Material Development for Peer-Assisted Learning Program (PALP) in Higher Education

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Abstract

Teaching English as a foreign language in higher education becomes more challenging from year to year. Based on the learner and learning needs, nowadays, English should be taught in relation to the other fields of the study. The phenomena require a certain 'scenario' to support the students' English mastery. In accordance to the condition, English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan has a program to help the students improving their English skills called Peer-Assisted Learning Program PALP. As an official program in the department, PALP is managed professionally by the boards. However, developing the appropriate materials for the program still becomes one big question to everyone dealing with the program, especially the boards. It is a really challenging work to develop such informative and practical materials for the students joining the program. Thus, in this paper, the writer will discuss several theories as the basis in developing the materials for PALP. It will cover the information about PALP, learner needs, learning needs, criteria of good materials, material development, and materials evaluation/assessment.

Keywords: material, English, peer-assisted

1. Introduction

In this era, every higher education institution, including Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD) has its own strategy to improve the students' knowledge and skills. In English Education Department of UAD (PBI UAD), the lecturers try to formulate a certain program aiming at improving the students' English skills. It's not really easy and simple to do it since it needs both the lecturers' and students' high motivation and commitment to conduct and maintain the program. After quite long discussion, the lecturers decide to make Pee-Assisted Learning Program (PALP). To have a brief understanding about PALP and the related factors, especially related to the materials, it will be a great deal to discuss PALP, learner needs, learning needs, criteria of good materials, material development, and the evaluation/assessment. It is important to understand the whole concept so that the boards of the program can develop the materials appropriately.

1.1 PALP

As mentioned earlier, PALP is a special program created by the lecturers of PBI UAD aiming to enable the students to learn and improve their English skills 'outside' the classrooms. Then, in this program, there will be mentees from the lower semester and mentors from the higher semester. They will be divided into small groups with 1 mentor, 1 co-mentor, and 7 to 9 mentees in it. The mentors and mentees will be partners in improving the skills although by the design, the mentor's duty is helping the mentees improving their skills.

The key concept of conducting this program is the fact that the students of PBI UAD are projected to be the English educator. Thus, they need the 'real' experience as an educator. Then, PBI UAD tries to facilitate them to get the experience through PALP. That is why PALP plays key roles on the the effort to improve the students' 'quality' both as a student and as a teacher candidate.

Dewey in Kosnik and Beck (2006: 9) said that education is not a matter of 'teaching" and "to be taught". It's an active and constructive process. It means the education can be more effective and efficient if the students actively engage to and construct the knowledge. Constructing knowledge is so important since it reflect the way the brain works. It is true that the knowledge can't be understood comprehensively without correlating it to the

previous concepts. In accordance to the explanation, constructing the knowledge is also an effort to make sure that the knowledge has advantages. It may be based on constructivist point of view that the first aim of the knowledge is to help people to be more beneficial, not to be the tool to explain the general truth. The concept shows that PALP has significant role not only to improve the students' quality to face their duty as the teachers, but also to improve their preparation quality to give contribution to the society later. The preparation should cover the whole instructional elements, including the instructional materials.

Related to the material development, in PALP, so far, the material development is conducted through a set of activities which are conducted by the PALP boards. The PALP boards are divided into two, the student board, and the lecturer board. In the end of every period, the boards evaluate the instruction and try to make it better by conducting the mentees' needs analysis for the next period. Then, the boards discuss the result and design the next instructional materials based on the needs analysis result.

1.2 Needs Analysis

Day and Krzanowski (2011: 9) state that the needs analysis is a comprehensive procedure to know the students' profiles, needs, and wants. Next, Richards (2001: 52) state that the purpose of needs analysis is to know the students' needs, the instructional formula which is appropriate to that needs, the degree of materials importance, the problem faced by the students in the instructional process, and the gaps between the mastered knowledge and skills and those which is not mastered yet. From the two theories, it can be concluded that the needs analysis is a comprehensive procedure which has significant role to know the students' needs, wants, and lacks and the information is needed to formulate the effective, efficient, comprehensive, and fun instructional activities for both the teacher and the student. It means that the needs analysis is the basis in designing the instruction. As the basis of the instructional process, it should be done appropriately so that the result can be accurate and valid. The accurate and valid analysis enables the instructional designer (usually the teacher) to facilitate the students with the appropriate treatment in the learning process.

From the previous explanation, the teachers should optimize their roles in the classroom. The ideal teacher, of course, is not only the teacher in the classroom. They are the innovator, motivator, facilitator, researcher, and so on. It means, they not only use the instructional 'products' to teach. However, they should make researches and design the instructional process itself. Understanding their roles well and do their best to do it are the keys for gaining the instructional aims.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 55) then classify the students' needs into two. They are learner needs and learning needs. Learner needs is related to the students' needs, wants, and lacks, while the learning needs are related to anything supporting the instructional process such as the settings, facilities, instructional design, etc.

Related to the learner needs, knowing the profile of students is the first thing to consider. Every learner is unique. They have their own characteristics. Thus, the teacher should facilitate them with the appropriate instructional system. Different student needs different 'treatment', it means the deeper we can understand the student characteristics, the more we can facilitate them with the appropriate learning.

Then, knowing the students' profile is not only about their intrinsic factors. The extrinsic factors such as the socio-economic condition of the students should also be the consideration. The different socio-economic level requires the different instructional system since it affect many thing related to the students' habit and characteristics. For example, a nurse and lawyer will need different materials for their English course. That is why the teacher should pay attention to that kind of factor.

Next, related to the students' wants, the teacher should also consider their students' wants. The teacher should give the materials which the students really want to know. Usually, it is about the things related to their daily activities. Those comprehensible materials can be really helpful for the students to master the materials since they usually find it in their daily life so it is not really difficult to them to understand the materials since they have enough background knowledge as the preparation to learn the materials. Beside, the teacher should also give the materials in the way which is really wanted by the students. It means that the student becomes the priority in designing the instructional system.

Finally, related to the lacks, the teacher should detect the gap between the materials which is easy enough for the students and the materials which the students have difficulties in it. From the analysis, the teacher should decide what materials should be continued and what materials should be repeated. It is expected that the procedure can help the students can master all of the materials in the end of the instructional process.

Next, talking about the learning needs, there are so many things to consider and we will discuss some of them. Firstly, it will be about the setting. The teacher should decide where and when the instructional process will be

held, whether it will be held indoor or outdoor and whether it will be held in the morning, in the afternoon, or at night. It should be based on the student's condition, for example if the students are the employees who should go for work in the morning, the instructional process should be held at night; if it rains it will be better if the instructional process is held indoor; etc.

Next, the intensity of the instructional process is also important. The teacher should design whether it will be held once a week, twice a week, and so on. It should be based on the amount of the materials and the time allocation. The accurate decision can be really helpful for both the teacher and students in learning process.

Then, the next element is the instructional methodology used in the instructional process. From so various kinds of instructional methodology, the teacher should choose the most appropriate one. It's really helpful to reach the instructional purposes.

Actually, there are other elements to discuss but we will discuss it later in the other article. The main point is in developing the materials for PALP, both the learner and learning needs should be considered. It is important to support the material development process so that the materials really meet the students' needs, lacks, wants and the institution's support system.

1.3 Criteria of Good Materials

Instructional material is anything used by the mentors (teachers) and mentees (students) to facilitate the language instruction (Tomlinson, 1998). Moreover, Tomlinson explains the materials can be in the form of cassettes, videos, CDs, dictionaries, grammar books, reading books, exercises books, etc. In the other words, the instructional materials are the things used to improve the students' knowledge and experiences.

In designing the materials, the designer tries to improve the students' knowledge about the language characters, language learning, and language use. Moreover, the material designer also decides the context of the language use, combines the skills, designs tasks, and decides how many exercises and the types of the exercises about several language aspects.

Next, Tomlinson (1998: 7) said that in designing the instructional materials, the designer should consider the following principals.

1.3.1 The Materials Should Affect the Students

A good material can affect the students. It attracts the students to learn more and more. If the materials get no response from the students or even get the wrong responses from the students, it should be something wrong with the materials.

1.3.2 The Materials Should Help the Students to Learn Easily

The student will be interesting to learn if the materials are challenging but not too difficult to them. That's the teacher responsibility to create 'friendly' materials for the students.

1.3.3 The Materials Should Improve the Students' Confidence

The materials will facilitate the learning process if it really improves the students' confidence. The friendly materials will give the power to the students to do more.

1.3.4 The Materials Should Be Understandable and Important for the Students

Something important will make us eager to know. That is why the materials should be understandable and important for the students.

1.3.5 The Materials Should Facilitate the Students' Self-actualization

Learning process is not only the process of knowing something. It's a process to make the students do more things from the instructional process itself.

1.3.6 The Materials Should Enable the Students to Use the Language for Daily Communication

Especially for language learning, the most important thing is making the language as the daily needs which should be used in daily activities. It will help the students internalize the language to their brain.

Thus, to design good materials is not really easy and simple to do. It needs commitment to consider material development principals. Related to the material development for PALP, the boards and the mentors should work hard to make it happen.

2. Material Development

Material development is an activity done by the teacher or the student to provide the language learning sources

and use it to maximize the inputs (Tomlinson, 1998). The instructional material designer can write textbooks, tell stories, explain advertisements, state opinions, give examples, or even reading poems. After finishing the materials, the designer can develop it into good instructional media. Then, Sudjana and Rifai state in Arsyad (2006: 24) that by using in instructional media, the teacher can attract the students' attention so that the materials can be clearer for the students and the instructional activities will be various. It means, the good materials are the key to improve the instructional quality.

Related to the material development Hutchinson and Waters propose the following principals (1987: 107):

1)	The material development enables the materials to stimulate the instructional process.

2)	The material development enables the materials to manage the instructional process.

3)	The material development enables the materials to accommodate the nature of language and instructional process.

4)	The material development enables the materials to reflect the instructional process.

5)	The material development enables the materials to take role to improve the language instructional process through introducing the new instructional techniques for the teachers.

6)	The material development enables the materials to provide the correct and appropriate language models.

Those principals are the basis to develop the instructional materials well and appropriately. The boards and mentors can use it as the basis in developing the materials.

The procedure to develop the materials itself can be adapted or adopted from the theory proposed by Dick and Carey in Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003: 570) that the instructional design can be developed through several steps which are analyzing the students' needs, analyzing the instructional process, analyzing the students and contexts, writing the instructional purposes, developing the assessment instruments, developing the instructional technology, developing and selecting the instructional materials, designing and conducting formative evaluation, revising the instructional system, and designing and conducting the summative evaluation. In short, the following steps can be done to develop the instructional materials.

2.1 Conducting Needs Analysis

In this step, the materials designer are expected to gain the information about the learner needs and the learning needs.

2.2 Designing the Materials

In this step, the material designer tries to make the first draft of the instructional materials

2.3 Arranging the Materials

The material design from the previous step will be the guidance to arrange the instructional materials.

2.4 Validating the Materials

The materials should be reviewed by the experts. It is so important for the designer to revise the materials in the next step.

2.5 Revising the Materials

In this step, the designer should revise the materials based on the experts' recommendation.

2.6 Trying the Materials Out

This step is conducted to know the users' opinion about the materials.

2.7 Assessing the Materials

In this step, the evaluation is conducted using a certain instrument to evaluate the materials.

The PALP boards and mentors should understand about the steps and do the procedure step by step well so that the output or the final draft of the instructional materials can be really good materials for the mentees.

3. Assessing the Materials

Instructional material assessment means evaluating it. Generally, this process is conducted to know whether the materials are appropriate to the instructional purposes or not. It's also done to make sure that the students can easily use it in fun ways or not.

Actually, the instructional materials should be useful for the students. Then, the content and activities on the

materials should also enable the students to learn what they want to learn. That is why the material evaluation process should be systematically conducted and it should combine the needs analysis and the solutions (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 105). In PALP, the boards and the mentors should find the gap between them and try to formulate the alternative solutions to face the problem.

4. Conclusion

Developing material is a sophisticated process which is related to several instructional elements. The boards and mentors as the key in the instructional system in PALP should understand, do, and maintain the principles and procedures to develop the materials well. It will control the instructional system from the very beginning stage to the last.

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