# Bridging the Global and the Local: Glocalizing Syllabus in the Light of Learning Style

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ABSTRACT

The education landscape is rapidly changing and there is a consensus among many stakeholders that teaching must be tailored to address different learners' needs. As the world becomes more connected, educational systems should consider both global and local perspectives in order to prepare students for a borderless world. The objective of this review paper is to present an educational syllabus that combines global and local perspectives, known as glocalizing syllabus. Key principles and components of syllabus design are then presented before examining various learning styles. Finally, it establishes a logical connection between the process of designing the syllabus and different learning preferences of students. This study has implications for EFL instructors, those responsible for curriculum development, and educational systems seeking to enhance their pedagogical practices. Also, the findings of this study emphasize the relevance of using a glocalized approach in curriculum design to promote more inclusive and adaptable learning environments. Educational systems can better prepare students for success in a varied, interconnected society by aligning syllabi with both global capabilities and local contexts, as well as accommodating individual learning styles. In conclusion, this study advocates for syllabi designing which takes into consideration individual variations in learning styles, as they can provide useful insights on instructional practices and curricular theories in education.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the most important research and educational development efforts have centered on language learners rather than on language teaching methodology. According to Rodríguez-Izquierdo et al. (2020), mainstream language teaching does not prioritize teaching approaches as significant factors in successful learning outcomes. According to Normadhi et al. (2019), each student's individual

learning styles and preferences, previous language learning experiences, linguistic attitudes, personalities, and possibly even their worldviews are completely different and unique, and these constitute the foundations of individual differences. Learners' individual differences can be considered in educational programs by developing a well-prepared syllabus based on their needs and styles. This review is a step toward helping students identify their learning styles and providing them with the opportunity to work with learning materials in ways that best suit their individual learning styles. This, in turn, paves the way for teachers to optimally present the lesson (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

## 2. The Importance of Syllabus Design

Numerous researchers have underscored and stated the goals of the course syllabus (e.g., Richlin, 2023; Brinkley-Etzkorn, 2018; Fink, 2012). Brinkley-Etzkorn (2018), for example, stressed the syllabus's importance in faculty members' personnel reviews to assess their teaching abilities, as well as its potential to evaluate course accountability and rigor. Richlin (2023) suggested that a syllabus might be utilized for a variety of reasons, including serving as a formal contract between a faculty member and the students in the course. Like Chakrabarti et al. (2021), they felt that a syllabus can also be used as a map or script to guide the students through the course materials and content. Similarly, Wagner et al. (2022) pinpointed that the main goal of a syllabus is to convey and communicate information regarding a course.

Basically, syllabus design focuses on the units around which classroom activities or tasks are organized and the sequence in which they are to be administered. Instructors of the course generally create and utilize a syllabus to delineate the course plan, establish expectations for student-faculty communication, contextualize the topics within the broader curriculum, and specify anticipated student engagement with the course material (Karanja & Grant, 2020). Based on Miller et al. (2020), the design of syllabuses has a lot to do with the collection, sequencing, and validation of the course content.

The decisions regarding the curriculum and its sequence also affect the role allocated to the learner. Syllabi have been organized and sequenced around structures (Ellis, 2018), words (Mamaghani & Zolghadri, 2018), notions and functions (Sabbah, 2018), skills (Ellis, 2018), and tasks (Gilabert & Castellví, 2019). Making an informed decision about which syllabus to implement is heavily reliant on a previously administered needs analysis, which can scrutinize the target situation, i.e., what learners are required to do with language, as well as learning needs, i.e., how learners are best motivated to acquire the language and skills identified through the target situation analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

### 2.1 Needs analysis: The preliminary step in syllabus designing to consider individual differences

Nunan (1989) defines needs analysis as a data collection process that includes "techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design" (p. 13). Furthermore, Sönmez (2019) defines needs analysis as the process of identifying and prioritizing the needs of a learner or group of learners for which a language is required. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) established needs

analysis by distinguishing between goal needs, which are what the learner has to do to learn, and "wants," which are the learners' perceptions of what their needs are. According to the authors, target needs include "necessities" that the learner should know in order to perform effectively in the target language setting, while "lacks" imply a need to know what the learner currently knows in order to determine which of the essentials the learner "lacks" (pp. 54-56).

Gürbüz (2013) defines syllabus design as a logical sequence of three major stages: (1) needs analysis, (2) content specification, and (3) syllabus structure. The most significant aspect of needs analysis is to examine the learners' needs, as each learner is unique and has a certain type of learning style. Therefore, great care is needed by syllabus designers as well as teachers to consider these differences among individuals while doing their duty.

## 2.2 Types of Syllabus Design

Different syllabi propose various ways in which learners must acquire the details of the content and apply them in real-life contexts. There is a plethora of syllabus types that might be used in teaching and learning situations. Syllabus types are classified into two superordinate categories: synthetic and analytic. In synthetic syllabi, design begins with the language elements that the course instructor will teach (grammar structures, vocabulary, collocations, sentence patterns, functions, etc.). In this type of syllabus, the learner's role is to synthesize the different parts of items that he or she has already learned separately (Alemnge, 2021). On the other hand, analytic syllabi take a more "global" and "holistic" approach to language learning (Fréchet et al., 2019). Language is not divided in analytic syllabi. Instead, it is employed to engage in communicative activities that mirror real-life interactions. In other words, the primary focus is on a single communicative aim. In analytic syllabi, learning is intended to occur concurrently with the development of learners' interlanguage systems, taking into account various learning styles and aptitudes. Here are six main types of syllabus design that were presented by Guarnieri (2015):

Structural (Formal) Syllabus: The content of language teaching is a collection of grammatical structures and forms. Examples include nouns, verbs, adjectives, statements, questions, subordinate clauses, and so on.

Notional/Functional Syllabus: As the name implies, the content of language teaching is a collection of the functions accomplished by language, as well as the concepts used to convey those functions. Functions include greeting, disputing, apologizing, and requesting, while concepts include size, age, color, and time.

Situational Syllabus: The goal of this type of syllabus is to place students in real or imagined target situations. A situation might involve several people engaged in an activity in a particular setting. Examples of situations include going to the dentist, complaining to the mayor, buying a movie ticket, and meeting a new person.

Skill-Based Syllabus: The content of language teaching is a set of specialized skills that can be demonstrated through language. Skills are the abilities required to operate within a language system. The primary goal of skill-based training is to acquire a particular language competence or skill. A

secondary goal could be to develop broader language competency, which would involve gaining knowledge while using language skills.

Task-Based Syllabus: Another approach to course design that uses the task as the unit of analysis is task-based language education (Gilabert & Malicka, 2022; Bula-Villalobos & Murillo-Miranda, 2019). As Ellis (2018) points out, the primary focus of this syllabus is on meaning and communication, where students are primarily "users" of language rather than just "learners." Another important aspect of this type of syllabus is that the material is chosen in proportion to learner needs and the social situations in which learners seek to engage (Feez, 2002).

In a task-based syllabus, the instructional content consists of a collection of complex and purposeful tasks for students to perform while using a language. The tasks are characterized as activities aimed at developing second language skills. Tasks integrate language (and other) skills within specific language-use contexts. Task-based teaching differs from situation-based teaching in that the latter is product-oriented, while the former is process-oriented. Students can work on various language forms, functions, and skills in an individual and unpredictable manner while performing the tasks. Tasks that can be used for language learning can be generalized to any situation the learner may encounter. Some examples include applying for a job, speaking with a coworker, and receiving employment information over the phone.

Content-Based Syllabus: The primary goal is to teach subject matter using the language that the students are acquiring. Students can be divided into two groups: language learners and content learners. Language acquisition occurs alongside content learning, with the subject matter being central. Content-based language teaching focuses on the material, while task-based language teaching concentrates on the linguistic and cognitive processes involved in learning. An example of content-based language instruction might be a medical class taught in the students' preferred language.

## 3. Learning Style

There are various definitions of learning styles. Learning styles are any tactics or mental behaviors used by students to learn in a certain educational circumstance or challenge (Cohen & Henry, 2019). Keffe (1982) defines learning styles as cognitive, emotional, and physiological characteristics that are reasonably constant indicators of how students perceive, interact with, and respond to their learning environment. Hassan et al. (2019) define learning styles as the educational conditions under which a learner is most likely to learn. As a result, it is predicted that each individual will have a distinct learning style. Similarly, Rasheed and Wahid (2021) believe that learning styles are the preferred techniques of learning adopted by all students in the classroom. They continued that everyone likes a different approach to learning information and that a learner can have multiple learning styles. The learning styles thesis states that people learn in a variety of ways. Any individual has academic or learning skills that are determined by a combination of inherited and environmental factors (Hart et al., 2021). These characteristics translate into preferences for learning and communicating visually, orally, spatially, and tactilely, which are referred to as learning styles.

Learners' preferred learning strategies vary according to their tastes, mental preparation, and physical condition in terms of sensory modalities. Identifying and implementing appropriate learning styles may play a crucial role in the selection of teaching methods, consequently improving education (Ariastuti & Wahyudin, 2022). There is widespread understanding that how people approach a learning environment influences their performance and achievement of learning outcomes (Nzesei, 2015). As every instructor realizes, no two pupils approach learning in the same manner. Some benefit more from visual imagery, while others prefer verbal explanations; some prefer to experiment and see what happens, while others prefer to think things through first; some reason sequentially, while others have a more holistic approach; some prefer concrete ("real-world") information, while others prefer abstract theories and symbolism, and so on (Barzegar & Tajalli, 2013).

The learning style concept is based on the works of Piaget, Allport, Guilford, and Thurstone. These thinkers were interested in various elements of individual differences and their relationship to intelligence (Keeffe, 1982). Accordingly, learning styles are rooted in the theory of individual differences. Normadhi et al. (2019) described "cognitive styles" to refer to how individuals perceive information and interact with their learning environment. However, some academics have used the phrase "learning styles" to describe what others refer to as cognitive styles. As a result, there should be a link between learning style and cognitive style and theory.

The phrase 'learning style' is frequently used in instructional settings to refer to cognitive types (Lwande et al., 2021). Curry (1983) made one of the most significant taxonomic and pedagogical contributions to the area. She positioned learning styles between learning preferences and cognitive styles in a layered "onion" model of individual difference components. As a result, learning styles, cognitive styles, and the theory of individual variations share many similarities and are inextricably linked. Baherimoghadam et al. (2021) also supported this view. They further asserted that a mixture of cognitive, emotional, and physiological features might suggest how a student can learn, which is generally defined as a learning style.

According to Taylor and Crocker (2022), normal differences among individuals can result in variances in how they like to learn and absorb information. Extraverts, for example, like to study in groups and collaborate on projects, whereas introverts prefer to work or study alone. Based on Kormos and Smith (2023), learning style can be used as a metaphor for assuming the range of individual differences in learning. Shamsuddin and Kaur (2020) pointed out that researchers in both educational psychology and the second language acquisition (SLA) field have concluded that different individuals approach learning differently, and the concept of "learning style" has been used to refer to these differences among learners.

Nowadays, one of the primary goals of foreign language learning is to raise awareness regarding students' personal or individual variations and their impact on the learning process and, more importantly, on learning outcomes. Furthermore, because various learner characteristics influence the process of language learning (Getie, 2020), modern language teaching and learning focuses on individual differences among learners.

Many models have been proposed for learning styles so far. Let's have a brief look at some of them. Grasha and Reichmann (2006) developed a learning style inventory to identify and categorize students' learning preferences as Avoidant, Dependent, Participant, Independent, Competitive, and Collaborative.

Reid (1995) classifies learning styles into six categories: visual, tactile, auditory, group, individual, and kinesthetic. Schellens and Valcke (2000) developed another instrument for assessing students' learning styles. They claimed that the demands of the learning environment might differ from the students' actual learning styles. They divide students' learning styles into five bipolar dimensions: auditory vs. visual, applied vs. conceptual, spatial vs. non-spatial, social vs. individual, and creative vs. pragmatic.

Another widely used instrument to measure learning styles is Fleming and Mills (1992)'s VARK model. VARK is an acronym for Visual (V), Auditory (A), Read/Write (R), and Kinesthetic (K) dimensions for assessing learning style preferences. A learning style inventory was developed by Felder and Silverman (1998). The model divides students' learning preferences into four dimensions: 1- Sensing or Intuitive; 2- Visual or Verbal; 3- Active or Reflective; and finally, 4- Sequential or Global.

Among these, David Kolb's (1984) Learning Style Inventory is of much greater importance to scientists. Therefore, the researcher places more emphasis on this one in this paper. According to David Kolb (1984), learning style is the consequence of inherited equipment, prior experience, and the needs of the current environment combining to form distinctive orientations that provide unequal emphasis on the four main learning modes proposed by experiential learning theory. David Kolb's (1981) Learning Style Inventory (LSI) is a well-known and widely used tool in this regard. Learners grade sentences based on four different learning styles. The LSI is one of the more challenging devices to comprehend. First, it is vital to understand these concepts.

• Abstract—The learner prefers to learn through symbols and thinking.

• Concrete—The learner prefers to learn through experiencing something such as touching.

• Active—The learner prefers to learn by manipulating or changing things through practical means.

• Reflective—The learner prefers to acquire knowledge through reflection and discussion.

The LSI scores show a preference for one of the four stages of a learning cycle:

• Concrete Experience (CE)—Learning from Feeling: learning from direct experience, relying more on feeling and collaborating with others.

• Reflective Observation (RO)— Learning by Watching and Listening: attentive observation, seeing situations from multiple viewpoints.

• Abstract Conceptualization (AC)—Learning by Thinking: analyzing, thinking about theories, ideas, and planning.

• Active Experimentation (AE)—Learning by Doing: enjoying actions and taking risks, getting to the bottom of things.

Since only one stage is not sufficient for a clear learning style, two scores should be combined to determine one's learning style (Kolb, 1981).

The preferred style has the highest combination score:

• Convergers—AC and AE: These learners prefer to make decisions regarding real-world problems and how to solve them.

• Divergers—CE and RO: These students prefer to see problems from a variety of perspectives. They have a vivid imagination and strong emotions.

• Assimilators—AC and RO: These learners enjoy abstract concepts and developing theoretical issues. They're logical and rational.

• Accommodators—CE and AE: These learners like actual actions, taking risks, working with others, and adapting.

Due to the popularity and widespread use of Kolb's model of learning style, this article considers individual differences in syllabus design based on this model.

## 3.1. Syllabus Design and Learning Style

The pedagogic reply to learning styles is to allow, in a settled way, for different language skills and content and to offer recommendations for variability in pacing—the speed at which learners can work through materials and instruction. In the same vein, Tomlinson (2011) states that materials should take into account different learning styles, which means that activities should be flexible and adaptable to all learning styles. For example, Stranks (2003) notes that exercises involving mental activity will not be appropriate for all learners. This implies that we should consider the students' learning styles while grading and sequencing projects.

Oflaz and Turunc (2012) conducted a study to examine how learning styles influence group work activities. The participants included a group of 5th-grade private school children from one of Istanbul's Bahcesehir K12 Schools, as well as 40 other Bahcesehir K12 Schools across Turkey. They were divided into two classes: A (21 pupils) and B (22 students). Students in Class A were given a Sensory Learning Style Test. The pupils had 10 hours of English every week. They were required to work in groups twice a week during their English courses. The findings showed that teachers can increase the effectiveness of their instruction by understanding their students' various learning styles and planning activities and tasks accordingly.

As stated by Verde and Valero (2021), there are some fundamental differences in learning modalities from person to person and, moreover, from one class to another. Teachers and, furthermore, syllabus designers must take these differences into account and adapt their instructional goals and methods to them. Knowing their students' learning styles gives them the opportunity to

categorize and modify their instruction, classroom grouping, and materials based on the levels and differences among their students.

## 4. Linking Syllabus Types and Learning Styles

As discussed, there are different kinds of syllabus types holding different and specific features that could be tailored to individuals' learning styles. The first type of learning style is the converger. As discussed, this type of learning style puts a sharp focus on practical ideas and finding solutions for real-world problems. This can be more connected with task-based, analytic, and process kinds of syllabus designs since these syllabuses have more to do with real-world activities and open-ended reasoning.

The second kind of learning style is the diverger. As this kind of learning style emphasizes viewing things from different angles and situations, one may come to the conclusion that it is more related to notional-functional, situational, and synthetic kinds of syllabus. The reason is that these syllabus types try to put students in different functions and situations as well.

Next is the assimilator type. As it has a logical form and needs to gain a plethora of information, it can be more related to structural, content-based, and skill-based kinds of syllabus types. These syllabus types have special grammatical forms and skills that are fixed, rational, and more abstract.

The last type is the accommodators. As they enjoy doing hands-on experiences and collaboration activities, they can be more connected with notional-functional, situational, task-based, synthetic, and process kinds of syllabus. The rationale is that these syllabus types focus on doing real-world activities and having group work discussions.

According to Ariastuti and Wahyudin (2022), learning styles are preferred ways of learning used by every individual. They continue that everyone prefers a special way to learn the information. So, learning styles are not the same for everyone. El-Sabagh (2021) states that learning style reflects our preferred manner of acquiring, using, and thinking about knowledge. Findings of researchers reveal that people learn more when they know their preferred learning style (Doyle, 2023; Gilbertson et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2019).

Aelterman et al. (2019) emphasize the diversity of learning styles among students in recent years to see whether they can make a difference in students' achievement or not. According to them, some learning styles may only fit into particular teaching activities. Thus, this is a very important point that teachers and, moreover, syllabus designers should bear in mind while developing any kind of tasks or classroom activities. They should pay attention to various learning styles among students.Together, these studies and assumptions can provide important insights into the significant connections between syllabus design and learning styles. The literature review informs us that every individual has a unique learning style and that every task fits into a specific kind of learning style.

## 5. Conclusion

By considering students' individual differences, teachers and syllabus designers are expected to design tasks and activities that cover various tastes and learning styles. This suggests that they should

create learning experiences catering to a diverse range of preferences and learning styles among students. According to Nunan et al. (2000) and his theory of syllabus design, which includes task-based syllabi, a well-designed syllabus takes into account the unique characteristics and specific requirements of learners. By incorporating tasks and activities that align with students' individual differences and needs, educators can create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment that supports diverse learning preferences and abilities. This learner-centered approach to syllabus design not only enhances student motivation and participation but also promotes effective learning outcomes tailored to the individual needs of students.

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