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The Application of ELT Methods & Approaches in Selected Assessments from Jesus María State School Syllabuses. An Instance of True ELT or Just *Isomorphic Mimicry*?

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Abstract

English as a foreign language is usually a compulsory subject in the 12K programme in Córdoba Province in Argentina. The choice of methods and approaches that adhere to provincially-established standards such as the *Diseño Curricular* are an important aspect of educational policies, and are expected to be reflected in syllabus design, evaluation, and teaching practices. The standardized application of guidelines is also evident in the English teaching training courses at universities and tertiary levels in Córdoba Province, where a vast theoretical framework is usually taught as mandatory literature. Although the selected methods and approaches should be reflected in the implementation of English language teaching practices, this is not always the case. Building schools and stocking them with blackboards and chairs, personnel, a library, a canteen, among other typical school-related items and not concerning about the content—the “what” —that is meant to be dealt with or the methodology—related to the how-tos, may result in a school with no schooling, an educational system that does not educate, a building which resembles a school but is just a façade of it, as described by Pritchett in his concept of *isomorphic mimicry*.

Keywords: *education, ELT methods, English language teaching*

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Introduction

Education is a polysemic term which is normally in the public eye of politicians, parents, learners, and different actors in post modernistic societies. This term has been defined distinctively in the last centuries. However, these definitions still highlight its importance and what it entails. Kant (1803 as cited in Tizio, 2005: 20) compared education to nurture and it was an exclusively human endeavour. Education worked on par with discipline, teaching and culture. In turn, “man is in succession infant (requiring nursing), child (requiring discipline), and scholar (requiring teaching)”. Tizio (2005) highlights the link between human nature and education: since a human being is born, there is basic care to administer. Then, discipline is given as limits play a vital role in upbringing, and finally, formal instruction—with reading and writing—comes into play. Herbart (as cited by Tizio, 2005: 21) states that instruction is a key element for education (strictly speaking) to exist. Systematic hard learning is vital. A child’s ideas are built upon other ideas which will enable them to understand the world. Thus, for Herbart, learning enables the creation and recreation of the world. For the sake of this project, Herbart’s triangle will be described as it analyses “la idea herbatiana del trabajo educativo” (Tizio, 2005: 28). This notion of an educational endeavour encompasses the agents of educations, the adults who represent the world, then the subjects of education and, finally, the content. This last element involves the selected cultural elements that set a gap between the agents and the subjects and is to be conveyed. Another noticeable definition is that of Williams’ (1997: 5) who also refers to the complexity of this endeavour, its human nature, and education as a process. Williams (1997) describes education as something that is carried out by a teacher transmitting information to a group of learners. However, education goes beyond this over simplification: This highly complex process encompass teachers’ ideas and actions and learners’ variables. Williams (1997) states that this is true for teachers of all areas, but she focuses on the language teacher in particular. Another scholar’s insight is brought about by Ur (2008: 3) as she distinguishes education—as previously stated, in connection with the cultural background of an individual—and training. The latter describes “the process of preparation for professional teaching, including all aspects of teacher development (Ur, 2008:3).

Brown (2000) deals with language, learning, and teaching. His query seeks to describe what, when, who, how, where, and why we teach when we do and what underlining principles play a role in language teaching. He also states that learning and teaching are inseparable terms as they are given simultaneously. The former involves getting information or skills and involves mental processes and behaviours. The latter, involves “guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learner to learn, setting the conditions for learning” (Brown, 2000: 7). It also involves a philosophical standpoint: an approach, a method, techniques, etc. Brown (2000: 27) describes the importance of including a functional approach in the teaching a second language. Constructivist approaches have gained ground in the second language teaching methodologies in the last decades. The previous ones would focus on the structural foci of the language neglecting the “deeper functional levels of meaning constructed from social interaction” (Brown, 2000: 27) and the pragmatic dimension of the language and language teaching.

Hence, education is an umbrella term that will encompass all the elements underneath instruction, teaching and learning. The teaching/learning of a second language in particular brings about distinctive features such as course administration, syllabus, and assessment-testing. Needless to say, when it comes to analysis of the complex array of factors and multi-tasked actors in the teaching-learning processes, a gap in the field arises. Thus, the purpose of this study is to shed light on how syllabuses are designed and how preeminent methods and approaches as well as assessment are implemented in the syllabuses for the teaching of English in one secondary state-run school located in Jesús María, Córdoba. One pillar for this analysis will be Pritchett’s concept of isomorphic mimicry. Lance Pritchett is an American economist whose focus of research is education in developing countries.

Presentation of the problem

The motivation to carry out this project is related to the author's anecdotal collection of documents where a generalised lack of adherence to the basic principles of contemporary ELT methodology and provincial curriculum design was evident. This design (SEPiYCE, 2009) explicitly orders the implementation of the *communicative approach (enfoque comunicativo)* and implicitly includes features of it in the objectives and methodology. After tutoring in *Plan FinEs* (a

national programme that enables secondary school drop-outs to complete their courses) for five years (2008-20013), the author received hundreds of school syllabuses—their submission was compulsory for registration. Surprisingly, the author noted that the explicit goals, objectives, and content and what the student could actually do with the language (virtually nothing, in most cases) showed interesting discrepancies with the basic tenets of ELT such as the communicative approach and were closer to Behaviouristic approaches.

Therefore, the notion of *isomorphic mimicry* appeared to be applicable here, as it could be a descriptive term of this observed situation.

An Overview of Key Concepts

As the syllabuses encompass in theory the study of post-behaviouristic methods and approaches such as the Communicative Approach, the Natural Approach, the Lexical Approach, among others; the main query of this research work seeks to unveil whether this discrepancy between theory and practice—what is compulsorily included in the curriculum and what is carried out by in-service teachers—is connected to Lant Pritchett's notion of *isomorphic mimicry* (Pritchett, 2013). Pritchett took this concept from the natural sciences, and he illustrated what for him constitutes the difference between *schooling* and *learning*. He carried out a large scale transnational study on educational analysis in the developing world, then looked at the breakthroughs made to improve learning, and he measured the performance of students via proficiency tests. He concluded that the efforts made by a number of countries to improve their systems of education could be compared to that of an animal resembling another superior species. That is to say, schools try to replicate what is functional in countries with efficient schooling systems, but they fail to achieve positive results in other countries as of the cases documented by Orafi & Borg (2009) in Libya and López Barrios & Villanueva de Debat (2014) in which the unsuitability of the implementation of CLT is also depicted.

When it comes to the notions of methods and approaches—key elements in the development of this project—a need arises to distinguish them semantically. In common parlance, those terms are used interchangeably. However, for this project, the distinction established by Richards and Rodgers (2001) will be

adopted and used in the analysis of the implementation of ELT methods and approaches in state-run schools in Córdoba City. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, Content Based Instruction, Cooperative learning, Lexical Approaches, Multiple Intelligences, The Natural Approach, Neurolinguistic Programming, Task-Based Language Teaching, and Whole Language approach, share “a core set of theories and beliefs about the nature of language, of language learning, and a derived set of principles for teaching a language” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 245). None of them prompts a particular arrangement of prescribed forms and methods to be utilized as a part of the teaching of a foreign language. Instead, approaches are flexible; every tutor may apply them differently as they “allow for individual interpretation and application” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 245). Furthermore, the role of the teacher is described in Brown (2007) as “...that of a facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing font of knowledge.” Conversely, a method (Richards and Rodgers, 2001)—such as Audiolingualism, The Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, among others— mandates exactly what the content, procedures, and techniques will look like together with teacher and student roles. Thus, the instructor’s performance is prescribed in a rather mechanic and repetitive fashion.

Regarding the history of the development and evolution of these notions, a number of methods and approaches have had central and peripheral roles at times. Despite the fact that for the focus of this study post-behaviouristic methods and approaches will play a more central role, there is a pre-behaviouristic method which is worth describing: The Classical Method which was used for the teaching of Latin and encompassed “a focus on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and of various declensions and conjugations, translation of texts, written exercises” (Brown, 2007: 18). During the 19th century, it was known as The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and it involved the teaching of a foreign language via explanations of its grammar in the first language together with memorization of long lists of unrelated pieces of vocabulary. Brown (2007) describes the height of the Grammar Translation Method between the years 1850 to 1940. Despite the fact that since then it has had a growing number of detractors, it is currently being used in many contexts. As Richards and Rodgers (2001 as cited in Brown, 2007: 19) state “it has no advocates. It is a method for which there

is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory”. In spite of these facts, the Grammar Translation Method was—and is—being used after its height. Hino (1988) describes yakudoku, a method for teaching English in Japan which resembles GTM. Its implication in the Japanese tradition for the teaching of English today is currently discussed as a Ministry guideline. Chang (2011) describes the teaching of English characterised by the adoption of GTM in Taiwan. Milanesio (2014) also describes features of the use of GTM in Córdoba City secondary schools. She describes that most in-class activities she observed focus on linguistic competence rather than communicative competence. Milanesio (2014: 98) also analyses the results of her research as grammatical competence is the most common competence while the others seem to be neglected as of her words: “Hence, the conception of language as knowledge or competence prevails and the approach identified is oriented towards traditional principles.” Finally, Milanesio (2014: 93) describes that during the analysed lessons, accuracy was sought, classes were teacher centred, and authentic interaction was discarded. Given this research, there is evidence that the GTM is currently being—at least partially—used even though it is not included in the *lineamientos curriculares* (LC). Whether features of this old-fashioned method appear in the implementation of this project will be described.

The year 1939 brought about WWII and the USA, as well as the rest of the involved armies, needed to learn foreign languages fast to communicate both with allies and enemies. Brown (2007: 23) describes the roots of the Army Method—called Audiolingualism (ADL) afterwards because of its focus on aural/oral skills—as behaviourism and structuralism. Behaviourism derives from educational psychology and its advocates related the learning of a (first or second) language to habit formation. Structuralism is derived from structural linguistics and its exponents were engaged in a “scientific descriptive analysis” (Brown, 2007: 23). Milanesio (2014) contributed that the underpinning language theory was derived from structural linguistics and, as such; “it emphasized the mechanistic aspects of language learning and language” (Milanesio, 2014: 45). There is evidence of the presence of features of ADL in state-run schools in Córdoba City as the result of the observation of instances of repetition drills, memorialization of

patterns, “over” learning of structures, accuracy-oriented syntax and pronunciation, among other features.

The 1970s came together with a large offspring of *designer* (Nunan, 1989: 97 as cited in Brown, 2007: 25) methods. Two of them are to be included as part of the underlining theories of this project: Total Physical Response (TPR) and Natural Approach. TPR was designed by James Asher in 1977. Brown (2007) describes it as a grammar-based method in which the imperative mood plays a key role. For James Asher, this is the way in which children acquire their first language, by the interactive nature of orders and requests. The Natural Approach was developed by Krashen & Terrel (1982, 1997). As for TPR, The Natural Approach “learners would benefit from delaying production until speech “emerges”” (Brown, 2007: 31). Richards and Rodgers (2001) describe an array of hypotheses which are the main tenets of the theory. First, the Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis distinguishes the first competence as a conscious process and the second one as a conscious process of the language rules. Second, the Monitor Hypothesis involves time to apply a learned rule, focus on form (accuracy-oriented), and knowledge of rules. Third, the Natural Order Hypothesis states that there is a natural order for the teaching of grammar items; for example, present actions before past ones. Fourth, the Input Hypothesis explains the relationship between what the learner is exposed to and what the learner actually acquires. Finally, the Affective Filter Hypothesis intends to describe the relationship between self-confidence, motivation, and *personal anxiety* (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 183), and the chances of input becoming intake. That is, the higher the anxiety experienced by the learner, the more difficult it will be for him/her to experience the acquisition process. The same is true of motivation and self-confidence.

One final group of methods and approaches to be mentioned is the one most commonly used at present: the set of the Communicative Approaches. There is evidence showing the high degree of agreement on part of teachers. Milanesio (2014) describes a tendency to lean towards communicative approaches in her research. Brown (2007) also poses both a current preference towards these kinds of approaches as well as a current rejection to whatever resembles a trend from

previous decades. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is currently the most well-known approach. Richards and Rodgers (2001) describe some notions that gave birth to CLT such as Hymes' notion of *Communicative Competence*, Chomsky's *Linguistic Competence*, among others. Brown (2007) describes a radical change of focus which lead communication-oriented teachers to balance form and function, fluency and accuracy, and focus on authentic pieces of the foreign language. Regarding teacher and student roles, they were swapped: The teacher was no longer the centre of the class; but at times a mere participant. CLT features contrast what had held a central role in previous approaches: Meaning is the most important element (rather than form and structures), learning to communicate is the aim of learning a foreign language, little translation and drilling are used, and the four linguistic skills are fostered. There is a list of six communicative approaches which can be considered as natural extensions of CLT (Brown, 2007) or approaches on their own (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has purely communicative goals and engages students in problem-solving activities. Skehan (1998: 95 as cited in Brown, 2007: 50) describes meaning as vital in a task, they should include real life situations and the objective is to complete the task by solving a problem. One second extension of CLT (or approach) is described by Brown (2007): Learner- Centred Instruction focuses on students' needs, styles, and goals; students have control over their activities, and techniques enable creativity and innovation. Another approach is Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) which is described by Richards and Rodgers (2001) as part of the umbrella term called Collaborative Learning (CL). CL is "group learning activity organised so that learning is dependent the socially structured exchange of information learners in groups..." and CLL aims at enhancing learner motivation and reducing learner stress by group work. All in all, language acquisition uses interactive pair and group activities. Interactive learning extension highlights the "interactive nature of communication" (Brown, 2007: 53). It comes hand in hand with David Nunan's contribution (1991) on the interactive nature of CLT. Whole Language Education (Brown, 2007) perceives a language as a unit, rather than the addition of the parts. Skills come together in pairs: Speaking and listening; reading and writing. Finally, Content Based Instruction is described by Richards and Rodgers (2001) as one in which teaching is organised information or content that students deal with rather

than the language. Brown (2007) describes that content is thus the end of the CBI class, and the language is a means of accessing this information.

Lance Pritchett's contributions will be taken into account for shedding light on the gap to be described in this project: Whether the implementation –or lack—of remarkable methods and approaches in the ELT class is a sign of *isomorphic mimicry* together with the assessment—or a lack of—section. Pritchett has been carrying out research in developing countries in order to describe the relationship between a country's level of education and level of growth. In his publication *The Rebirth of Education: Schooling ain't learning* (2013) he distinguishes the notions of school enrolment and attendance from meaningful educational gains, as separate terms which should not be equated: "For hundreds of millions of children in the developing world, schooling is not producing education in any real sense. As the subtitle indicates: schooling ain't learning". Pritchett adds that "education ... is included in the United Nations declaration of Human Rights, and is viewed universally as both an end of the development process and one of the most powerful means for achieving development," but this should not be confused with just having people "sitting in school" (2013: 5-6). Pritchett brings about an analogy taken from biology: *isomorphic mimicry*. Some species such as insects, snakes, and serpents have a particular survival characteristic: They resemble other species, but they do not have the same abilities as the first one. For example, in the United States, there is a snake with red and yellow rings called eastern coral snake. It has sharp teeth and its bite can kill a person or animal within minutes. Conversely, the scarlet king snake seems to be a coral snake, but has no venom. It does not need to be venomous as its colours give the idea of being harmful. The scarlet king snake benefits from looking deadly without having sharp teeth or poison. This is one example of isomorphic mimicry in which an organism resembles another on the surface and benefits from its physical similarity, while actually lacking its central effectiveness. There is evidence that examples of isomorphic mimicry are given in our educational system. There is a number of social actors participating in what resembles education and learning. Politicians open new schools, which are filled with students, teachers, and supplies. Argentina, together with a global trend, has a growing number of students attending school for a larger number of years (CEA, 2013). However, the outcome

of obligatory secondary schools is not educated graduates equipped with the tools to which speeches on education brag to promote according to the demands of the world. As comprehensive tests of students achievement reveal (OECD, 2012), Argentinean high school students rank 41st at the end of the list, showing low ability to do basic maths, or to understand basic texts. The value of instructing learners in these areas has been traditionally agreed upon. Besides, the more recent need for large scale introduction first and expansion later of other areas of knowledge such as English language in public schooling may be associated with developments which transcend the confines of national educational policies.

The term *syllabus* (or *curriculum* as of its American synonym) is certainly a complex word which requires more than a phrase to be defined and described. The first descriptor of syllabus design was Tyler (1949, as cited in Nunan 1988: 55) who stated that every syllabus designer would answer what educational purposes a school should attain, what experiences should be provided that are likely to attain those purposes, how educational experiences should be organised and how can designers determine whether these purposes have been attained.

Complex in nature, a syllabus should include "...all of the planned learning experiences of an educational system" Nunan (1988: 55) and can be defined as "...the selection, sequencing and justification of the content of the curriculum" Nunan (1988: 55). For the sake of the further analysis on whether the documents to be analysed are considered to be syllabuses or not, two other current scholars' definitions will be taken into account. First, Brown (2007: 156) states that most schools define syllabus as "a sequential list of objectives, topics, situations, skills, and forms to be taught". This straightforward definition will be beneficial for further descriptions. Succinctly speaking, Brown (2007: 156-157) describes what a communicative syllabus should entail: Goals, objectives, a list of functions (purposes), topics and situations, forms ("grammatical, lexical and phonological"), linguistic skills, links between the topics and the coursebook or its units and the material, and kind of assessment and criteria. Second, Ur (2008: 176) describes a syllabus as a *document* which is usually given as a list. Ur's characteristics of a syllabus involve, this "list" as the container of "content" items and "process" items; it follows a natural order (from easy to more complex items);

has objectives and represents a *public document*. Finally, a syllabus may describe time management, a method and/or approach, and suggested material.

Assessment is another key concept to be described for the aims of this research project. The terms evaluation, assessment, and testing are frequently used interchangeably. However, they are different both in nature and in terms of their scopes. The broadest of all is *evaluation*, “the determination of how successful a programme, a curriculum, a series of experiments, etc. has been in achieving the goals laid out for it at the outset (Dictionary of Psychology, 2001: 252 as cited in Ahouari-Idri, : 1).

Assessment, on the other hand, takes place in the classroom. Brown (2004: 4) defines assessment as “an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain” (than testing). Whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the student’s performance”.

The most specific concept of the three is testing. Ur (2008: 33) defines test as “an activity whose main purpose is to convey (usually to the tester) how well the testee knows or can do something”. Likewise, Brown (2007: 445) defines *test* as “a method of measuring a person’s ability or knowledge on a given domain”.

In a nutshell, evaluation will play a role in the analysis of the curriculum design both in and outside the class. Assessment—both formal (as tests according to Ur, 2008: 37) and informal. For the purposes of the project, an evaluation of the assessment section of the course syllabuses intends to be analysed and appraised. Brown (2007: 158) highlights the importance of programme evaluation as a key element to complete the syllabus. Some elements will contribute or hinder the success of the course; for example, the “appropriateness of the course goals (in meeting needs and purposes)” (Brown, 2007: 159).

State of the Art

In order to give empirical basis for embarking upon the implementation of this proposal, a number of studies which have been published in the last ten years has been selected. These studies describe the implementation of a/some given methods and/or approaches in different countries.

Biniyam (2012) describes whether the kind of approaches that teachers are expected to follow for primary EFL teaching are being fostered among other aspects of the implementation of curriculum policy contents in Ethiopia. By carrying out a qualitative examination of the competences teachers are required to master and by comparing them to what practicing teachers are actually capable of doing, the author concludes that there is not an appropriate teacher preparation which effectively trains teachers to implement the guidelines defined by the Ministry and that there is a discrepancy between teacher practices and these policies.

Haslynda (2014) describes, among other significant aspects, how several approaches and methods to language tuition are implemented in Malaysia. Among this project's objects of study are the teaching approaches in the curricular reform of primary education in Malaysia known as the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS). Through the implementation of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, stimulated-recall dialogue and document analysis, the author shows that there is a discrepancy between the methods propounded in the policies proposed by the SCPS and teachers' guides and actual L2 teaching classroom practices.

Milanesio (2014) carried out a research to find out whether TEFL in the context of mainstream secondary schools in Córdoba is approached as equipping learners with a means of communication or as a purely linguistic code. By contrasting teacher's language conceptions and beliefs, she attended three different schools and observed classes. Three teachers were subject of the investigation and the study involved analysis of the syllabuses, class materials, and class observations. The results exposed a discrepancy between teacher's beliefs and classroom actions.

Tantani (2012) seeks to shed light on how teachers deal with the teaching of grammar compared to what they know about teaching EFL in secondary Libyan schools. This relationship was assessed by interviewing eight teachers to see if these practices are consistent with their instructional practice. The instruments to collect data were observation and semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample data, which were transcribed and coded for analysis according to grounded theory principles, and a framework was designed to

analyze the coded data in order to triangulate the findings gathered from observation and interviews. Regarding the findings, it was seen that grammar was taught using different approaches and techniques, but identification on a single perfect way of teaching was not found. Whether grammar is taught deductively or inductively, and how much time and effort are devoted to this, will provide hints on the nature of the approach underpinning the EFL lessons.

Wang (2006) explores how the mandatory college English curriculum is implemented in a Chinese tertiary level education context. The data involved what was collected from interviews with four national policymakers and six departmental administrators. Via the implementation of class observations, teacher surveys and interviews, Wang described a discrepancy between policymakers, administrators, and teachers' intentions and how they are put into practice.

Fetogang (2016) researched on assessment syllabuses and the validity of English education in Botswana in secondary schools. The results of this study showed that the focus was put on national examinations while the content and abilities prescribed in the syllabus were mainly neglected.

Stec (2007) investigated syllabus design in the study of second language in primary schools in Poland. The focus of her study included the principles of English syllabuses evaluation in the process, and the research questions include, regarding syllabus design, the type of syllabuses, the specifications that those syllabuses include for the target learners, how is the curriculum statement accomplished in the syllabus, among other distinctive foci of analysis.

These studies describe the implementation of different methods and approaches to the teaching of a foreign/second language and how they differ from education policy guidelines, curriculum guidelines, teachers' beliefs and actual teaching practice together with an evaluation of the implementation of assessment in the given syllabi. The presence of discrepancy(ies) can lead to poor quality tuition, and since there are many discrepancies, the actual problem might be difficult to diagnose. Therefore, it would be interesting to check if what is happening in schools is a case of *Isomorphic Mimicry*. Therefore, this study will

aim at checking if the current situation in a school in Jesús María, can be described in those terms.

Methodology

As a first step for the description of the proposed methodology, this project fits into Brown's (2002) category of primary research as it intends to go beyond a theoretical description, and to carry out data gatherings and analyse case studies. Regarding the levels of research, it is expected to be *applied* as it involves

A type of research which is designed to deal with human and societal problems in the hopes of finding solutions to real- world problems. Applied research focuses on the use of knowledge rather than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. A motivation behind applied research is to engage with people, organizations, or interests beyond the academic discipline and for knowledge to be useful outside the context in which it was generated. (Tavakoli, 2012:17)

This Project will also involve action research as this is Carried out “in the real world” (Brown, 2002) in order to get a better understanding of the educational environment to improve the effectiveness of the instruction Finally the qualitative/quantitative continuum (Mackey & Gass, 2005:2). Regarding the levels of research, it is applied as it deals with “human and societal problems”. According to the type of research, it is action research. It is carried out “in the real world” to get a better understanding of the educational environment, and to improve the effectiveness of the instruction.

One instrument will enable me to collect data for the analyses of this project. A collection of syllabuses will give a hint on the implementation of methods and approaches, and methodology, whether they are explicitly indicated or not. Thus, if the designer of the syllabus does not refer to them, the chosen theoretical framework will help see through this to infer features of the method(s)/approach(es) being used in the foreign language class.

The participants will include 1st to 6th year courses at IPEM N° 294 Jesús María state-run school in Jesús María City, Córdoba Province. These students have English as a compulsory subject in all six years. Data collection will include copies of the syllabuses which are available at the school's secretary office.

Results

The resulting outcome of the analysis of the six syllabuses will be first marked as yes/no/mostly yes/mostly not and partially and fully described in the discussion section below. In the general column, an attempt to determine whether the selected school documents are eligible to be considered syllabuses regarding Nunan’s, Brown’s, or Ur’s definitions and proposed categories for such analysis. In the methods/approaches column, the explicit presence or lack of adherence to one or many methods and approaches intends to be described. Likewise, implicit indicators of such a presence or absence will be examined. Finally, assessment -- as well as methods and approaches section—will be analysed separately. Whether the document entails a certain criterion or not, and how consistent this is will be the focus of this section.

	General	Methods/ approaches	Assessment
Syllabus 1	Mostly yes	Partially	Partially
Syllabus 2	Mostly yes	Partially	Partially
Syllabus 3	Mostly yes	Yes	Partially
Syllabus 4	Mostly not	Partially	No
Syllabus 5	Mostly yes	Mostly yes	Mostly yes
Syllabus 6	Mostly yes	Mostly yes	Yes

Discussion

In Syllabus 1 (First year), scholars' features of a syllabus/a communicative syllabus seem to prevail. However, there is no clear distinction between general and specific objectives, the list of contents is restricted to a list of topics with no relationship among them nor is it connected to the specific items of the bibliography. As a matter of fact, the bibliography is not specific as it just states "class notes" taken from photocopies from "different" (unstated) authors. Despite the fact that there is no explicit method or approach, it may be inferred that features of CLT are given regarding the focus on student-student interaction. However, there is a heavy load devoted to linguistic competence which may entail a lack of actual communication as a target. Finally, the list of content as bulleted items only describes lexical groups and forms of frequently used verbs which may unveil GTM being fostered in the course. Regarding assessment and testing, there are specifications which seem to violate basic principles such as validity and reliability. Syllabus 1 has a presentation of the course, a list of objectives, and content. None of them implies what the student is said to be tested afterwards: Class participation, respect, behaviour, students' capacity to apply the grammatical concepts into a practical and oral fashion.

Syllabus 2 (Second year) mostly complies with the proposed requirements. However, it poses distinctive features to be described as discrepancies. First, the objectives, time sequencing, and assessment criteria are exactly the same as the ones present in Syllabus 5. Even some of the strategies and content are completely alike. This fact may be interpreted as a lack of consistency with the level and course which they intend to frame as individual characteristics, features, age of the students, etc. seem not to have been taken into account. Second, one of the objectives describes *competencias lingüísticas comunicacionales* which may be translated as "linguistic communicational competences", to which no theoretical background or definition has been found. As the content mentions—in one instance—that students are expected to work collaboratively which may be inferred that Cooperative Learning Approach is fostered. However, most of the content involves grammar topics (such as the finite and non-finite forms of frequently used verbs that are simultaneously included in Syllabus 1 and few lexical items are included. Despite the fact that "oral and written communicative

situations are fostered”, most of the elements in the content lean towards language correctness and Linguistic Competence, rather than Communicative Competence—contradicting then the communicative principles that had been stated.

Finally, both continuous assessment and formal testing seem to be present together with the features of *validity* and *reliability*.

Syllabus 3 involves some of Ur’s characteristics of a syllabus as objectives and content are described. However, there is no specific coursebook or material to be used in the course. Nor does it include a gradation in the implementation of the topics. Furthermore, the first objective is entirely alike the fifth objective in Syllabus 5. Despite the fact that there is no method or approach being explicitly mentioned, there are elements that may indicate as follows: CLT may be involved as the course is said to be skill-based, and the focus described in the presentation of the course is communication. However, the content is present as a bulleted list: Most of the items describe unconnected grammar items and the rest, situations. Those grammar items may represent GTM being used and the situations and contexts—as they were described—, CLT. Regarding assessment, there is a section called *evaluación* which is in turn divided into two categories to describe criteria and instruments. The criteria for evaluation indicate class participation, the content, the extent to which the content is understood and assimilated, respect and behaviour and the ability to apply the concepts in a practical way together with creativity, and individual and group work in class. The lack of clarity is open to dispute: These guidelines do not correspond to the objectives, content, or methodology. There seems to be then a discrepancy between content and evaluation. Regarding the second category, the instruments involve practical, written, oral, and audio-visual work. Finally, “effort and persistence” are also taken into account.

Syllabus 4 (Fourth year) displays only two features of a syllabus: It is a list of content and has materials (a coursebook and “different photocopies to be given away during the year”). Syllabus 4 encompasses five units with the same pattern: A given verb tense, a list of vocabulary, and an analysis of paragraphs and texts. These features are likely to be considered GTM’s. Regarding assessment, the lack of indicators will impede this analysis.

As described earlier, Syllabuses 3 and 5 are entirely alike regarding objectives, evaluation, time management, and methodology. Regarding the content, this is subdivided into two categories: Lexical content and grammatical content. The former is used to describe lexical items, verbs, and collocations. The latter involves other topics such as countable and uncount nouns, quantifiers, and tenses with in intra or inter relations to the course materials. What is more, there is a subheading which reads “bibliography” and no bibliographic item is indicated. Given these features, it may be said that this document does not have what it takes to be a syllabus according to the selected scholars’ work. The central roles of vocabulary and grammar—working disconnectedly—give a hint on a non communicative approach being implemented in the course. Finally, assessment is described in a complex, complete, and abstract fashion. The types of tests (summative, progress, etc.) and the communicative nature of the target language are described. However, as this description is completely alike Syllabus 3’s, it is hard to see if the criteria were meant to describe one document or the other. Besides, a generic list of comments might have been included in order to cater for different syllabuses despite the fact that Syllabus 3 belongs to third year (general education) and Syllabus 5 is used in fifth year, both for the group which specialises on IT and the one which specialises on communication.

Syllabus 6 presents elements of the syllabus at first sight such as objectives, content, bibliography, lists of grammar items, etc. In a deeper fashion, and by contrasting the rest of the school syllabuses, it can be seen that Syllabus 6 has whole paragraphs that are exactly the same as Syllabus 1, Syllabus 2, and Syllabus 5. The following elements will be described to display a discrepancy in the syllabus:

- One of the objectives mentions a focus on the development of linguistic, pragmatic, discursive, and strategic skills. No feature of this focus—except for the linguistic component—has been found in the syllabus.
- Every bit of the content is grammar-based (conjugations, forms, sentence structure, etc.).
- The teaching strategies are, however, situation-oriented, communicative, and dialogue-oriented.

Given these features, it would be impossible to determine which method or approach is preferable in the syllabus. However, such a clear focus of grammar—mainly restricted to verbs—describes one of the focuses of GTM. Finally, regarding assessment, formative and summative, together with oral and written tests are mentioned.

One last feature is that none of the six syllabuses seemed to fit into one type of syllabuses. As stated above, the advantages of functional syllabuses have been ignored and eclectic, teachers' self-designed types have been preferred.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, the concepts of education, instruction, teaching/learning, and *isomorphic mimicry* have been described. In addition, concepts and types of methods and approaches, assessment and tests, and syllabuses have been depicted. Finally, elements of this broad theoretical framework have been taken to analyse the implementation of the above mentioned concepts in order to see whether aspects of *isomorphic mimicry* were present.

In all six levels teachers in charge of English as a second language have had the compulsory duty of handing in a syllabus at certain point at the beginning of the year. However, most of them have failed to meet the requirements that the provincial and national levels demand. Due to this fact, it may be inferred that traces of *isomorphic mimicry* are given as a teacher hands in a syllabus in a printed format only to comply with the head's appeal.

As a lack of theoretical framework in the design of the syllabuses has been observed, one may argue that *isomorphic mimicry* is also present in the philosophical (or lack of) standpoint to set the whats and hows of the course on behalf of the teachers.

Authorities working for the Ministry of Education may carry out exhaustive research in order to determine whether having English in formal education is investment in the long term or just waste of taxpayers' resources. Also, the possibility of having EFL for the only sake of self-complacency (Raspanti & Vergara, 2015) should be revised.

As syllabus design is just one aspect of SL teaching/learning, further studies may be carried out. Class observations, interviews, surveys, analysis on teachers' beliefs, assessment of used and non-used tests, and diachronic studies (to figure out progress among levels).

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