COMPROMISING BETWEEN THE GENERAL AND SPECIFIC IN EAP SYLLABUS DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Jamilah
UniversitasNegeri Yogyakarta
email: jamilah@uny.ac.id

Abstract

(Title: *Compromising Between the General and Specific in EAP Syllabus Development in Indonesian Context*). The quality of a language program is reflected in the syllabus used from which the aim, contents and belief about language instruction are revealed. Syllabuses for English for Academic Purposes in Indonesian universities have been developed, yet they are not quite satisfactory. This article is to explain how to develop a sound syllabus for EAP in Indonesian context, following the steps: context and needs analysis and syllabus planning. Data were collected through triangulated survey employing questionnaires, observation, document study and discussion. Research participants were students, English teachers, and management staff of Yogyakarta State University. Integrated, theme-based syllabus is proposed that includes study skills in higher education as the general theme, which is completed with specific themesrelated to students' disciplines. This way enables both general and specific skills of EAP to be included in a singlesyllabus.

Keywords: syllabus, language program, English for academic purposes, instruction

INTRODUCTION

Efforts in developing English syllabuses for non-English major students in Indonesian context have produced various models of syllabuses. Mustadi (2011) developed competency-based model that focused more on grammar competence, Sholihah (2014) proposed learning outcome-based model, and Aini (2008) developed skill-based (Reading) syllabus. Those syllabuses are expected to be appropriate models to follow since they have undergone thorough theoretical as well as contextual consideration. However, it is not easy for other teachers to adopt those models due to the fact that every teacher has different point of view to the teaching of English in higher education. Furthermore, those syllabuses are not completely in compliance with the current theories of teaching English for higher education proposed by experts.

Jarvis (2001), Hyland (2006), Nation (2012), Grabe & Stoller (2011), Anderson (2012), Brick (2012) state that the teaching of English in higher education is for preparing the students to better study their fields in English, and this is called English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Hyland (2006) classifies EAP into two categories, English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). EGAP is used by all students no matter what fields of study they get involved while ESAP deals with specific discourses used in certain fields, such as in medicine, law, and physics. Brick (2012) adds one more category to the EAP- study skills. Study skill approach focuses on the development of students' study skills common for all students of all fields. In this case, Hyland (2006) includes the study skills in the EGAP.

The choice between EGAP and ESAP as the focus of English teaching in higher education is much determined by the nature of disciplines andprofessions the students take. The more specific the disciplines (i.e., law, medicine, nurse) ESAP is preferred, and the more general the disciplines (i.e., education, social sciences, humanities), EGAP is taken (Brick, 2012:171). However, management policy of certain universities or faculties, and even certain departments may not conform to what Brick states, such as the case of Yogyakarta State University (YSU). The top management has determined to take EGAP as the focus of the English course and urged the Course Centre to develop a text book to be used by all students. They even proposed to develop

an online examination for the course. However, some faculties and departments prefer ESAP for their students. As a result, there is no agreed sound syllabus for the English course for non-English majors, which, in Indonesian context, is included in the general course programs, coded as MKU6211. This paper explains an effort to solve the existing problem of syllabus development for English course for higher education. What Eng-lish syllabus model most complies with the current theories of EAP and which kind ofEAP, whether EGAP or ESAP should be adopted to suit the needs of the institution and students served?

Richards (2001) stated that a syllabus is a written document that shows the course contents and its sequence, and thus, syllabus development is a process of selecting, sequencing, and justifying the course contents. The course contents include the language to learn and learning experience the students should take. Syllabus development can be done after the environment and needs analysis, since a good syllabus is developed based on the needs of a certain institution and its students.

METHOD

To develop an English syllabus for higher education which complies with EAP theories and fulfills the institution and students needs, the study followed the following steps: 1) context andneeds analysis, 2) planning the syllabus, 3) setting up the syllabus, and 4) evaluation

Step 1 is to identify general context and situation in which the students use the target language, and the communicative events in which the students get involved; Step 2 is to consider the aims and the contents of the course; Step 3 is to sequence and integrate all the elements in a table; Step 4 is to evaluate the product. Despite the 4 steps proposed, the paper focuses more on the second step, planning the syllabus, especially in considering the aims and contents.

Step 1 was done through triangulated survey. Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to students, interviewing the English teachers and management staff of YSU, and studying the available documents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Results of The Context and Needs Analysis

The result of context analysis showed that English in Indonesia higher education contexts is used as a foreign and additional language to the teaching and learning process besides Indonesian language. English is used in reading academic literature, including textbooks, references, and articles. The students have learned English at least for six years at high schools, and therefore are expected to be able to understand English texts. However, there are still a large number of students having not reached the thresh hold level to understand such texts, especially the academic ones (El-Furqaan, 2014). Nation (2012) states that in order to understand academic texts in English, students should master at least 5000 word families. The facts show that the average numbers of vocabulary that Indonesian students master is less than 2000. The lack of vocabulary mastery is not the only problem the students face in understanding academic texts. Students surveyed also lack in grammar mastery, reading strategies, and reading practice to understand academic English.

Based on the needs analysis, the students surveyed confessed that they had many objectivesinlearning English, such as to be able to communicate with foreigners, to improve their TOEFL scores, to read books on their major, to read materials related to their major, and to use the Internet better. They realized that English was very important in their academic life. They used English for reading their learning materials and course books or references, listening to lectures, com-municating with lecturers in English, writing their ideas in English, and presenting them in front of an audience. They wanted to achieve various objectives and therefore they needed a lot of learn- ing hours and had to make enormous efforts to reach them. Unfortunately, they did not have intention to do so. Many of them did not like learning English. On the other hand, the course offered is so short. It is only a two-unit credit offered in one semester. Due to the time constraint, course aims and course contents should be carefully selected.

Syllabus Planning
Selecting the courseaims

It is almost impossible to transform students of under the thresh hold level of English into competent users of academic English. What can be offered by a two-credit-English course is very limited. However, students' learning autonomy may change the whole situation. Learning autonomy is an important principle in the communicative foreign language teaching (Nation & Macalister 2010, Kumaravadivelu, 2008 and Brown 2007). Learning autonomy should be trained to students. Students with good learning autonomy can reach whatever objectives they want to pursue since they understand the purpose of their learning program, explicitly accept responsibility for their learning, take initiatives in planning and executing learning activities, and regularly review their learning and evaluate its effectiveness (Little 1991). Learning autonomy can only be trained to students, if the teachers or the tutors are also autonomous (Johnson, Pardesi, Paine, 1990, as cited by Thanasoulas, 2000). Autonomous teachers cantrain students the learning strategies in order to be autonomous learners. Oxford (1990) states that language learning strategies encourage greater autonomy for learners. Learning autonomy is particularly important for language learners because they will not always have the teacher around. With learning autonomy, students can actively develop their ability on their own without teacher supervision. Therefore, they need to be trained to be independent learners.

Learning strategies can be an appropriate choice to teach in a very short English course for higher education students in Indonesian context. English course books focusing on learning strategies can be found world-wide, yet it is quite hard to find English course syllabus focusing on the same things in Indonesian context. Relating this choice to the EAP teaching approaches, EGAP with study skills approach can be adopted. Study skills trainings are quite popular amonguniversity students worldwide, and they are easily found in the Internet, yet in Indonesia they have not been taken seriously. In general, students are not quite familiar with the academic rules and they do not know how to learn at university effectively. They need training on these skills. However, Wingate (2006) argues that enhancing students learning through separate study skills course is ineffective and counter-productive to learning. Therefore, learning to study effectively at university cannot be separated from subject content and the process of learning. The teaching of study skills can beintegrated with the teaching of English, and it can be the content of the English course, besides the learning strategies and the language to understand the content. From this argument, students of higher education need to learn study skills integrated in the Englishcourse.

Communicative language teaching approach proposes that learning language means learning to communicate using the target language, and thelanguage is in the form of texts together with themeanings and functions (Richards, 2006). He further states that there are four frameworks in executing this approach. They are text-based, competency-based, task-based, and content-based language teaching. The first two models are included in product-based, while the second two models are the process-based models. Among the four, content-based instruction (CBI) is chosen for the teaching of EAP. EAP is a part of CBI, in which students learn certain content of their fields while at the same time they learn the language used to convey the content (Richards & Rogers, 2001, Wesche & Skehan, 2002, Krahnke in Richards, 2006, Davis, 2003, Nation & Webb, 2012, as cited in Crandall, 2012). EAP in CBI can berealized in three different instruction models - sheltered, adjunct, and theme-based instruction (Stoller & Grabe, 1997). Among the three, theme-based instruction is the most suitable for Indonesian context, since the students mostly belong to the lower level of English competence. They don't use English as the only language for their study, and the course are mostly given by the language teachers, rather than the content teachers. This choice is supported by Davis (2003) who states that theme-based instruction is the most flexible model among the three and it is commonly found in the context where English is used as a foreign language.

In addition, theme-based language instruction is adopted due to the benefits it offers since it is a part of CBI. There are at least six advantages of the use of contents to the teaching of a foreign language. Firstly, contents facilitate comprehension; Secondly, they make linguistic forms more meaningful; Contents also serve as the best bases to teach the skills areas; they address students' needs, motivate learners, allow for integration of the four skills, and allow for use of authentic materials (Brinton, Snow, Wesche, 1989, Richards, 2001). Although theme-based instruction enables the integration of the four skills, due to the limited time, a skill should be chosen as the focus. Based on the needs assessment results, reading skill is mostly needed, since students have to read much in their study. Taking reading as the focusof EAP teaching is recommended by many scholars (Anderson, 2012).

From these considerations, the aim of the English course for non-English major students of YSU should be to encourage students to practice reading academic texts in a way that facilitates autonomous learning to improve their English competence and to study their majors effectively. This general aim is then further developed into learning objectives that cover knowledge to master, skills to develop, and attitude to foster. Related to the knowledge, students are expected to get understanding of study skills needed to study at university, knowledge of academic reading strategies, linguistics knowledge to understand texts in English, and knowledge about their subject contents. Related to the skills, students are expected to develop the reading skills to learn at university, and for the attitude to foster is that students are expected to develop responsibility to learn autonomously.

Selecting the coursecontents

The first step in selecting contents for the theme-based language instruction syllabus is selecting the themes (Stoller & Grabe, 1997). Considering the institution policy that the course is intended for students of all majors, general themes are preferred. Since the course is to make students autonomous in learning English, they should realize that

English is really important for their academic life. This realization is expected to make them willing to improve their English competence without depending on their teachers. Besides, the course is also intended to make students able to learn their majors effectively; therefore they need study skills for studying in higher education. English as an International Language and Study skills at university are chosen as the general themes for the course. However, although general themes and EGAP seem quite reasonable for this course, some teachers from a number of study programs (i.e., Mathematics, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry) prefer to have ESAP or themes relatedtotheir majors. They argue that specific themes are what students really need. Students need to be familiar with specific terms and discourses of their fields. In addition, specific themes related to their majors would be much more interesting, and this in turn would motivate students more to learn.

Integrating general themes and specific ones and including many themes in the syllabus is justified as long as the allotted time permits it. However, as previously stated, this course is only a two-credit course. In Indonesian context, it means that there are only16 meetings times 100 minutes. Looking at the scope of the general themes, especially the second one, *Study Skills at University*, there are so many topics to cover. Referring to Allan (2010), for example, there are 14 topics to discuss. Topics of the general themes seem to have occupied all the provided time. On the other hand, when referring to Wingate (2006) thattrain- ing study skills for university students should be integrated to the teaching of subject contents, specific themes related to students' majors cannot be skipped. There must be a way to include specific themes in thesyllabus.

Designing the course that enables students to learn independently outside the class is a good idea to find space for the specific themes to be included. Learning materials for the general themes can be put in a module or be developed in an e-learning program so that students can learn autonomously outside the class anytime they want. Class time can be used to check students' work, clarify difficult concepts, and implement the learned skills

and strategies in more meaningful activities. Besides maximizing the learning time, this way, at the same time, can foster students' independent learning.

General and specific themes together with theselected topics, then, can be put in a sequent order. Texts related to the topics, then, are selected. Academic texts taken from the Internet and text-books used by university students are preferred.

Based on the texts, learning tasks are developed, covering contents comprehension, reading strategy practices, and language items learning. The tasks are sequenced from the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Pre-reading tasks are meant to activate students' knowledge to understand the text, while-reading tasks aremeant to train students to implement reading strategies needed in academic reading, and post-reading tasks are for relating what they have learned from the text with issues related to the topic. This can serve as transitions that link various tasks and topics. To link the three themes selected so that they have connection with one another to make the course coherent, a thread needs to be formulated. *Study skills training in English to encourage student's independent learning at university,* can be an alternative thread to link the three themes.

CONCLUSION

Theme-based syllabus is proposed as an alternative model for the teaching of English in Higher education in Indonesia. This model is supported by EAP teaching theories and suitable with the context in which English is used as an additional or foreign language.

The combination between EGAP and ESAP is proposed due to the needs of the students served. There are three themes selected for the EAP syllabus for non-English major students of Indonesian university. The first two themes are relatedto EGAP, *English as an International Language*, and *Study Skills at the University*, while the third theme is related to ESAP (the major the students take), such as *Learning Music* for students of Music Study Program. Two topics are selected for each theme to be discussed in the face-

to-face meetings, while other topics of the second theme are presented on a module or an e-learning program for independent learning to give more reading practice, to encourage students' independent learning, and at the same time to save class time, so that students have sufficienttime to deepeningtheir understanding by applying the knowledge and skills they have learned to study their subject contents.

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