

## Issues of Syllabus Designing Practices and Quality Assurance at Higher Education Level

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### Abstract

*The goal of Higher Education Commission is to develop and implement quality across all university activities and making it compatible with international practices. The faculty is required to have ability in designing, maintaining and updating curricula, when measuring the quality of an institute or of teaching; designing syllabus is the basic required skill. This study aims to analyze perception, syllabus designing skills and practices of faculty members in universities. This research is quantitative, structured questionnaire and document analyses were used for data collection. Results showed faculty have no related training; rules for designing syllabus are not followed. It is recommended that training sessions should be organized to developing syllabus designing skills of university faculty. Standard guidelines should be developed by quality assurance bodies.*

### Key Words

Curriculum, Syllabus  
designing, Higher  
Education, Standard

### Introduction

The importance of preparing effective course outline or syllabus is mostly overlooked by the teachers, administrators as well as by the higher authorities. They probably assume that effective teaching depends solely on teaching and teachers, although it is proved that proper planning is the most important ingredient in the whole teaching-learning process and it can improve learning effectiveness for teachers and learners both Jones and Steven (2015).

If a student is not learning, not submitting his work on time, doing poor work on an assignment, we blame the student or the teacher, we neglect the role of syllabus planning in shaping educational outcomes and providing a smooth way of moving forward. Slattery and Carlson (2005) say syllabus is a four-way agreement between instructor, student, the department and the University. If these connections are made successfully, then mutual expectations are established right from the beginning. Brandenburg, & Wilson (2013) emphasized the importance of balance in syllabus designing. The syllabus gives a clear picture of the objectives of the course which links with the vision and mission of the subject at a specific educational level. By seeing a syllabus a picture can be drawn about the emphases, interest and designing skills of the faculty which is responsible for that course.

The preparation of curriculum and syllabus of different disciplines or subjects is the responsibility of HEC (Higher Education Commission of Pakistan). Universities also prepare and modify their syllabi on the guidelines given by the HEC. The Members, Board of Studies prepare and approve it, its approval goes through a long process of passing from Board of Faculty then from Academic Council. All these bodies are composed of senior faculty members from related departments of the university and subject experts but most of them are not trained for designing syllabus. As the selection criteria for a lecturer at university level is 1<sup>st</sup> division in the related subject and Ph.D. in the same subject, there is no requirement of any training related to teaching of educational planning. Syllabus designing is the skill which is a part of teachers training program at (B.Ed., M.Ed.) level, Bullough, R.V.J. (2012) however, in most of the courses of teachers training programs training related to syllabus designing is not included, although this training is needed at school and college level also, or if it is included, practical aspects are not emphasized. After analyzing the syllabi of teacher's education from different universities it was found that this area is neglected. It is important to find out who is involved in the process of syllabus designing? What

perception teachers or faculty members of a university have about content and requirements of the syllabus? What skills they have and how they prepare syllabus of the courses they are teaching? Do they get any practical training in designing syllabus in their teacher education course? As Cheryl (2003) indicated this skill can be used for documenting the scholarship of teaching. It is assumed in developed education system that syllabus designing is a professional skill. Fink (2003). A teacher having syllabus designing skills can develop a balanced, comprehensive document that can provide all needed information to the students. This skill is to be taught at Graduate or Master's Level. Johnson (2006) says that syllabus works as a communication device helping students about learning and their assessment process.

All renowned universities have this course of syllabus designing as a part of their education curriculum, and all consider it as an essential skill for educationists. Gibbons, Centi, Dezure, and Freeman (2006) discussed the balancing act between a specific, informative syllabus and one that overwhelms students. Wasley, P. (2008) says that syllabus can be defined as a written contract between institute, faculty members and their students, its purpose is to provide a framework to inform students about all related information about that course, answering students' questions about what, how and when, moreover update them about what will occur if they will not be able to meet syllabus potentials" (Habaneck, 2005). The syllabus is a "vehicle for expressing accountability and commitment". Michael, J. V. Woodcock (2006) said over time, the notion of a syllabus as a bond has grown more accurate but is not, in fact, a bond that should be implemented. The word syllabus comes from the Late Latin word meaning "list." or outline that provided guidance to teachers and students as to what they are going to do, (although new *Oxford English Dictionary* has removed that word); about the objectives of the overall curriculum. It means what a teacher is expected to teach in the class what is expected from students within the prescribed time scale of that course. Roberto. Rabbini (2002) says scholarly designed syllabus ensures mutual understanding between the course facilitator and students, which minimizes confusion on all aspects of learning process like policies procedures and implications, and clarifies expectations on behalf of all stakeholders, Syllabus provides a right track to institution, and way conveying the teacher's instruction viewpoint to the pupils. Long, R. W. Russell G (1999) says that Its purpose is to enhance learning by expounding pupil perception of all the rules, procedures, and materials such as time frame for each content unit, information about the instructor Roberto Rabbini (2002). A syllabus could carry a brief description of the course content, learning objectives, topics that will be covered each week or detailed synopsis of every reading assignment, home assignment, and examination with different teaching strategies for different contents. The syllabus writing style is usually the teacher's choice but sometimes it is similar for all teachers, in an institute. Claire (2006) says that syllabus functions as a communication device that can give you details about students learning, how it will be assessed, so it gives a clear picture to both students and teachers. Parkes, Fix, and Harris (2003) suggest that it is a device that serves as a contract between the subject instructor and his students.

Johnson (1995) says that well -written syllabi communicate to students what is expected of them to achieve success in that specific course and what competencies must be mastered. Syllabus writing is a professional work and the lead instructor is responsible for providing the updated syllabus to students either in printed or electronic format. All experts, Diamond, and Grunert (1998) are of the opinion that syllabus content should be in compliance with the institute's other policy documents so there can be a relationship and consistency in all policies.

Albers (2003) in his research writes that a syllabus which is constructed scholarly gives three benefits, it can provide hiring and review committee a view of the research and the reflection of a properly designed syllabus ensures mutual understanding between the instructor and students which minimizes confusion on policies procedures and implications and clarifies expectations on behalf of all stakeholders, Syllabus provides a roadmap of organization and direction, relaying the instructor's teaching philosophy to the students.

Operative syllabus design based on objectives or the purpose of providing a syllabus to students. The decision about what information can be incorporated in syllabus normally depends on these three important questions given by Fink, L. D. (2003), who your students are, what objectives you have for that particular course, how you will measure achievement or learning of these students. All learning activities, materials, and academic support based on these questions. Designing a syllabus not only answer these questions but we have to consider some other factors also, like motivation of students behind taking this course, background or previous knowledge of the students, either student is first time joining the university or already studying in any university or the difficulties they may face during study. the syllabus contents should be so clear that they are easily understood by others who are not familiar with the course. The Journal of Chiropractic Education website ([www.journalchiroed.com](http://www.journalchiroed.com)) can be a help in this.

Different experts related to the field of education and curriculum designing advised to consider Bloom 's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives as the guideline for setting objectives of the course. Grant Wiggins and Jay Mc Tighe have given some guiding points that a syllabus should include, some basic things such as Title page Learning Objectives of the course, Basic Information related to semester credit hours etc Course Content in brief,

Student Responsibilities and expectations, Grading Process, Materials that can help in learning and Access, Pedagogical approach, Required texts and readings, assessment procedure and measurements, information related to course instructor, Course calendar and specific Advice or instructions to the learners .

The purpose of providing a comprehensive syllabus to students is to maximize efficient learning by clarifying student understanding of all the rules applicable to them, procedures related to teaching, assessment, materials such as time frame for each content unit, information about the instructor, his availability, contact, location time, information related to teaching process, learning material, books, grading policy, late work policy, and means of contact with course facilitator, outside resources for subject material assistance, resource centers, important dates in course such as exams and paper due-dates, tips for succeeding in mastering the course etc. Syllabi serve several important purposes, the most basic of which is to provide a clear picture and guidelines for future success of student.

### **Content of the Syllabus**

Experts from the field of education have given emphasis to the content that should be included when designing syllabus at any stage of education. Although there are variations and differences in some content most of the content is accepted by educationists as essential part of a syllabus, there is difference in order of presentation but many things are common and followed by all the slandered universities.

General course information includes 1) name of the course, and identifying information like terms, quarter, semester. 2) Units, time is given per week, Prerequisites and requisites, course names. 3) Information related to course instructor like main or co-instructor his or her office 4) hours with contact information, and procedure to get appointment, meeting place or email address. Some experts also want to include their professional background, their expertise, and field of specialization (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). 4) The second important component on which almost all experts are agreed, is the purpose of the course, in this section course description, course goals or objectives and additional course information are included. Parkes, Fix, and Harris (2003) suggest that the syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and the learned. Jones (2015) says that the tone of your syllabus communicates your attitude towards the subject and towards the student. In the syllabus of some universities information related to learning environment is also included but not in all universities, like facilities of labs, reading material, required materials and attire, recommended text and resources.

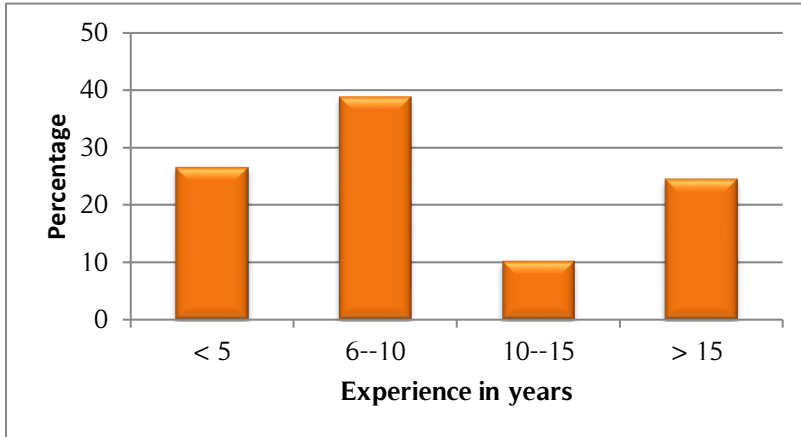
A very important content that is included in most of the syllabus of different universities is time schedule or the course plan (Altman and Cashin 1992) say it helps students in preparing in advance for the learning environment and they can balance the schedule of other courses that they have taken. This includes course calendar, lecture or lab topics, different seminars, or events, tests and assessments with dates given. 6) Another part of the syllabus that experts ask to be included, Slattery and Carlson (2005) is linked with the pedagogies which gives students a guideline about what is expected to them during learning and how their learning will be assessed, by written examination, oral or presentation, quiz, or performance, group assessment or individual. Diamond and Grunert (1997) say that a course syllabus is a learning-centered approach so grading scale and method, information related to missed assessments, posting of grades 7). Methods of assessments like self-assessment, peer assessments, out of class assignments portfolios, group projects, oral reports quizzes should be given in details it should also include all points or values that the course has to offer and how these points will be gained or deducted. He also gives emphasis to including detailed information about technical, classroom and institutional policies, which can be about special needs persons, students' conduct, revision of courses or other policies like property safety, affiliation with outside organizations or even about smoking. Some experts like Fink (2003) says that information related to how students can access the course website, preparation of examination of any scholarship available of clubs or student activities organizations should also be included in the syllabus.

After studying the proposed syllabus designed by experts from different fields of education it is felt that there must be some common format for those universities or institutes who are working under same quality assurance authority. When there is an environment for healthy competition among institutes for ranking, then these competencies of the teachers should also be included when assessing universities for grading or ranking.

The purpose of this research is to highlight issues related to syllabus designing at higher education levels because firm grounding for quality of education when assessing teacher's performance. Reasons why there are vast differences and variability in designing syllabus? How does teacher education syllabus provide knowledge and skills through training, and how it impacts on the quality of education through the perception of the teachers by critically analyzing syllabus which is presently available to the students of different departments

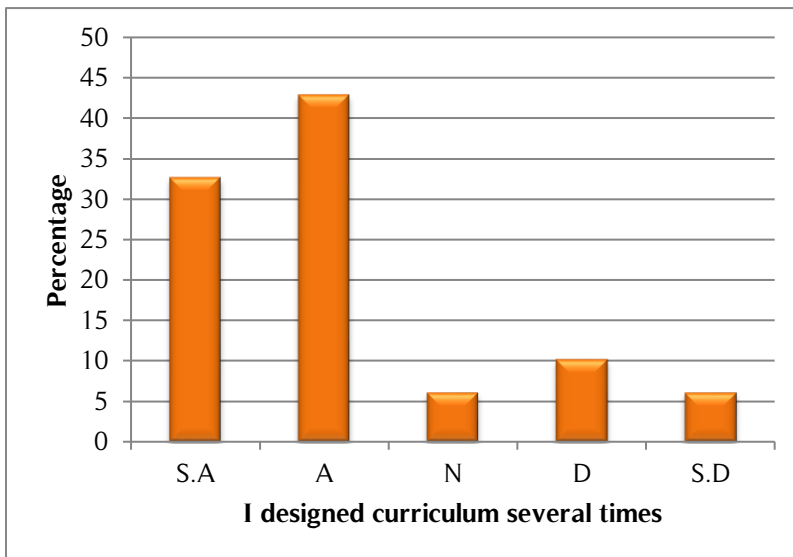
## Methodology

The study based on quantitative research method in which teaching faculty is considered as population, while teachers of different universities from education and social sciences with minimum three years of teaching experience were the target population sample was collected through conveyance sampling from public and private universities of Karachi and from hundred questionnaire distributed among teachers 62 were received. A structured questionnaire with 24 items was used for collecting data with reliability (0.84) on Cronbach alpha and validated through experts' opinions from the field of teacher education. For supplementing data received through questionnaire 15 document (syllabi) were also analyzed, Sample was collected through conveyance method and analyses through SPSS



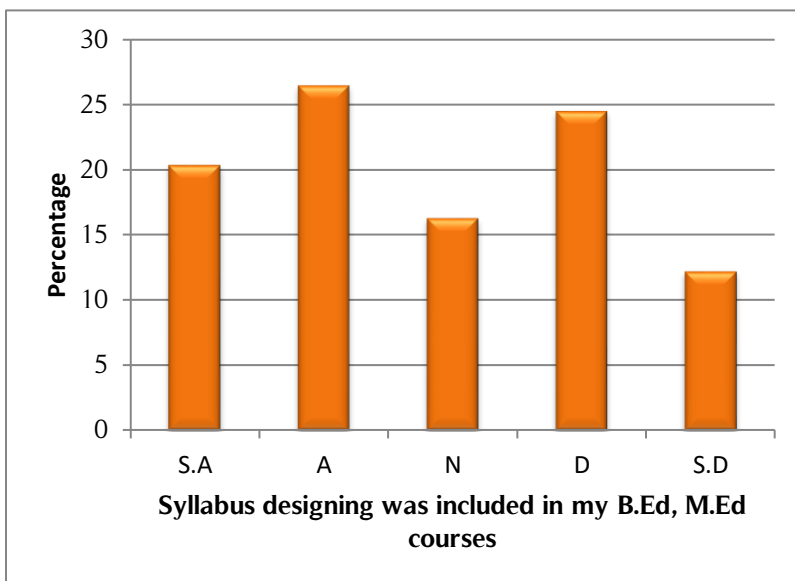
**Graph 1:** Experience of the Teachers

The data denoted above concerning the experience of the teachers shows that higher number of the teachers are having 6-10 years of teaching experience in teaching profession



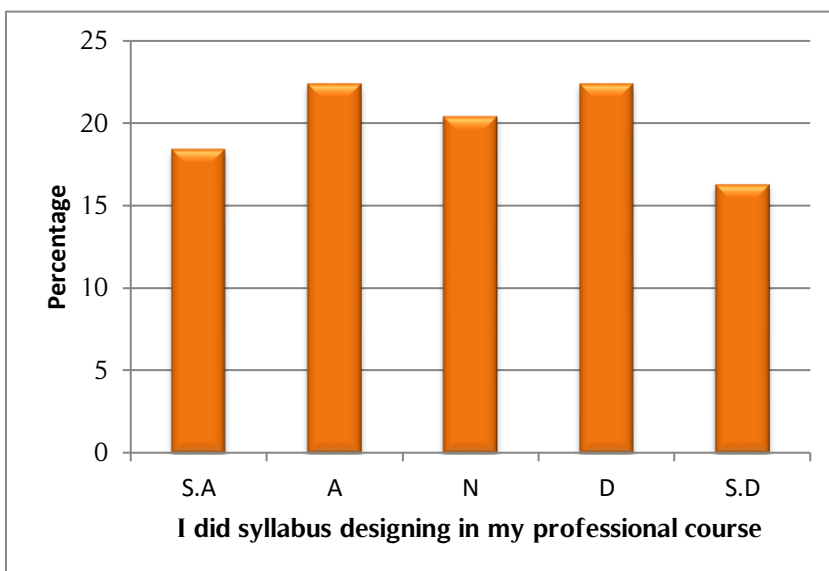
**Graph 2:** I Designed Syllabus Many Times in My Teaching Career

The Graph above shows 42% of the teachers have designed the syllabus many times in their teaching career.



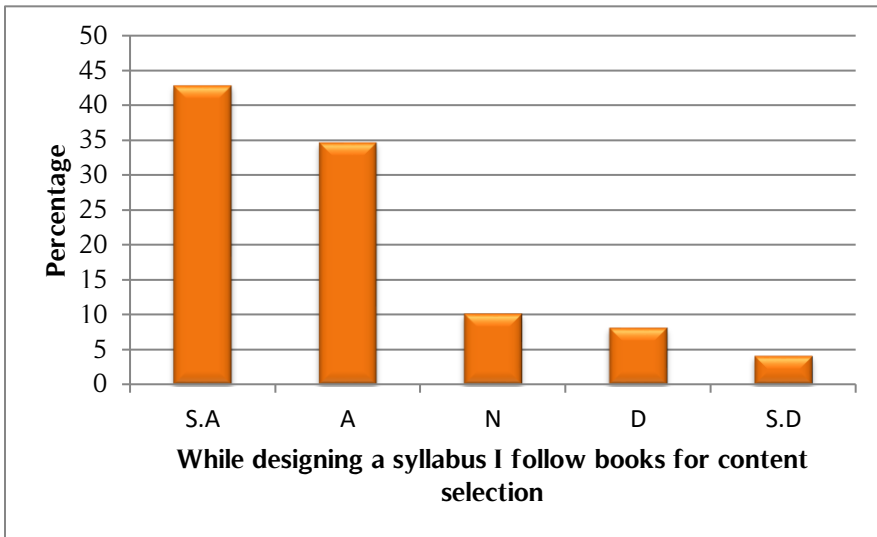
**Graph 3:** Syllabus Designing was Included in my Training Courses (b.ed., m.ed.)

Graph 3 shows that only 26% said that syllabus designing was included in their teachers' training courses.



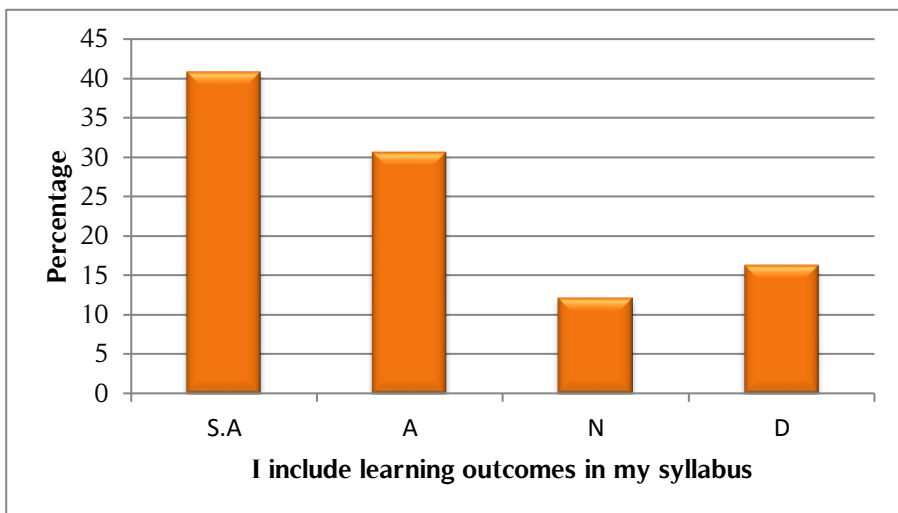
**Graph 4:** I did Syllabus Designing during my Professional Courses

Graph 4 indicating that a higher number 42% of the teachers follow books content when they design content of the syllabus for their teaching subjects.



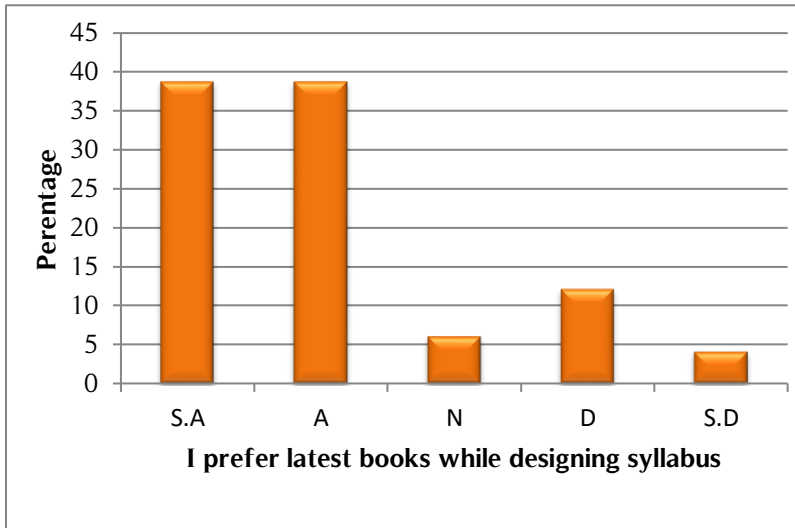
**Graph 5:** When Designing Syllabus we Take Topics Directly from the Books

Results indicated that 46% of the teachers take all topics directly from the books.



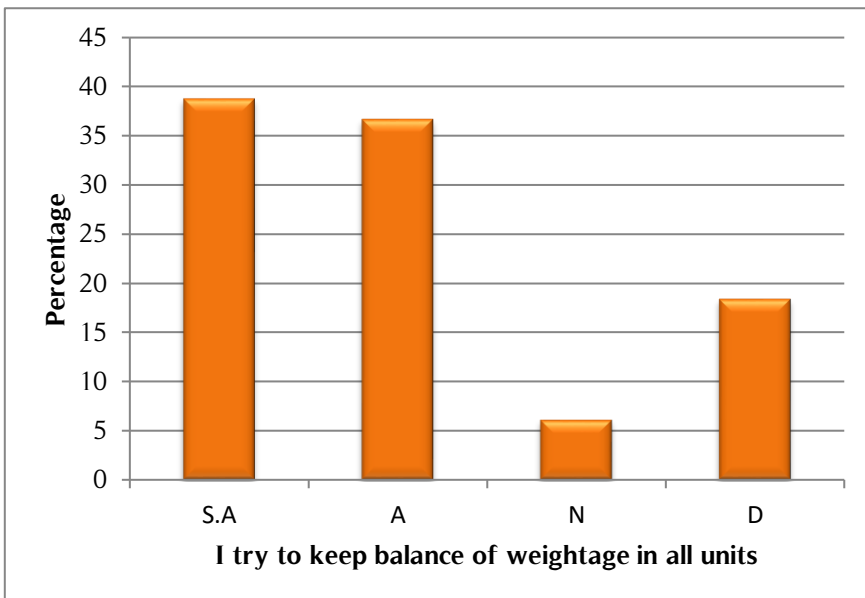
**Graph 6:** I Include Learning Outcomes in my Syllabus Design

It is indicated by the results that only 40% of the teachers include learning outcomes in their syllabus.



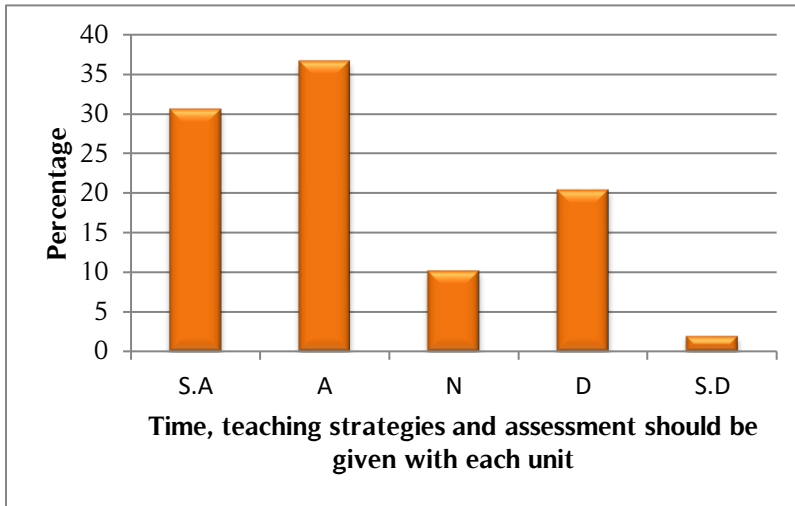
**Graph 7:** I Prefer latest Books when Designing Syllabus

The results show that only 22.5% of the teachers include latest books for designing their syllabus.



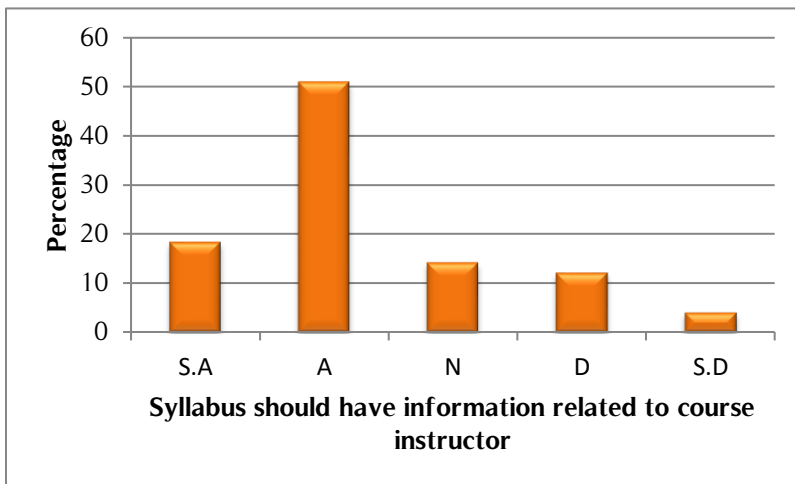
**Graph 8.** Try to Keep Balance in Weight of the Units

The results show that only 38.8% of the teachers gives importance to the equal weight of all the units in a syllabus.



**Graph 9.** Teaching Strategies and Assessment should be Included in the Syllabus

Graph shows that a very small number 20.4% of the teachers are very strongly in favor of including assessment and teaching strategies in the syllabus



**Graph 10:** Information Related to course Instructor should be Included in the Syllabus

Results indicated that very few teachers 18.4% are in favor of including information of the course instructor in the syllabus.

Results of Graph 11, 12, 13, 14 are related to including information related to whole learning environment, policy of the institute, expected ethical values also shows very less inclination towards including this information in the syllabus, while a very large numbers of respondents are in favor of designing of syllabus by the experienced teachers.

Results show a reluctance of teachers towards making it a comprehensive document, it is maybe because they have not received required knowledge and skills during their teachers training programs, or the reason lies in high authorities overlooking this aspect of the curriculum, another reason can be not including this area of expertise in quality assessment from higher education commission, at the time of assessment and accreditation of any institute. If higher education will include designing of syllabus as a slandered tool for education than maybe teachers or the



university authority will give attention to it, or will provide guidelines or proper training to their teaching faculty to enhance their syllabus designing skills.

## **Discussion**

The present study focuses on finding issues and practices of the teachers in designing syllabus of the courses they are teaching at higher education levels. In the view of the literature review, it is clearly indicated and accepted that designing syllabus in the guidelines of curriculum is as important as the curriculum itself, and it is an essential content of teacher education Curriculum. as indicated in teachers standard and quality standard for teaching, but the teachers feel that their training courses at B.Ed. and M.Ed. level lack this component, and they do not receive ample training of syllabus components and designing of syllabus in their teacher's training programs, although they agree that syllabus should be designed by the expert teachers; as Bullough (2012) says that expert teachers make teaching easy, through balanced syllabus.

Although they have teaching experience they hardly ever take it as a very important component of their responsibility. A large number of teachers have designed syllabi in their teaching career but they do not have any specific guidelines either from their institute or from quality control bodies like ORIC, which is responsible for quality at university level. As results indicate there is no any standard format even among different departments of the same faculty, there is no specific guideline about what should be included, how many units be included, whether assessment, teaching strategies, time frame, information about course in structure, and facilities available be included or not. Teachers accept the importance of writing a good syllabus, they agreed that syllabus designing should be done by experienced teachers and should have all necessary information that can help students in their study of that subject, although some persons think that students do not read that component seriously (Slattery, 2005; Wasley, 2008; Kousha, 2008).

## **Document Analyses**

Analyses of the related document (syllabi of different departments of the university) show a very haphazard picture of the syllabus, Brandenburg, and Wilson (2013) says that a crowded curriculum can create a barrier to deep learning. In the attempt to cover large amount of material, depth of learning can be the first casualty. These syllabi showing the same haphazard picture, Syllabus of the same university have different headings and subheadings in most of the syllabus course, description is not given, in some syllabi, even objectives of the course are not mentioned.

Some syllabi have five units, some up to eleven units. This shows no time limit is considered, neither weight nor difficulty level of the subject matter is considered, books referred to are very few and very old, only very basic information is included, like objectives of the course, contents and reference books not a single syllabus is found spelling out the policies of the institute and expectations from students

While experts say Johnson (2006) syllabus should be written in such a way that everyone can understand it whether he/she has a concern with it or not. It should elaborate, what is expected from the students and how can they go ahead. In almost all the syllabi, there are missing guidelines related to examination methods, expected areas of performance, minimum requirements for qualifying in that subject, no specific information related to course instructor and the time or ways to meet him or her. Almost all syllabi have no information regarding the purpose of the course, methods of teaching, expectations from the student, who will take this course as facilitator, information related to the facilities available to study that subject.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the results it is clearly indicated that teachers feel that they need proper training for the development of syllabus. They need a clear guideline from higher authority or from a quality assurance body to develop syllabus of any institute on international standards that can cause our teaching/ learning process to work smoothly and with harmony for all stakeholders.

In light of the results, it is clearly indicated that teachers are at present not well trained to design syllabus and they are not following any rules or similar patterns in their syllabus which is giving difficulty to the students, Syllabi from the same department are having different content in their syllabus. Almost all syllabi having no information for purpose of the course, methods of teaching, expectations from the student who will take this course, information related to facility available, course facilitator or about the facilities available to study that subject. Absence of a body which can provide guidelines for the development of the syllabus or assessing designed syllabus is not formed in any university. Although it is the responsibility of the academic council, syllabus is approved without examining these factors. They feel that they need proper training for the development of syllabus. They

need a clear guideline from higher authority or from quality assurance bodies to develop syllabus of any institute on international standards if we want our teaching-learning process to work smoothly and with harmony for all stakeholders.

### **Recommendations**

Following are the recommendations for dealing with the issues of syllabus designing

1. Syllabus designing should be included in the course content of B.Ed. and M.Ed.
2. The skill of syllabus designing be included in teaching-learning process
3. Organizing workshops for the teachers who are in the teaching faculties in the universities.
4. A guideline of essential components should be developed and provided to the university for uniformity among faculties and departments.
5. Assessment of syllabus designing skills of teachers should be the part of teacher's assessment and quality assurance as Albers (2003) says, designing syllabus reveals the level of a teacher's scholarship.

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