

ADAPTING LEARNING MATERIALS TO FACILITATE A BALANCED ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS, VALUES, AND 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

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Abstract

(Title: *Adapting Learning Materials To Facilitate A Balanced Acquisition Of Language Skills, Values, And 21st Century Skills*). English language teaching in the Indonesian schools aims to develop the students' four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in the target language and promote the acquisition of values and 21st century skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication). The learning materials published by the government and publishers available in the market generally focus on the development of the student's language skills and values. Hence, the learning materials should be adapted before being used so that the learning materials do not only promote the acquisition of language skills and values, but also 21st century skills. There are a number of alternatives of that teachers can use in adapting the learning materials to promote the acquisition of 21st century skills. Some of the alternatives include adapting the task input, activity/procedure, setting, and learner role and adding tasks to units and units to the textbook.

Keywords: learning material, language skill, values and 21st century skill

INTRODUCTION

According to the core and basic competences of Curriculum 2013, English language teaching (ELT) in the Indonesian school has two main aims, i.e. promoting the acquisition of the four language skills and instilling values. In order to meet the current demand of the society, ELT also facilitates the students to acquire 21st skills. In most cases, teachers use commercially developed learning materials and/or materials developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture which are for use nation-wide. The question is whether the materials facilitate learners to attain language skills effectively and help students acquire values and 21st century skills adequately.

A close look at some English coursebooks for the implementation of Curriculum 2013, for examples *Bahasa Inggris: When English Rings a Bell for Year VII* (Wachidah, Gunawan, Diyantari, and Khatimah, 2016), *Bahasa Inggris: When English Rings a Bell for Year VIII* (Wachidah and Gunawan, 2014), *Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA, SMK/MAK Kelas X* (Widiati, Rohmah, and

Furaidah, 2014), and *Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA, SMK/MAK Kelas XI* (Bashir, 2014), suggests that the coursebooks generally do not deal the promotion of 21st century skills adequately. It is understandable as the coursebooks were written when the integration of 21st century skills in ELT had not been encouraged by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In those days the writers focused on the development of communication skills in the target language and the acquisition of values as demanded by the curriculum. Therefore, in order to facilitate the acquisition of 21st century skills adequately, the textbooks should be adapted.

This paper briefly discusses how to adapt English learning materials in order to facilitate the acquisition of not only language skills and values, but also 21st century skills. The essential properties of good learning materials and integrating 21st century skills in the learning materials will be first discussed and adapting learning materials to promote 21st century skills presented.

ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES OF GOOD LEARNING MATERIALS

Reviewing findings in SLA research, Tomlinson (1998) proposes a number of properties of good learning materials. Five of the characteristics that I think essential are that good materials: (1) teach relevant contents, (2) expose learners to natural use of language, (3) help learners focus on language aspects, (4) provide learners with enough opportunities to use the target language to express meaning, and (5) provide guided, semi-guided, and free language production tasks.

Priyana (2002) reviews SLA theories and identifies a number of principles of learning that should be considered in effective learning materials. Of the principles, at least four of them should characterize good learning materials. Good learning materials provide sufficient comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982; 1987), draw learners' attention to form (Schmidt, 1990; Fotos and Ellis, 1991; Ellis, 1998; Skehan, 1996; Helen, 1999; Richards, 1999; Williams, 1999), encourage learners to produce the language (Swain, 1985; 1993), and facilitate learners to interact in the target language (Long, 1981; Mackey, 1999).

A unit of learning materials consists of a number of tasks. The tasks must be sequenced in such a way that they facilitate the learning process. There are a number of alternatives that can be applied in sequencing tasks. However, the practical one is using the psycholinguistic processing approach (Nunan, 2004). According to this approach, comprehension tasks are presented first, followed by productive tasks, and then interactive tasks. It is assumed that, when the complexity of language is held constant, comprehension tasks are less demanding than productive tasks, and productive tasks are less demanding than interactive tasks.

Besides the above criteria, good learning materials present language repeatedly. An item taught in a unit must be presented several times in different contexts within the unit and in the units that follow (Tomlinson, 1998; Richards, 2001). This recycle helps the learners store the newly-learned item in the long term memory, put it among the previously-learned items, and

convert declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge.

In addition to that, good learning materials apply the task dependency principle (Nunan, 2004). Tasks in a unit are arranged to make a coherent sequence leading to the attainment of communicative competence. Every task is built on what is learnt from the task presented/completed earlier in the unit. In other words, earlier tasks are the bases for the designs of later tasks in the unit. What is learnt in an earlier task is the basis for the completion of the next tasks.

When the above criteria are met, the learning materials will facilitate the learners to acquire language knowledge and skills. Within the context of Curriculum 2013, ELT learning materials must also instill characters and develop the student's 21st century skills.

INTEGRATING 21ST SKILLS IN THE LEARNING MATERIALS

In the Indonesian educational context at present, the 21st century skills that must be promoted include critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, communication, and collaboration. There are a number of ways that the skills can be integrated in the English language learning materials. I shall use Nunan's view on task components (2004) in integrating the 21st skills in the learning materials. He suggests that a task has six components, namely goal, input, procedure, teacher role, learner role, and setting. While the goal, input, procedure and setting of a task are generally explicit, the learner role and teacher role are usually implied. The following figure shows the components of a task.

First, one of the ways to promote 21st century skills is through the input (e.g., texts, pictures, models, and graphs) in every task. Texts with suitable topics (subject matters) are intentionally selected and/or written to introduce new language items, values, and 21st century skills. A recount text of a creative and innovative inventor, for instance, potentially inspires learners to be creative and innovative. When students comprehend the text, they will unintentionally learn about creativity and innovation.

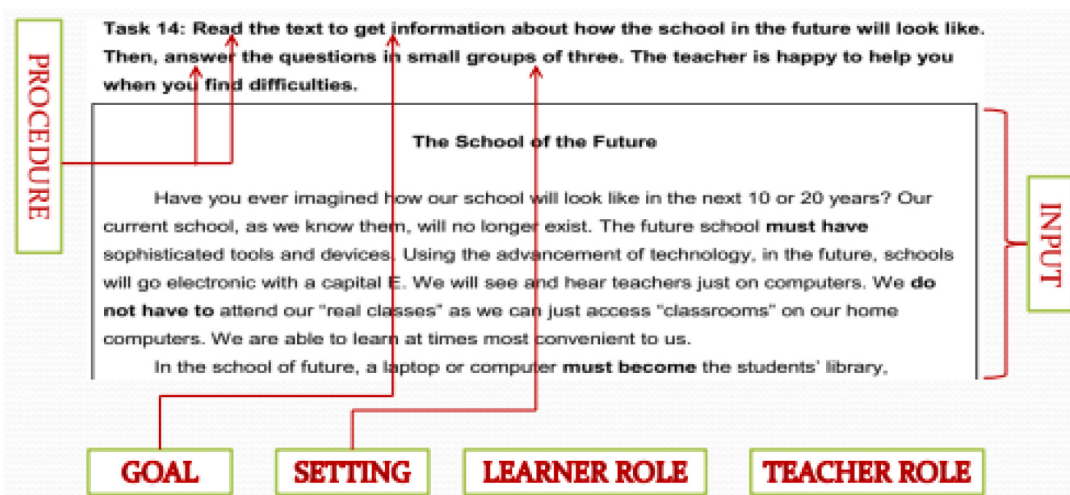


Figure 1. A task and its components

Second, 21st century skills can be integrated in the task procedure. Procedures/activities are designed to help learners develop not only communicative competence but also 21st century skills. When students complete tasks, they gain new knowledge, improve language skills, and acquire 21st century skills. Activities such as games (see Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby, 2006 for different types of games), jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, decision-making, and opinion exchange (Pica, et al., 1993) can potentially develop both the students language competence and 21st century skills. Games develop collaboration skills, jigsaw, information exchange, and opinion exchange promote communication skills, while problem-solving and decision making facilitate the development of critical thinking and problem solving. In the writing class, composition tasks will surely promote creativity.

Third, 21st century skills can also be integrated in the setting of the task. A task that is done in pairs or in small groups, for example, will develop the students' ability to collaborate. And *fourth*, 21st century skills can be embedded in the role that the learners and teachers play in the task completion. For instance, a writing task that requires the learners to exchange their draft and give feedback to each other, effectively promotes the acquisition of critical thinking.

ADAPTING LEARNING MATERIALS

Waysto Adapt Learning Materials to Integrate 21st Century Skills

As stated earlier, the textbooks available in the market (including the ones published by the government) generally need some kind of adaptation before being used in the classroom. Graves (2000) suggests that a textbook can be adapted at the task level, unit level, and book level. The adaptation may be done by *modifying contents, adding or deleting contents, reorganizing contents, addressing omissions, modifying tasks, and extending tasks* (Richards, 2001).

Considering the adaptation levels (Graves 2000) and adaptation strategies (Richards, 2001), adapting learning materials to integrate 21st century skills can be done in the following ways.

Adaptationat The Task Level

At the task level, using the task component framework proposed by Nunan (2004), to integrate 21st century skills, a task can be adapted at least in terms of its input, procedure/activity, setting, and/or learner role. The following task taken from *Bahasa Inggris SMA/MA, SMK/MAK Kelas X* (Widiati, Rohmah, and Furaidah, 2014) is adapted to give an example. Adaptation is made to the activity of the task.

Task 3 – Writing a descriptive essay

Think of a place you like to visit or a favorite place that you have visited several times. This can be tourism object or your favorite part of your house, or school, a park, or a traditional market in your hometown. Describe what is special about the place. Make a word web to help you get and organize ideas.

Using your word web, write an essay about that place. Include an introductory paragraph, two body paragraphs that contain the supporting details, and a concluding paragraph (read again task 4 for text 1)

After you finish writing, ask yourself the questions used in the editing section (writing-task 1).

(Utami W., Zuliati R., and Furaidah, 2014: p. 67)

The task above is a writing task. The activity of the learner is writing a descriptive text individually. Thus, this task potentially develops the learner's creativity.

This task can be adapted to promote the acquisition of another 21st century skill, i.e., critical thinking, by adding an activity at the end of the task, for example:

Exchange your draft with a classmate sitting next to you and give feedback to each other with regard to the grammar, choice of words, spelling, and organization.

The following is an example of task from Bashir (2014). The task setting is adapted to promote collaborative skills.



Writing Connection

Write an information report on any one of the following topics. Use the format you learnt in building blocks.

- Floods
- Bears and their habitats
- Lions
- Tropical forests
- Endangered animals of Indonesia
- Endangered flora of Indonesia

(Bashir, 2014: p. 41)

The instruction of the instruction says: *Write an information report on any one of the following topics. Use the format you learnt in building blocks.*

As the task does not state the setting, it is presumably done individually. The task can be adapted to promote collaborative skills by

redesigning the task setting into pair or small group work. The instruction can be changed into:

*Write an information report on any one of the following topics **in pairs or small groups of three**. Use the format you learnt in building blocks.*

Another below is task taken from Bashir (2014). According to the instruction, the students are asked to write a biography poster of a hero. The instruction says:

Write a biography poster for a person you consider a hero. ...

The task will certainly promote creativity. However, if a teacher wants to also inspire creativity and innovation, the subject/topic to write is changed from a hero to an inventor. Hence, the instruction is modified into:

Write a biography poster for a person you consider an inventor. ...

Let's Create/Contribute

Make a biography poster for a person you consider as a hero. Fill in the details in the poster given below. You can use the same poster or make a different one based on your creativity. After you are done, display the poster on the soft board or the wall in your classroom.

Sample biography poster

The sample biography poster is titled "Biography Poster Report" and includes the following sections:

- Portrait:** A decorative frame for a drawing of the person. Below it are fields for "Born: _____" and "Died: _____".
- Read All About:** A section for a book cover illustration. Above it is the text "Read All About _____!" and "To learn more about this incredible person, check out this book I wrote." Below it is a drawing of an open book and a pencil.
- Mini-Movie:** A section for a movie poster illustration. Above it is the text "If this person's story was turned into a movie, I would call it _____". To the right, it says "The movie below shows three important scenes from _____'s life." Below the illustration are three "Caption" labels.
- Quoteable Quote:** A section for a quote: "Something important this person said: _____".
- Life Lesson:** A section for a lesson: "Something important I learned from this person: _____".
- In Five Words:** A section for five words: "Five words that describe this person: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____".
- Final Fact:** A section for a fact: "One last thing I want to tell you about this person: _____".
- Super Resources:** A section for resources: "To learn more about this person, here are some books, websites and resources: _____".

(Bashir, 2014: p. 67)

Adaptation at The Unit Level

A unit of learning materials has a number of tasks. The tasks are usually organized into preliminary (warm-up) tasks, main lesson tasks, and closing tasks. The tasks

are designed to develop the learner's language skills, instill characters, and facilitate the acquisition 21st century skills and some other learning objectives. It is sometimes found that none of the tasks in a unit develop the learner's

21st century skills. In that case, one or more tasks to facilitate the attainment of 21st century skills must be added. Alternatively, some of the tasks are modified.

Adaptation at The Book Level

A coursebook has several units/chapters. Usually, the units are uniformed in terms of the method and/or learning principles that underlie its design. Unfortunately, some materials writers do not apply methods and/or learning principles that promote 21st century skills. In that situation, one or more units/chapters which are designed on the bases of methods and/or learning principles that potentially promote 21st century should be added. The additional unit(s) may be developed on the principles of Project-Based Learning and Problem-Based Learning. The two effectively promote the acquisition of 21st century skills.

Steps in Adapting Learning Materials

Adapting learning materials for use in a school/programme involves a cycle of selecting the most potential textbook for use in a programme, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the selected textbook, adapting the textbook, using the adapted textbook (and at the same time gathering data on the effectiveness of the textbook), adapting the textbook (again based on the empirical data), use the textbook, and so on. It involves an ongoing assessment and decision making (Graves, 2000). Two of the steps are elaborated below.

Identifying The Strengths and Weaknesses of The Selected Textbook

Once a potential textbook for use in a school/programme has been found, the book is then analyzed to identify the criteria of good materials which are already met and those which are not. The following is a checklist that may be used for the purpose.

1) Content

- a) Does the textbook cover all or some of the competences in my syllabus? Which is not covered?

- b) Are all or some of the texts appropriate models of the text types in my syllabus? Which is not appropriate?
- c) Do the texts contain the targeted language to learn? Which text does not introduce item(s) to learn?
- d) Are all or some of the topics relevant? Which is not relevant?
- e) Does the textbook teach the four skills proportionally? Which skill gets too little or too much attention?
- f) Does the textbook teach language aspects sufficiently? Which aspect is neglected?

2) Language

- a) Is the language authentic or natural? Which part of the language is not authentic or natural?
- b) Is the language accurate? Which part of the language is not accurate? Why?
- c) Is the language appropriate? Which part of the language is not appropriate? Why?
- d) Is the language level of difficulty right for my students? Which part of the language is too difficult or too easy? Why?

3) Presentation

- a) Are the units well sequenced? Which units are not well-sequenced?
- b) Are the tasks in the units well sequenced? Which tasks are not well-sequenced?
- c) Do the tasks help learners focus on language aspects sufficiently?
- d) Do the tasks provide the students with enough opportunities to comprehend the target language?
- e) Do the tasks provide the students with sufficient opportunities to produce the target language?
- f) Do the tasks provide the students with opportunities to interact in the target language?
- g) Is the targeted language presented repeatedly? Is the repetition sufficient?

- h) Are the activities varied?
 - i) Are there enough tasks for the learner to achieve the communicative competence? Should tasks be added?
- 4) Value integration
- a) Do enough texts in the textbook introduce values?
 - b) Are the values relevant to the ones the students need to learn? Which one is not relevant?
 - c) Do some or all the tasks facilitate the learners to apply values? Are they sufficient?
 - d) Does the textbook facilitate the learning of enough number of values?
 - e) Are the values presented repeatedly enabling the students to learn them?
- 5) 21st century skill integration
- a) Do enough texts in the textbook introduce 21st century skills?
 - b) Do some of the the tasks facilitate the learners to acquire 21st century skills? Are they sufficient?
 - c) Do some or all of the units facilitate the learners to learn 21st century skills?
 - d) Does the textbook facilitate the acquisition of all of the 21st century skills?
 - e) Are the 21st century skills presented repeatedly enabling the students to acquire them?

Adapting the Learning Materials

The answers to the questions above are the bases for the textbook adaptation. It may deal with all of the five components (content, language, presentation, value and 21st century skills integration) or some of them. The adaptation may take different forms, e.g., modifying contents, adding or deleting contents, reorganizing contents, addressing omissions, modifying tasks, and extending tasks (Richards, 2001) and changing/modifying the input, goal, procedure/activity, setting, teacher role, and learner role.

Adapting a textbook formally (by actually rewriting it for the school use) by a

teacher is generally a difficult effort. For that reason, the Ministry of Education and Culture (2010) suggests that a textbook (for example an e-book) can be adapted by only bringing in additional texts/tasks into the classroom, changing the sequence of task completion, changing the task activity, setting, teacher role, and learner role. This, however, does NOT mean that a formal textbook adaptation to meet the dynamic changes of the student needs is not encouraged.

CONCLUSION

This paper has briefly discussed how to adapt English learning materials in order to promote a balanced acquisition of language skills, values, and 21st century skills. In adapting learning materials, principles of effective language learning and character education and ways to integrate 21st century skills should be considered.

Materials adaptation involves a cycle of selecting the most potential textbook to be used at school, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the selected textbook, adapting the textbook, using the adapted textbook (and at the same time gathering data on the effectiveness of the textbook), adapting the textbook (again based on the empirical data), use the textbook, and so forth. It involves an ongoing assessment and decision making (Graves, 2000). The adaptation may take different forms, e.g., modifying contents, adding or deleting contents, reorganizing contents, addressing omissions, modifying tasks, and extending tasks (Richards, 2001), redesigning the goal, input, procedure/activity, setting, teacher role, and learner role.

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