
    People/Appearances
33) Past Experiences
34) Comparisons

*Some topics received the same number of points and are thus tied with each other.

The breakdown of the results from the Questionnaire by class is contained in Table 3, in which the top five and bottom five topics as they were rated by each class surveyed have been listed.

Table 3: Top and Bottom Ratings by Class
University

S.E.P. B (16 boys, 2 girls)

1) Travel Eng./Immigration
  Travel Eng./Flight Check-in
  Travel Eng./Emergencies
4) Invitations
  Greetings

30) Comparisons
31) Plans
  Leisure Activities
33) Abilities
34) Past Experiences

S.E.P. B (12 boys, 13 girls)

1) Travel Eng./Emergencies
2) Greetings
3) Travel Eng./Immigration
  Travel Eng./Flight Check-in
  Family

30) Weekend Activities
  People/Clothes
  People/Appearances
33) Schedules
34) Comparisons

Junior College

S.E.P. B (19 girls)

1) Greetings
2) Shopping
3) Work/School
  Health
  Travel Eng./Emergencies

30) Abilities
31) Invitations

S.E.P. C (20 girls)

1) Shopping
  Restaurants
3) Travel Eng./Flight check-in
  Travel Eng./Immigration
  Travel Eng./Emergencies

30) People/Appearances
31) Family

People/Appearances	People/Clothes
Comparisons	Comparisons
Predictions/Probabilities	34) Past Experiences

It is obvious that the top choices for the students were topics related to shopping and travel English. These were not only chosen by the girls in the Jr. College, but also by the University students, who were mostly boys. One reason for their preferences has to do with what they feel to be their immediate needs. Every year more than 12 million Japanese travel abroad. A large percentage of them are young female office workers who have the money and the time to travel. Although very few students have been abroad, many of them will travel overseas once they start working. When the same students were asked if they thought they would travel abroad in the near future, 92% of them answered "yes" or "maybe." That is a very strong indication as to why they are interested in acquiring some survival English related to traveling.

According to Nunan, adult learners are less interested in learning for learning's sake than in learning to achieve some immediate or not too far distant life goals (Nunan, 1992). While this is certainly true of adult learners, it is probably true of other learners, including college students as well. By paying more attention to students' perceived needs, teachers could increase the learners' motivation, participation, retention rate, and their attitude towards learning English.

Other factors to consider when looking at the students' ratings are their age, expectations, culture, and lifestyle. When students in this writer's classes were asked to do a role play with their partner about their families, one student commented that he feels strange talking to someone about his family, when he hardly knows the person. This kind of attitude and way of thinking may have more to do with Japanese culture than

anything else. In North America many people carry their family pictures in their wallets and readily talk about their loved ones, but in Japan, although the same closeness exists among family members, people are usually more reluctant to talk about the members of their family with strangers. It does not mean that we should not teach this topic, but it may be appropriate to give students some kind of background as to why they need to study the topic. Japanese/Western customs was rated among the top ten by the students, but it covers a wide range of areas that requires much more time than can be allocated to this topic. This topic can be covered in each lesson, depending on the subject that is being taught. At any rate, ways should be found to incorporate it into the SEP.

One topic that was rated next to last was Past Experiences. Students need to learn to use the past tense and form of "used to" in order to be able to talk about their past. For a forty- or fifty-year-old person it might be a very interesting topic to talk about, but for a college student it could be a very boring subject.

The stated needs by the students clearly indicate what they want and desire. As can be seen, travel topics such as Shopping, Flight Check-in, and Vacation/Travel were rated ahead of Times and Dates, but in order to be able to function in these situations they must know how to tell times and dates first. That is why some teachers argue that students really do not know what their language needs are and teachers cannot depend on them to dictate the syllabus. But with a little coordination and adjustment in the order of topics, there is no reason why teachers cannot find a middle ground where their expectations and students' needs could both be met. To simplify the students' needs as superficial and short-sighted would be very naive. Many learners have stated the desire to improve their accuracy and proficiency levels and are aware of the work that it involves, but they need direction, and it should come from teachers, who

should be sensitive to students' felt needs.

Teachers' Views of Needs

"When teachers are asked, 'What do you understand by the term "students needs"?' their responses could be categorized under three headings: The 'language proficiency' view of needs, the 'psychological-humanistic' view, and the 'specific purposes' view" (Trimby, 1979).

The "language proficiency needs" are interpreted as the gap between current and desired general proficiency level, and tend to stress the importance of language proficiency as a criterion for grouping learners. Teachers assume that all learners of the same level have similar needs. The "psychological-humanistic needs" emphasize learners affective and psychological state-usually one of a higher level of confidence, motivation or aware-ness. Although they do not deny the importance of language-related needs, the supporters of this view see the building of confidence and positive attitude to learning as a vital prerequi-site to the acquisition of language learning skills. They also stress the need to assist learners to develop and use independent learning strategies. The third group of teachers tends to focus on the "instrumental" needs of learners, which seem to arise princi-pally from their stated purposes for learning. Therefore, a teacher's syllabus is a response to what learners' occupational or academic goals are (Trimby, 1979).

Although most teachers like to think that they are focusing on all types of needs mentioned above, their approaches to teaching, the way they conduct their classes, their choices of textbooks, and what they perceive as their students' needs indicate which view they favor most. But unless teachers have enough data to support their assumptions of students' proficiency levels and their future needs, they run the risk of forcing their opinions upon the students and creating a situation where both parties are

unable to communicate in terms of what ought to be taught and learned.

To get a better understanding of how teachers see their students' needs, the same questionnaire was given to the teachers who are involved in teaching the SEP or other oral English courses at Seigakuin University and Joshi Seigakuin Junior College. They were asked to rate the topics appropriate for the SEP B and SEP C students. The result may be found in Table 4.

Naturally, it is much easier for students to choose and rate the topics than teachers. For teachers it is a decision that requires a lot of thinking and debating as to what to teach and what not to teach during an academic year. Whatever choices they make can affect their students' learning process.

Greetings, Locations and Directions, Money, Numbers, Prices, and Times and Dates were almost unanimous choices among all teachers. This shows a clear consensus among the teachers as to where students' oral proficiency levels are, and these are all contents suggested by the ACTFL Guidelines for Intermediate and Novice level students. Also, when we compare the top twenty topics from the teachers and the students, we find many similarities, although not in order of importance. For example, the list of the top twenty topics includes fourteen topics that were chosen both by the teachers and the students (see Tables 5and 6).

On the other hand, three of the topics that were among the top ten (Health, Travel Eng./Flight Check-in, and Academic English[Understanding Lectures]) chosen by the students are not among the top twenty topics rated by the teachers! Academic English (Understanding Lectures) was one of them. Understanding lectures probably has more to do with the students' desire to understand native speakers talking in the classroom than with understanding academic lectures given at a university in, for example, Canada or England. Health and Flight Check-in were

the other topics. They can easily be incorporated into other topics such as Times/Dates and Emergencies. Preferences (Likes, Dislikes), Weekend Activities (Past Tense), Plans (Future Tense), and Daily Routines (Present Tense) were not rated highly by the students.

However, according to the ACTFL Guidelines (Buck, 1988), a student at the Intermediate level should have partial control of the most frequent grammatical structures, and if that is where teachers want their students to be at the end of the year, they ought to be able to function at this level, although not fluently, by using present and past tenses, and to express their likes and dislikes about various topics that concern them. If the grammatical structures for these tenses are presented in contexts more appealing to the learners, they might get more favorable ratings.

Table 4 : Teacher Topic Ratings

Ratings	Topics Teacher :	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	Totals
1	Greetings (3)*	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	22.0
2	Locations, Directions (15)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	22.0
3	Numbers, Money, Pieces (9)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1.5	1	2	20.5
4	Times and Dates (17)	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	20.0
5	Japanese/Western Customs (10)	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1.5	1	2	18.5
6	Preferences (28)	2	2	2	1	2	0	1	2	1	2	2	1	18.0
7	Shopping (2)	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	18.0
8	Weekend Activities (26)	2	2	2	1	2	0	2	2	1	2	1	1	18.0
9	Plans (23)	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	17.0
10	Requests, Messages (13)	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	0	1	0	2	17.0
11	Restaurants (6)	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	17.0
12	Schedules (18)	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1.5	0	1	16.5
13	Travel Eng. (Emergencies) (1)	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	0.5	1	2	16.5
14	Invitations (22)	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	1	16.0
15	Leisure Activities, Daily Routines (24)	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	16.0
16	Vacations, Travel (11)	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	2	16.0
17	Work/School (13)	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	0	1	16.0

18	Travel Eng. (Immigration) (5)	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	0.5	1	2	15.5
19	Abilities (29)	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	15.0
20	Family (18)	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	15.0
21	Academic Eng. (Note-Taking) (20)	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	2	0	2	14.0
22	Health (7)	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	14.0
23	Past Experiences (33)	2	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	2	1	0	14.0
24	People (Appearances) (31)	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14.0
25	People (Characteristics) (15)	2	0	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	1.5	0	2	13.5
26	Comparisons (34)	1	1	2	2	2	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	13.0
27	Travel Eng. (Flight Check-in) (3)	1	0	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	0.5	1	2	12.5
28	Permission, Advice (20)	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	12.0
29	Academic Eng. (Understand Lectures) (7)	2	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	0	0	11.0
30	Academic Eng. (Learning Styles) (12)	1	0	2	1	0	2	2	1	0	1	1	0	11.0
31	Opinions and Reasoning (26)	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	11.0
32	Living Quarters, Hometowns (29)	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	9.0
33	People (Clothes) (25)	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	9.0
34	Predictions, Probabilities (31)	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	5.0

*Note : Numbers in parentheses indicate student ratings of topics.
2 = very important   1 = somewhat important   0 = not important

Table 5 : Top Twenty Topics Rated by the Teachers (18) and the Students (82)

Teachers

1. Greetings (22)
1. Locations, Directions (22)
3. Numbers, Money, Prices (20.5)
4. Times and Dates (20)
5. Japanese/Western Customs (18.5)
6. Preferences (18)
6. Shopping (18)
6. Weekend Activities (18)
9. Plans (17)
9. Requests, Messages (17)
9. Restaurants (17)
12. Schedules (16.5)
12. Travel English (Emergencies) (16.5)
14. Invitations (16)

Students

1. Travel English (Emergencies) (129)
1. Shopping (122)
3. Greetings (120)
3. Travel English (Flight check-in) (120)
5. Travel English (Immigration) (119)
6. Restaurants (112)
7. Health (111)
7. Academic English (Understanding Lectures) (111)
9. Numbers, Money, Prices (109)
10. Japanese/Western Customs (106)
10. Vacations, Travel (106)
12. Academic English (Learning Styles) (104)
13. Requests, Messages (101)
13. Work/School (101)

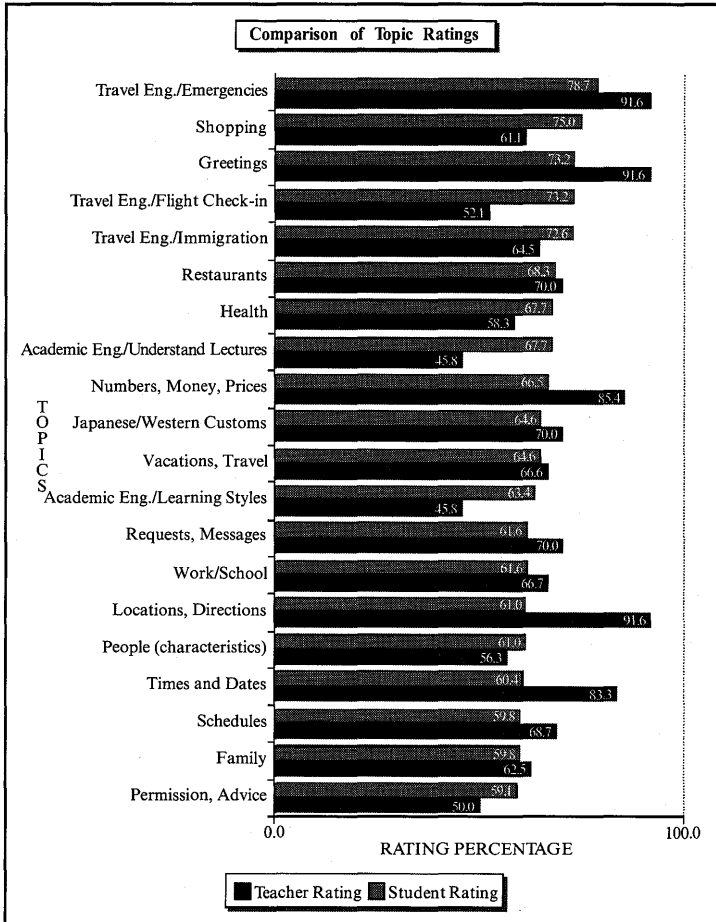| 14. Leisure Activities, Daily Routines (16) | 15. Locations, Directions (100) |
14. Vacations, Travel (16)	15. People (Characteristics) (100)
14. Work/School (16)	17. Times and Dates (99)
18. Travel English (Immigration) (15.5)	18. Schedules (98)
19. Abilities (15)	18. Family (98)
19. Family (15)	20. Permission, Advice (97)

*The numbers in parentheses beside topics indicate the total number of points the topic received from each group.

On the other hand, most of the topics that were rated least important by the students (Predictions, Living Quarters/Hometown, People/Clothes, Opinions and Reasoning) were also rated last by the teachers. The reason for the low ratings could be due to the fact that the language proficiency needed to talk about some of these topics (Opinions and Reasoning, Predictions) is beyond the students' ability, or the topics were not seen as priorities by either teachers or students.

Keeping teachers' educational backgrounds, approaches to teaching, and preferences in mind gives us a better understanding of why some topics were rated differently by the teachers. For example, Comparisons was rated very important by five teachers and not important by four teachers. The same disparity exists when we look at topics such as Living Quarters and Hometowns, People/Clothes, Opinions and Reasoning, and Academic English.

What are considered as needs is a matter of judgment and agreement made by teachers or between teachers and learners, but what is important to know here is that if the teacher is the sole decision maker, his/her views of what is important or not important are reflected in his/her teaching. A teacher who thinks, for example, that invitations are more important than leisure activities, will devote more teaching time to the former. But will this type of approach satisfy the true needs of students who might have a different purpose for learning English? Will

Table 6: Teacher/Student Topic Ratings Comparison

Comparison of Topic Ratings

Topic	Teacher Rating	Student Rating
Travel Eng./Emergencies	78.7	91.6
Shopping	75.0	61.1
Greetings	73.2	91.6
Travel Eng./Flight Check-in	73.2	52.1
Travel Eng./Immigration	72.6	64.5
Restaurants	68.3	70.0
Health	67.7	58.3
Academic Eng./Understand Lectures	67.7	45.8
Numbers, Money, Prices	66.5	85.4
Japanese/Western Customs	64.6	70.0
Vacations, Travel	64.6	66.6
Academic Eng./Learning Styles	63.4	45.8
Requests, Messages	61.6	70.0
Work/School	61.6	66.7
Locations, Directions	61.0	91.6
People (characteristics)	61.0	56.3
Times and Dates	60.4	83.3
Schedules	59.8	68.7
Family	59.8	62.5
Permission, Advice	59.1	50.0

RATING PERCENTAGE (0.0 – 100.0)

■ Teacher Rating ▒ Student Rating

* Topics selected for comparison are the top 20 topics as rated by the students. Eighty-four students and twelve teachers participated in the survey upon which this is based.

the same teacher apply the same rating to learners with different goals? Perhaps educators can make better decisions if they know how and in what areas their students are planning to use English once they graduate. Perceived future use of the language should be the primary focus in teaching English to students. To get a better understanding of what students' actual needs are, in this writer's opinion it is necessary to survey students who have graduated and to try to find out what role English has played in their lives and careers. Employers also need to be involved in this survey to see what their expectations and needs are when it comes to hiring new employees.

As for the syllabus itself, it is unfeasible that during an academic year we attempt teaching thirty or forty topics. On the other hand, concentrating on only eight or ten topics seems to be far inadequate to meet the students' perceived needs. It is obvious that a balance is required between students' and teachers' perceived needs, and priorities must be set. When looking at the SEP B and C syllabuses and the students' topic ratings, one is struck by the level of consistency between them. However, experience during the first semester has shown that time constraints render it unfeasible to teach all the topics adequately.

A syllabus of more manageable proportions can be made by choosing sixteen to twenty topics to be taught during an academic year. Fortunately there is a broad consensus among all parties involved as to which topics to select. With some minor changes (viz., some reduction of the topics), more flexibility, and cooperation, producing a syllabus that can satisfy everyone's expectations is quite feasible and, in fact, fairly easy.

Taking the above information into consideration, the writer would now like to propose a sample syllabus for one academic year for Programs B and C.

Spring Semester Syllabus

Topics	Functions
1 Greetings, saying good-bye, classroom English	Introducing oneself; asking for and giving information about self, such as name, occupation, city, and country; asking for clarification, saying goodbye; Culture Corner*
2 Work/School	Asking for and giving information about work, school, etc; Culture Corner
3 Family	Talking about family relationships; Culture Corner
4 Times and Dates	Asking and giving the time
5 Schedules	Asking for and giving information about schedules, such as those for movies, concerts, trains, buses, etc ; Culture Corner
6 Leisure Activities	Asking for and giving information about daily routines, school life, and weekend activities ; Culture Corner
7 Numbers, Money, Prices	Recognizing and using numbers, dealing with money
8 Shopping	Asking about prices and buying things in a store, returning or exchanging merchandise; Culture Corner

Fall Semester Syllabus

Topics	Functions
1 Preferences	Expressing likes, dislikes, and preferences
2 Invitations	Offering, accepting, and refusing invitations; Culture Corner
3 Restaurants	Ordering a meal in a restaurant; Culture Corner
4 Requests and Messages	Making requests, leaving/taking messages on the phone, making appointments, reservations; Culture Corner
5 Weekend Activities	Asking for and giving information about past weekend activities; Culture Corner
6 Vacations, Travel	Asking for and giving information about vacations; Travel Eng. (Immigration, Flight Check - in); Culture Corner
7 Locations, Directions	Asking for and giving locations and directions; Travel Eng. (Emergencies: Getting directions to a hotel, police station, hospital)
8 Health	Talking about the body and describing health problems; Travel Eng. (Checking into a hospital); Culture Corner

*Culture Corner has been added to the syllabus to provide the students and the teachers with an opportunity to discuss and share information about different aspects of Japanese and Western culture when introducing or teaching a topic. Both parties in this survey have indicated a need and interest in this area, but teachers can use their own discretion as to what and

how to teach.

This writer is confident that these syllabuses will meet the students' strongest perceived needs while at the same time satisfying teachers' conceptions of what ought to be taught in the first year of the SEP at the B and C levels. In addition to this, these syllabuses are highly practical in the sense that they take into consideration the time constraints within which teachers must operate.

Conclusion

"In the end successful language 'teach-learning' is going to be dependent upon the willing cooperation of the participants in the interaction and an agreement between them as to the goals of their interaction. Cooperation cannot be imposed but must be negotiated." (Corder, 1977)

In order to be able to develop a learner-centered curriculum that meets the demands of the teachers and the needs of the students, a compromise must be made between subjective communication needs assumed by the teachers and those felt by the students. It is easy to dismiss the students' subjective needs as vague and unidentifiable, but this kind of thinking will not help either teachers or the students. It is true that most Japanese students have never had any direct input in their own learning process. They are told what to do, and they have been following a very rigid and predictable path to attain their educational goals. But to regard our students as people who can not make decisions, and teachers as their saviors, is a big mistake whose consequences may be regreted.

It is true to say that most teachers usually know more about their students' objective needs than the students themselves, and it is also true that when students are asked to express their needs, they usually make some very general requests such as "I

want to speak English," "I want to talk with foreigners," or "I want more grammar." Teachers should help their students to clarify their needs. When they say they want to speak English, they ought to be told where their present level of proficiency is and what it takes to reach a higher level. Learners relate to this kind of approach much better than just being told what to do. "I want more grammar" may not mean that students want to know the differences between "do" and "does," but it could mean they have difficulty using grammar in a communicative context.

Students' study habits is another thing that must be considered very seriously when dealing with grammar. Whether to teach grammar deductively or inductively is something that teachers should keep in mind, especially when teaching Japanese learners. If teachrs are going to make any changes in students' study habits, it must be done gradually and with a clear knowledge of what they are trying to accomplish. By realizing this, both teachers and students can negotiate ways to meet each others' expectations.

As has been seen, the majority of the students felt that they need travel English. It is possible to teach structural English accompanied with other communicative activities under the guise of travel English. Vacations, Travel could be incorporated into Flight Check-in, Health could be incorporated into Emergencies, etc. Context, in most cases, has more to do with getting leaners' attention than content or anything else. That is why choosing a topic or a textbook that interests students is as important as any other decision that might be made concerning a course syllabus. It is worth the time investment to accommodate our students' needs and interests. Before teachers sit down and set their goals and objectives for the coming year, they should know more about their students' own goals and expectations.

It may be helpful at this point to summarize the basic conclu-

sions that the writer arrived at concerning the development of a truly learner-centered syllabus.

● **Incorporate student feedback into syllabus design and revision.**
This entails utilization of questionnaires, interviews, in-class observations, and data gleaned from informal discussions with students. In other words, a learner-centered syllabus must be just that: learner centered!

● **Set realistic and attainable proficiency goals and objectives.**
It is important to have a well-established notion of what students' actual proficiency levels are upon entry into the program and what levels they could realistically be expected to achieve by the end of the year.

● **Realize that learning occurs best in an environment in which both teachers' and students' expectations coincide.**
When teachers expectations are unrealistically high, learners' frustration levels are raised, resulting in the students being demotivated and losing what little confidence they had at the beginning of the course.

● **Give precedence to context over content in syllabus design.**
The topics chosen for the prospective groups will not vary to any substantial degree. However, the context within which topics are taught in each group will vary.

● **Understand and be sensitive to learners' cultural and educational backgrounds.**
Introduction of new learning styles and changes in learners' study habits must be done with proper planning and careful analysis in order to utilize their strengths in assisting the learners to adapt to new learning and teaching styles.

● **Do evaluation during the school year with the idea of making improvements and adjustments in syllabus context and content in the upcoming year.**

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On-going evaluation of the textbook and its contents should be made, as well as analysis of the topics chosen. The guiding principle behind these processes is measurement of the *practicality* and *applicability* of what is being taught to students' lives.

Although this writer's target students were chosen from the SEP B and C programs, there is no reason why some of the principles of needs analysis could not be applied to program A as well. Knowing that most of the students' proficiency does not surpass the Intermediate Mid level, it could be said that some of the needs stated by the teachers and the students in this survey can also be true for everybody else on this campus. Teachers should stop being the sole decision makers and instead develop a syllabus that reflects the views of all the parties involved. It cannot be claimed that a syllabus is learner-centered unless teachers have done an adequate amount of preparation. In a new program needs are based on assumptions made by teachers, but in a well-established program these assumptions will be based on information gathered through different evaluation processes.

It would be unrealistic to design a syllabus and expect the same result when learners' needs very from class to class, school to school, or even region to region. Much work needs to be done regarding this matter, and there will always be debates about who is right or wrong, who knows best, and what should be changed or should not be changed, but the bottom line is that teachers must determine how best to serve their students and responsibly meet their needs.

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