IMPROVING CLASSROOM MATERIALS DESIGN FOR VOCATIONAL ENGLISH TEACHERS AT SAMPANG VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract:*Improving the content and classroom materials design for English Classrooms at any vocational high school level is a tough job. English teachers at SMK levels found it challenging to integrate their classrooms materials to fulfill the vocational needs of their students. No denying to the fact that Vocational English has set a different framework compare to general English classes at the similar level of education. This study aims as a joint research partnership and as well as a platform to improve and create variety of English Vocational Materials for SMK classes in Sampang area. Around 7 public vocational high schools were involved in this study, providing a thorough information of its students' needs for ESP purposes. The materials included knowledge about syllabus writing and the creation of independent teaching materials in the classroom as well as the implementation of reading, writing, and listening and speaking which are targeted to two different goals, UNBK and ESP improvements. The activity of developing English teaching materials is also expected to improve the final results of UNBK Students in English subjects. The study has resulted in the findings of challenges of teaching and developing materials for ESP classes, learning and teaching weaknesses triumph with the models, and the possible future solutions for ESP teaching at SMK level. The study also resulted in the initiative project collaboration with MKKS SMK in Sampang area to pioneer Sampang Vocational Camp 2020.*

Keywords*: ESP, Classroom materials design, vocational English, Sampang*

INTRODUCTION

The government's initiative in developing vocational education needs to be appreciated by academics and society in general. Vocational education can be one of the programs in overcoming high unemployment and the number of children dropping out of school in many Indonesian regions. Vocational Education Program aims to prepare students to become professionals in their fields of expertise where graduates are directed to master abilities in certain fields of

work as workers in industry, government / private institutions or entrepreneurship. In anticipation of increasingly fierce labor market competition both in Indonesia and within the ASEAN countries, especially after the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) agreement in 2015 which in its blueprint emphasized increasing global economic competition, the vocational program in Indonesia became crucial. Vocational programs are being pushed to prepare human resources who are ready to work especially with the fact that Indonesia is still lagging behind Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand in terms of manufacturing and key industries such as assembly and production of cars or machinery, electronics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals and clothing.

The teaching patterns applied in Vocational Education prioritize the teaching of practical skills and expertise compared to the mastery of theories with a percentage of around 40% of the total teaching and learning activities. Therefore, the government is increasingly aggressively aiming at the development of Vocational Education so that more graduates are hired by industry.

The teaching of these skills is not only limited to teaching content classes but also includes teaching of English. Mastery of hard skills needs to be supported by mastery of soft skills that can help graduates or vocational education students in order to meet the needs of leading industries around East Java or Indonesia in general and also to provide field practice and apprenticeship activities. One of the masteries of soft skills is the ability to communicate well, especially in using foreign languages. The mastery of foreign languages such as English becomes an important contribution so that vocational graduates can compete globally with the understanding of communication understanding using English, the third largest spoken language in the world.

The role of English is needed to develop the ability to interact. The ability to communicate using English, for example, is crucial in the academic sphere or professional environment, both oral and written. This communication skill needs to be fostered from primary or secondary education.

Implementation of learning in schools means optimizing teaching and learning activities that are supported by an organized and directed teaching system. A good teaching system also needs to be supported by the ability of teaching staff to master the material and class well. The components of this teaching need to be continuously explored in its potential and developed so that English teaching can continue to be improved. There are many factors and components consisting of instructors, students, and learning models. Teachers must be able to determine the learning models and materials that are most appropriate for use in their classrooms. Teachers need to be given freedom in choosing and evaluating their classes so that fun and effective learning goals can be accomplished.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Improving the ability of teachers in mastering the making of teaching materials needs to be fostered continuously so that the learning model can be adjusted to the needs of students. Adjustment of this learning model is important because labor competence is largely influenced by experience while still being students. Therefore, this study is intended so that vocational English teachers in Sampang Regency able to create up-to-date teaching materials for each respective classroom.

During this time, the English for Academic or Specific Purposes training model has not been widely applicable in Indonesian Vocational Education due to the lack of Human Resources who understand its application. There are still many English teaching staff who do not have enough access to competency training, especially English vocational training activities. This studywas carried out in Sampang, Madura, involving vocational high school English teachers. This project is important in supporting groups of educators, especially English teachers to work together improving the quality of teaching materials for their classrooms, especially materials for 4 English skills of Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing.

Related Theory

Handoyo in Tomlinson (p. 233) wrote that VE is integral to vocational education in senior high

schools in order to help students make a transition from education to employment, and in some cases to higher education (2016).

VE (Vocational English) is a complex but also narrow in terms of its application. VE is taught in variety of classrooms for example VE for engineering, VE for tourism, VE for health or medical, VE for businesses and many others. VE aimed to equip students with the knowledge of hands-on communication where English does not only function as tools to communicate but also engaging students with authentic needs and experience of the language.
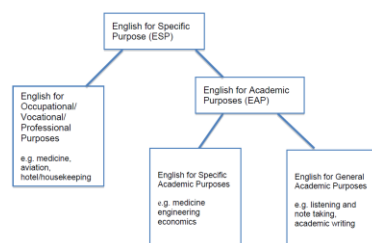
Figure 1. English for Specific Purposes Subdivision (adapted from Jordan, 1997)

- **Needs Assessment**

Understanding our students' needs are one of the early few steps of knowing what to do inside our classrooms. By learning the demographic and needs of the students, teachers are able map out possible teaching method and materials for the students so it will be more efficient and on target.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) on needs analysis in ESP:

"...if we had to state in practical terms the irreducible minimum of an ESP approach to course design, it would be needs analysis, since it is the awareness of a target situation – a definable need to communicate in English – that distinguishes the ESP learner from the learner of General English." (p.54). Needs assessment or analysis is crucial for teachers to get a highlight of what their classes are perceiving their lesson plan or syllabus. A modification of syllabus might be needed to adjust to the finding of needs analysis so that students are able to find value inside of the classroom during the teaching and learning process.

- **Why integrating Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing together is important**

L2 students have challenging times learning English particularly that most Indonesian kids are multilinguals and speak at least two different languages growing up with one being the country's official language and the other as their mother tongue. In

different education setting like vocational education where English is aimed to help students to understand professional world, the challenges are even double the size of regular classrooms. Students studying vocational English in vocational high schools are learning both general use of the language and content specific materials. Integrating English skills into one design might be the way to increase learning or classrooms engagement for these students.

Many of the Indonesian students who struggle with their English times tend to skip class or do almost about everything to avoid performing in English. Let us take reading and writing as an example. Reading and Writing is a unity we cannot separate in language learning. People say we are able to write because we read as much. However, in his book, Grabe and Zhang (2013) mentioned that using textualresources in academic writing tasks also represents a majorchallenge for L2 students, especially when these tasks are notpracticed sufficiently. Tasks that require reading/writingintegration, such as summarizing,synthesizing, information,critically responding to

text input, or writing a research paper,require a great deal of practice. Unfortunately, opportunities tolearn and practice reading/writingconnections seldom happen inL2 settings (p. 10).

We need to admit that in most Indonesian classrooms or Indonesian education in general, students are not given adequate timeframe for them to read and write more so the practice was infrequent, it is scarce to say it better. Grabe and Zhang (2013) continues by saying that L2 students in academic contexts face a wide range ofdifficulties related to L2reading/writing integration.

These difficultiesstem from limited reading and writing proficiency, the challengeof reading long passages, a lack of fluency in reading andwriting, limited L2 background knowledge, and relatively littleexperience (and practice) integrating reading and writing skillsfor academic purposes.L2 students often do nothave strong enough vocabulary knowledge to paraphraseeffectively (p. 13).

It is clear and easy to identify what Grabe and Zhang means with the limited experience or practice because

students tend to not getting authentic hand-on practice in reading and writing as much and that is, students who wrote more effectively lookedfor additional specific information that would be appropriate toinclude in their writing (a mining strategy); they also looked backover their writing and considered their goals for writing (globalstrategies). Students with better reading abilitiesperformed better on reading/writing tasks(P.15-18).

In the case of speaking and listening, L2 students also face similar challenges the way they face their reading and writing. Even worse, listening might be more difficult because L2 students are not only required to have good listener skills but also the skills to communicate its message on their own words. Speaking and listening skills often integrated into one single activity because more listening helps students to improve their speaking. One of the many ways most teachers do in speaking and listening instruction is by assigning presentation whether in groups or individuals projects. Teachers generally utilize various forms of resources for this activity to help students be familiar with listening.

One of the many examples of this activity is note-taking and presentation.

In theoretical terms, taking notes serves two functions. First, the encodingaspect may contribute to learning and idea retention by activatingand stimulating a listener's attention (for example Kobayashi 2005).The encoding of information in written form represents the *process* ofnote-taking (Siegel, 2016: p. 276).

Siegel continued by mentioning that another study foundthat L2 note-takers were only able to record approximately 30 per cent ofpropositions in lectures (Kiewra, Benton, Kim, Risch, and Christensen1995) (p.277). and this could only mean that L2 are still facing difficulties in listening. If students are facing serious issues in classroom related to listening and lectures in general while their teachers are explaining, it would be difficult for them as well to deliver appropriate speaking. Therefore, the study aims to see what practices and method of building classroom materials best for students and teachers in language teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The participants were 20 English teachers from 7 public vocational high schools in Sampang are. The teachers were involved in two different large Focus Group Discussion and received instruction for building VE materials for their respective classrooms. These teachers have different numbers of years of teaching with various teaching background. The FGD run approximately 3-4 per session for two months period of project. The materials development instruction was added to an EFL lecture listening and discussion coursethat focused on different topics each session (for example 'Culinary' and'Mechanical Engineering'). Teachers were also instructed to build their own samples of each teaching methodologies which integrates speaking, listening, reading and writing at the same time. Data from this study were obtained from different resources as follows

1. *Questionnaires*
2. *Unstructured Interviews with teachers*
3. *Focus Group Discussion*
4. *Work Samples*

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It is crucial to remind ourselves as educators that student's internal motivation could be an immense deal to help them maintaining their academic progress. No matter how great the program is, with students lacking in motivation, it will not result in a good way. This recognition needs to be implanted in any aspects of education, including the teaching of English. There is a motivation in learning English and for vocational English students, learning English for them is like obtaining keys for future working purposes. In fact, English for Academic or Specific Purposes is intended to support English language learning that is integrated with content area classes. At present, teaching English in vocational high schools is still emphasized on learning by using modules or textbooks in general. This is further complicated by the obligation of vocational teachers to conduct teaching that is in line with the National Examination or simply called as UNBK. With such teaching set, English teachers at vocational high schools found it limited for them to be more creative because at the end of the day, the goal of their teaching

activities is to pass the national exam. Limited hours of teaching also have not allowed these teachers to conduct a more comprehensive teaching experience for their students and materials design related to their content areas are few and far between what it's needed.

The challenges

The study found out that some of the most significant challenges that English teachers at vocational high schools are as follows:

1. *National Examination (UN) - KI/ KD*

   KI = Core Competency

   KD = Basic Competency

2. *Limited hours of teaching*

3. *Limited Book/Other Resources*

4. *Limited attention put into classroom design and assessment during pre-service or during service training*

5. *Madura's location (access to teacher or capacity training)*

Figure 2. Example of KI-KD

The English teaching at Vocational High School level is heavily centered into the success of students gaining high score for UNBK which is not an unfounded goal but too many times, with this goal in mind, teachers are only able to push their students into one single directional learning objective; passing what's the national curriculum wanted them to pass. Therefore, more teachers rely only on the KD-KI fundamentals only focus their teaching practices into building such isolated routine. Creativity inside these classrooms are still possible and that is by designing materials that can go both ways for UNBK and for the students' language improvement.

Triumphs and Difficulties

- **Students' difficulties in learning English**

Table.1. Challenges for L2 students in studying English

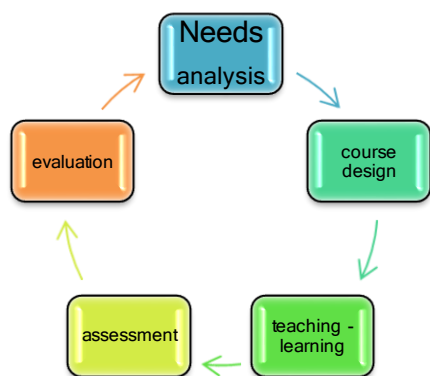| Multiple Choice |
| --- |
| Fill in the blanks |
| Class Presentation |
| Rarely Portfolio or Essay Assessment |
| Performance Assessment |
| Assessment questions limited to "can you recall or remember what is taught in class" |
| Conversation with colleague on assessment in only "sometimes" |
| Rarely modify classroom assessment |
| Local Approaches when assessing students |

- **Teachers' Practices in material design**

Table 2. Teachers practices in Sampang SMK

Expressing thoughts in Writing
Difficulties Communicating Orally in English
Concentrating during Class
Difficulties understanding recording in listening
School facilities
Understanding Instructions
70-90% uses of local languages

Some of the many examples of textbooks used in most SMK.

- **Teachers' Assessment Approaches**

Table 3. Assessment Approaches

Personal Feedback
Rarely help students to develop clear criteria of a good learning practice
Rarely supply information from content area teachers
Monitor students' learning progress
Textbook heavy classrooms
Little to no hands-on practices
Students were given mostly general materials and not content specific

From this finding, we can identify patterns and which direction teachers can start while establishing classroom materials for their students. One of the many important steps in material designs that majority of teachers fail to think is the needs analysis. This has been mentioned previously in the second part of review and literature and skipping this step would only result in a void of data where teachers can actually extract to provide them pictures of their students' current situation.
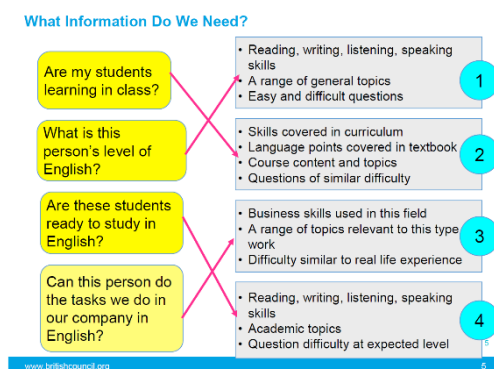
Figure 3. Stages in the ESP process

These findings were obtained from both Questionnaires and Interview transcriptions with all the teachers involved in this study.

Figure 4. British Council Assessment needs

Some of the results and standards from the FGD and work samples are as follows;

- Using authentic English texts including newspaper and magazines articles, websites
- Summarizing and paraphrasing texts that are specifically targeted for content area programs so it creates more engaging reading circle
- Writing short essays that can be both general and specific in topics. Teachers believe the best practice when it comes to writing is to do it step by step and different in levels for three years school program
- Use reading guide and anticipation guide to help students navigate their readings and find key ideas of the texts
- Focus on key vocabularies or themes of the reading to help narrowing down the topic
- Vocabulary development by using defining new words – charts
- Making meaning through texts and intensive/extensive reading. Making meaning or connection through texts can be done by using authentic text close to students' prior knowledge
- Make a list of key ideas from the text
- In-class writing, comments on web-forum or social media. The teachers we collaborated mentioned how difficult it is for students to maintain focus when it comes to social media use. One of

the many solutions for this is to actually utilize it as parts of the classrooms design. Ask students to comment on their peer's social media during classrooms activity and let them express their writing ability through it.

- Proofreading skills
- Reading and writing journals
- Use podcast for listening and speaking purposes
- Company profile on YT or industrial or content specific clips for listening and speaking
- Students create their own videos or clips in English presenting topic on the particular program
- Presentation basics in classrooms about general topic and topic of their interest.
- Class discussion and role plays
- Peer feedback
- Field visit to labs or workshop at schools

Some of these criteria of building or designing classroom materials were the result of intense focus group discussion and the teachers' work samples. This set of standards will not be typically performed in the entirely but the set can help teachers to begin identifying their materials and the KD-KI rules by the national curriculum standard. Having established a standard is easier for the teachers to help classifying their teaching materials.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
Conclusions

Our number one response of improving classroom materials is to find ways to help students develop internal motivation by connecting language work to their personal and professional goal. The following details are some suggestions we can conclude

First, Teachers and Students are both struggling. By modeling them of how important it is to motivate themselves is essential and teachers should be able to model them about being independent practicing the skill anywhere they could. Second, the importance of collaborative learning. As vocational students, they will most likely end up working in a team. So, having to be active, delivering their opinion in group discussion will help them to be more confident in their work place. Third, integrating speaking and listening, reading and

writing as classroom activities. The use of the aforementioned standards as the result of the FGD can be utilized to discover more ideas and connecting it to the KD-KI fundamentals. Fourth, needs assessment or analysis months before the class started is crucial to determine what the students' needs are and be more efficient, Last, syllabus or lesson plan modification, integrating the lesson toward two different dimension; first, with lesson aiming for UNBK and second, lesson aiming to stimulate students' language learning and communication.

Suggestion

1. Classroom Material Design and Assessment Training
2. Collaboration to establish better ESP development between vocational high school teachers and polytechnic lecturers
3. Equipment advancement
4. Materials and Curriculum development
5. Supply of books or other resources

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