ELT CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: FROM IDEOLOGY TO DESIGN

Muhlisin Rasuki

Curtin University
Muhlisin@unmuhjember.ac.id

Abstract

This paper discusses the process of developing a curriculum in the contexts of English language teaching (ELT). It argues that curriculum developers/designers need to move from outlining the ideology before establishing the curriculum design. The ideology refers to the nature of knowledge or skills that the students are to develop upon completing the course of instruction, while the design refers to a set of procedures carried out to establish the nature of the instruction. To maintain both practicality and applicability, this paper provides an example of curriculum development. The example deals primarily with developing a curriculum of academic English writing course in a certain higher educational context in Indonesia. Although the example deals primarily with the development of a curriculum of a particular course of instruction in a certain educational context, the principles underlying the development, however, is relevant to the process of developing a curriculum in general.

Keywords: *curriculum development, ELT curriculum, academic L2 writing*

I. Introduction

Curriculum is indispensable in formal educational contexts. It specifies what needs to be taught, when and how. The process of which a curriculum is developed, therefore, needs to go through judicious consideration. Such consideration may include, for instance, the learners, the resources, and the nature of knowledge.

Where learners are concerned, it is important that curriculum developers obtain a great deal of information about learners and, where feasible, from the learners. To the very least, the information which needs to be obtained is related to learners' motivation in joining the course along with their proficiency levels. That is to say, a curriculum should not be developed without taking into consideration who will participate in a course of instruction, what motivation they have, and which types of the instructional process they are likely to cope with best.

In addition to "studying" learners, curriculum developers also need to account for instructional facilities available. These may include, for instance, learning spaces, like classrooms and labs, learning tools, like computers and other instructional media, and learning resources, like textbooks and dictionaries.

Once curriculum developers have established their "findings" of both learners and facilities available, they will then need to carefully account for the nature of the course. Obviously, different courses develop different areas of knowledge and/or skills and thus certain courses will be more complex than others. A course aimed to develop the leaners' ability in public speaking, for example, should be planned and designed in a different way from a course aimed only at improving the learners' pronunciation skill (see, e.g., Richards, 2001, and Nunan, 1988, 1992, for more detailed discussion on these issues).

This paper, will not discuss all of the issues above. Rather, it concerns mainly with developing a curriculum of a particular course of instruction. Still, in doing so, the paper outlines the ideology related to the nature of the course before putting the design into practice. The course of instruction that this paper deals with is 'academic English writing course'.

The discussion brought about in this paper is divided into eight main sections. The first presents the ideology behind the course. The second provides the analysis of the contexts. The third presents the instructional aims and objectives. The fourth specifies the contents and type of syllabus. The fifth presents teaching materials. The sixth discusses sample of teaching activities. The seventh discusses the assessment applied. The last discusses course evaluation.

II. Discussion

Ideology of the Present Curriculum

The present curriculum is intended to address one of the needs that higher educational level students need to cope with, i.e. being able to produce academic essays. In higher educational level writing skills constitute one of the most important skills that students need to develop in order to cope with academic demands. Achieving high level of performance in writing skills, however, is not easy. It even becomes more difficult as regards achieving writing skills in a foreign language (L2), for students not only need to deal with the content of what they have to write but also with the proper use of the L2 writing systems. Silva (1993, p. 669) contended that "L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing". Hence, although to some extent a number of

students may deal with the ideas of what to write relatively easy, they often find it ultimately difficult as dealing with putting down the ideas into L2 writing systems properly.

In many cases, therefore, in addition to teaching writing skills that are related to the process for developing well-organized written texts, the practice of teaching L2 writing skills also needs to include raising students' awareness on the proper use of lexical and structural items of particular texts. Also, when the teaching primarily deals with a particular genre of text, exposing the generic patterns of the text to the students would also be beneficial, for such exposure can help them construct ideas for both structures and contents of the text through complex cognitive and linguistic abilities (Carson and Leki, 1993; Grabe, 2001). In this curriculum all aspects which expound the development for academic genre are taken into account as the bases for developing academic writing course curriculum. The academic genre specifically concerned in this course is expository essays.

During the process of teaching and learning, the teacher is expected to help the students develop their writing that is acceptable to academic standard. It can be done through teaching skills of pre-writing—like planning, brainstorming, and organizing ideas—to post-writing—like revising and editing. The teacher is also expected to give constructive feedbacks during the process of which the students are developing their essay. The students, on the other hand, are expected to engage actively in their learning. This can be done through active inquiry to the teacher whenever they face some difficulty and actively engage in doing the tasks assigned. Still, the teacher also needs to clarify each task the students are doing so that the students can easily associate the nature of the task with other similar tasks they encounter later on. In this case, the students would find the learning activity meaningful. Hence, the principles underlying the roles of teacher and students are relevant to sociocultural perspectives in which

learning occurs best when learners engage in tasks that are within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the area between what they can do independently and what they can do with assistance. Learning evolves from verbal interaction and task negotiation with a more knowledgeable person, and the teacher has a central role in "scaffolding" this development (Hyland, 2003, p. 21).

Context and Needs Analysis

This academic writing course curriculum is intended for use in an English language education program at a higher educational institution in Indonesia. In terms of context, there are usually between 30 and 40 adult male and female students enrolled to the course. The students are Indonesians taking English as their major of study. The course, therefore, is a type of Target Language – Removed Context (Graves, 2008). Further, the students must have passed all prerequisite courses before taking this academic writing course and thus they have already had training in general writing skills previously. The course is taught as a compulsory unit at the university. The course duration is one semester covering 12 weeks with one classroom teaching activity lasting for 90 minutes weekly. The classroom teaching will be a combination between teacher-fronted and student collaborative learning activities.

In general, this academic writing course is intended to prepare the students for the subsequent courses which demand that they produce academic essays. Thus, the course materials include topics and skills related to writing academic essays. There are textbooks available at the institution which may be used to teach the course. Still, to ensure that the selections of teaching materials meet students' needs, needs analysis was conducted as part of the enrolment to the course. The needs analysis was conducted through administering a questionnaire.

Aim and Objectives

The results of the context and needs analysis were used as guidelines to formulate aims and objectives of the course. Formulating the course aims and objectives are necessary "to provide information for course and programme planners" (Nunan, 1988, p. 61). In general, the aim and objectives of the course are stated as follows:

Aim: By the end of the course, students will have developed skills in writing expository essays in English language in line with their generic and discourse features.

Objectives: Having completed the course, the students will be able to:

- make effective notes and summaries from literature for their essay.
- plan, brainstorm, develop and refine paragraphs to compose an expository essay.
- summarize, paraphrase, quote and acknowledge academic references in their essay.
- produce an expository essay of around 1000 words cohesively with introduction, body and conclusion. The genre of the essay could be comparison and contrast, the analysis of cause and effect, process analysis, or detailed analysis of a particular topic.
- develop critical awareness of the generic and discourse features of expository essays.
- develop a critical understanding of the structure of different genres in expository essays.

Syllabus

The course integrates two types of syllabus for the specification of the course contents, namely skill-based and discourse-based syllabi. The skill-based syllabus specifies the contents that are useful to develop students' ability to cope with particular registers or generic features of expository texts (Krahnke, 1987), while the discourse-based syllabus specifies the contents which can help students develop awareness on discourse *features* pertinent to expository essays. The discourse-based syllabus is realized in "a set of strategy-headings" as proposed by McCarthy and Carter (2001). Among the set of strategy-headings the current discourse-based syllabus primarily includes: genre-related strategies, coherence-related strategies, planning strategies, and convergence strategies.

Genre-related strategies refer to the specification of generic features and functions of expository essays. Coherence-related strategies refer to the specification of lexical items and cohesive devices used to maintain coherence of the essay. Planning strategies refer to the specification of generic structures and conditions relevant to expository essays. Convergence strategies refer to the specification of the informational categories, like "theme" or "topic" commonly

involved in expository essays, and affective categories, like "objective" rather than "subjective" point of views in writing the essay.

The selection of the two syllabi is primarily based on the nature of the course. In this course, selecting the course contents which can develop students' ability and raise their awareness on peculiar features of expository essays from the lexical up to the discourse level would be indispensable, and such selection is best realized through skill-based and discourse-based syllabi.

As regards the units to be covered during the whole course delivery, there are 12 units altogether which are to be taught within the 12 weeks. Each unit, therefore, is to be taught weekly. In general, the teaching and learning activities may be divided into three parts: *the writing process*, *elements of writing*, and *accuracy in writing*. The *writing process* covers 3 meetings, and it is intended to review the stages necessary in developing an expository essay. There are three units covered in the writing process: *writing foundations*, *reading and note-making*, and *writing stages*. The *element of writing*, which is the second part of the teaching and learning activities, constitutes the main stage of the course. It covers 6 meetings and it is designed to specifically develop students' skills in writing an expository essay. There are six units to be covered in this *elements of writing* stage, namely: *comparison and contrast*, *cause and effect*, *definitions*, *discussion*, *examples*, and *references and quotations*. The last part, *accuracy in writing*, deals with three units to be covered in 3 meetings. The units are *coherence and cohesion*, *style*, and *writing models*.

The teaching units as specified above are formulated on the basis of usefulness and relevance to the objectives of the course. Furthermore, the unit sequencing is also done based on the level of difficulty and, especially, the necessity of learning experience that students must have before embarking to certain units. Besides, as the course unfold, the units to be taught may undergo a little, should there be any, alteration in response to students' needs (Wette, 2011), for no matter how good the pre-specified contents are perceived by teachers, if the students do not perceive them so, it seems unlikely that the instructional processes would achieve the intended outcomes (Johnson, 2001; Life, 2011). Still, although a little alteration is expected, major alteration is not, because the pre-specification of the

course contents or the teaching units have already undergone careful examination to fit in with the results of needs and context analysis conducted before the course contents or the teaching units are established.

Teaching Materials

Within instructional systems in general, teaching materials are indispensable as an essential part of teaching and learning processes. In a more specific context where language teaching is concerned, 'instructional materials generally serve as the basis of much of the language input that learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom' (Richards, 2001, p. 251). In other words, the role of teaching materials is to provide the students with explicit instruction and practice (Tomlinson, 2001; Masuhara, et al. 2008). The key role of teaching materials, therefore, is to present the course contents and let students practice the contents.

There is only one textbook used as the main teaching materials for the course. Still, the textbook is quite comprehensive in terms of presenting the course contents. It also provides useful activities for students to let them practice the contents as well. The book is entitled "*Academic Writing: A Practical Guide for Students*" written by Stephen Bailey. As the book title suggests, it is designed on the basis practicality to help students cope with "*Academic Writing* as useful and accurate as possible" (Bailey, 2003, p. vii). In addition, the book is also designed in such a way that it "allows students to work either with a teacher or by themselves, to practice those areas which are most important for their studies" (Bailey, 2003, p. vii). As regards its contents, the book contains the genres necessary for teaching the course. What is more, the book also contains some authentic texts in the field which can also be used as extra enhancements to the students' learning.

Sample of Teaching Activities

As regards the classroom teaching, it will be conducted through a combination between teacher-fronted and student collaborative learning activities. Both teacher and students, therefore, have their own roles in the classroom. For example, throughout the process of teaching and learning the teacher helps the

students go through the process of developing their writing skills conforming to the academic standard. The teacher is also expected to give constructive feedbacks during the process of which the students are developing their essay. Furthermore, the teacher also needs to clarify each task the students are doing so that the students can easily associate the nature of the task with other similar tasks they encounter later on. In this case, the students would find the learning activity meaningful. The students, in response, are expected to engage actively in their learning. This can be done through active inquiry to the teacher whenever they face some difficulty and actively engage in doing the tasks assigned. Hence, the principles underlying the roles of teacher and students are relevant to sociocultural perspectives (Hyland, 2003).

In a more concrete description, the first week of teaching and learning activities in the classroom will start with a short introduction to the course. This includes an explanation about the course in general, its aim and objectives, the units and materials to be covered, and the assessment. Some explanation about the teacher's teaching philosophy will also be given to the students to make them aware of their role as students and what they could expect from the teacher during the process of teaching and learning. Subsequent to the introduction to the course, a further introduction with the students is carried out to give further information to the teacher about what the students expect from the course, and probably also from the teacher as well.

Subsequent to the introduction activities, teaching follows thereafter. In this first meeting, the unit to be taught is *writing foundations,* and the unit comprises two teaching areas, namely: *background to writing* and *how to develop plans from titles*. The main teaching and learning activities for the unit, therefore, are divided into two stages. For the first stage, which is the very outset of teaching and learning activities of the day, the teacher starts with introducing different purposes of writing—from personal letters to academic paper or article, textual and stylistic features of different types of writing, and then specifically explaining about typical organizational structures of expository essays. Having given the explanation to the students, teacher then starts with student activities in which the students are assigned to work on a single task collaboratively in a group of three or four. The

task is mainly related to the area of teaching, which is to introduce the students about the *background to writing*.

Subsequent to completing the task, the teacher continues with the second area of teaching; that is, building students' knowledge on *how to develop plans from titles*. At the onset of the teaching and learning activities, the students are familiarized with the ideas about the characteristics of titles in academic essays, how to generate a title for an academic essay, and how to make basic plans for developing the title into an essay. Having been given the explanation by the teacher, the students then work in pairs on a task assigned by the teacher as to formulating a title based on their interest on what to write for their essay later on. At this stage, each student may discuss as expeditiously as possible with his/her peer concerning their interest and the way to formulate it into a title. Still, the main purpose of the task is more as an initial attempt to raise the students' readiness to get involved with the nature of the course rather than to get a settled title per se. Hence, the students may still propose some changes on their currently developed title as they go deeper into the course.

The description of teaching and learning activities above constitute the standard pattern of which the teaching and learning activities throughout the semester are carried out. The unit to be covered in each teaching and learning session, however, is different following the specification that is already established in the syllabus. Yet, some instructional reinforcement on the same unit that is previously taught may also take place occasionally as a response to the students' needs and progress.

Assessment

The method of assessing the students' learning outcomes in this academic writing course is executed through (1) assigning writing projects to the students and (2) evaluating their regular class attendance. Writing projects rather than writing tests are selected as part of the assessment due to the nature of the course. That is, in academic writing classes it seems more reasonable to apply writing projects then tests since the very nature of doing academic writing itself requires that writers base their arguments on related literature. In that case, it is necessary that the students

are given opportunities to do library study to ensure that the product of their writing conforms the convention of academic genre. In fact, in many cases the product of academic writing relies much on process of which the writing is carried out. Thus, applying classroom writing test simply cannot satisfy the nature of academic writing per se. Still, the writing projects would be the realization of which formative assessment is applied in the course.

The writing projects, as formative assessment in the course, are assigned on the basis of four purposes, including three of which are student-oriented and one is course-oriented. Included in the student-oriented purposes are: checking on the students' learning progress, evaluating how well the course units have been mastered by the students, and giving feedback continuously to the students. The course-oriented purpose of applying the formative assessment, on the other hand, is to evaluate the course plans on the basis of the information obtained from the assessment. Hughes (2003, p. 5) points out that such student-oriented and course-oriented purposes are relevant to formative assessment.

As far as the student-oriented purposes are concerned, it is reckoned that through applying the formative assessment the students' learning outcomes and improvement can be traced regularly by the teacher. What counts, however, is when the students receive moderation and feedback from the teacher on their works and then they could gain beneficial input from the feedback to improve the quality of their works later on. To achieve these purposes, the teacher needs to ensure that the feedback s/he gives can be understood properly by the students. Some discussion with the students as a follow-up of each assessment may also take place occasionally thereafter. In this case, formative assessment would do more than just an assessment, for, considering the progressive feedback or inputs the students can get subsequent to submitting their work to the teacher, it also facilitates the students' learning as well. Further, the information obtained from applying the formative assessment on the students' learning outcomes will also be one of the chief parts to be taken into account as the course draws to the end and the call for the course evaluation is at hand. More elaboration about this will be given specifically in the course evaluation section later on.

Writing Projects

In this part of the assessment, there are three items that students must complete at a satisfactory level. The three items are given in three stages during the whole course of the study. The first stage of the assessment item is entitled "*literature review project*" in which the students must report relevant literature that could be used to base their essay. For this project, the students must provide a preliminary list of five book chapters or articles with complete bibliographic information and a general description of how they may relate to their essay.

The second stage of the assessment item is "*project design*" in which the students must write general idea indicating their understanding of how their essay is likely to progress. To do so, the students must include (1) a statement of the aim(s) of their essay, (2) a short response to the current information related to their essay, (3) a description of their essay (e.g. is it a kind of *comparison and contrast*, *detailed analysis*, *discussion*, etc.), and (4) a short justification for the project.

The last stage of the assessment item is "Essay". At this stage, the students must have completed writing the final product of their essay.

Attendance

Following the policy of the institution, the attendance is set mandatory for the students enrolling to the course. The students, however, are still allowed to miss two out of twelve meetings in which case no penalty incurs. Still, special arrangement with the teacher may allow the students to miss more than two meetings. If so, the students must still be able to manage their study in accordance with the course demands. Special issues for the evaluation concerning the attendance may be adjusted accordingly.

Table 1. Assessment Criteria for this Course

Literature review project (week 4)	20 %
Project design (Week 8)	30 %
Essay (week 12)	40 %
Attendance	10 %

Course Evaluation

The evaluation of this new curriculum is done through teacher's critical reflection on the instructions and the students' progress on the assessment items, as

well as from the students' feedback. The teacher is encouraged to critically reflect on the teaching and learning activities by considering all aspects relevant to the implementation of this new curriculum. The teacher also reflects on the progress the students develop during the whole processes of teaching and learning activities mainly, but not solely, from their ability to cope with each of the three assessment items. Lastly, upon completing the course, questionnaire is administered to the students to elicit their response to the whole process of the instructions they have experienced. From both teacher's critical reflection and students' feedback on the classroom instructions, some improvement for the curriculum may be described for better curriculum design and application thereafter.

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