DESIGNING AND USING ESP SELF ACCESS MATERIALS IN THE SBI CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Article presented the design and utility of ESP materials which were self – accessible for the SBI students which required careful thoughts and preparations. The study began by determining the students' needs of ESP, continued by the course developer who collected the required materials from four different source, those are published materials, authentic material, self-made materials and materials from students' contributions. The use of the materials were still needed the active role of teachers in setting visiting time, counseling or even assessing students' works. It is concluded that the less autonomous nature of the self access context for the SBI context is based on the assumption that younger students still require guidance and supervision from their teachers.

Keywords: self access material, English for specific purpose, international schools

ABSTRAK

Artikel membahas perancangan dan penggunaan materi bahasa Inggris untuk bahasa Inggris guna tujuan khusus(ESP) bagi pelajar dari Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional (SBI). Studi dimulai dengan penentuan kebutuhan pembelajaran dari sisi pelajar, kemudian dilanjutkan pencarian dan pemilihan materi dari materi tercetak, materi otentic, materi yang dibuat sendiri, dan materi dari kontribusi pelajar. Peran guru secara aktif masih sangat diperlukan untuk mengajar, membimbing, dan menilai hasil belajar. Disimpulkan bahwa pelajar yang lebih muda masih lebih memerlukan bimbingan guru dalam mengakses dan menggunakan materi ESP.

Kata kunci: materi berakses mandiri, bahasa Inggris, sekolah bertaraf internasional

INTRODUCTION

Background

It takes times and careful efforts to design a good ESP course. Current studies on ESP have identified the importance of analyzing needs, learners, types of syllabus and methodologies before an ESP course is to be designed. Studies have also elaborated learning methods and approaches in teaching the well designed courses. However, few studies have explored the approaches or methods required in designing and using ESP material that can be used by learners autonomously. The autonomous learning approach or the so called self access language learning has emerged as one of the alternatives for language learning methodology. Initiated in United Kingdom, centers for self access learning have now been developed in some countries with one similar objective, that is to accelerate students' language learning.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study elaborated library research and field research. Library research was done by selecting resources, continued by field research of designing and using ESP modules for the self access learning in an SBI context, and discusses a range of possible ways in which self access ESP materials could be used to enhance the international-like environment and help students to help themselves in learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self Access Language Learning: Strengths, Weaknesses and its Impacts on Learners

Self –Access language learning is a language learning process where students set their own target and learn to achieve all those targets by learning the materials prepared for autonomous learning without the mediation of teachers in the process. Teachers, however, still play a very big part in selecting and organizing the materials for the students. Teachers make the best self - access material designer, as they know the needs of the students and the contexts they are in.

The existence of Self Access Centers in promoting language learning has had both its critiques and praises. For example, Tomlinson (2004) besides making notes to the strengths of the self access concept in enabling the learners to set their own time pace without reference to a teacher, being learner centered, supplementing classroom activities and practices in the use of specific language items, and contributing to the development of clear declarative knowledge i.e. conscious knowledge of the forms, meanings and systems of the language, he has also made some notes on how self access learning may affect students in their learning: *first*, activities are restricted to those that can be easily marked by the learners. *Second*, most self access materials are guided and transformed in the use of cloze, gap filling, matching and transformation activities to facilitate self-marking and focused feedback. *Third*, it provides little contribution to the development of implicit knowledge i.e. knowledge acquired subconsciously. And *lastly*, Tomlinson believes that self accesses materials are only for those who are *studial* and not for those who are kinesthetic, global and experiential.

In line with Tomlinson, Benson (1996) concerns with the question of whether self access learning empowers or disempower students due to its state of individualizing language learning. The claims made by Tomlinson (2004) and Benson (1996) regarding the bad effects of self access could happen only when things are out of control and the school lacks of creative people. Teachers as

material designer play important roles in ensuring that the points made by Tomlinson are not going to happen by regularly updating the self access materials with rich activities involving not only individualistic based-materials, but also pair and group work based materials that will enhance everybody's learning. So, instead of only copy-pasting available internet ESL exercises, teachers could also make their students do the group video watching, pair role plays or even attractive individual multimedia activities. Nonetheless, it is important for self access practitioners to know that such things could happen.

Apart from the issues of strengths and weaknesses of self access learning implication, let us then focus on maximizing the possibilities of its successful implication in the SBI context. One may wonder, what are the benefits for *Sekolah Berbasis Internasional?* Why autonomous learning? To answer these, let us answer this question: how many of us have learned more in the classroom rather than out of the classroom? We have been learning autonomously ourselves and have been made amazed by our self discoveries in real life. It happens because we know what attracts us to learn and to what extend we want to learn something. Hence, the self access language learning is only formalizing this capacity into prepared materials and activities that will ensure students are still learning in the right direction.

In the context of SBI, the autonomous learning concept would benefit the schools in creating an international atmosphere at the school and improving students' quality in terms of academic and attitude toward learning. As naïve as it is to say that internationalization is simply measured by the use of English at school, one would admit that the active use of English at school is a sign that the school is ready to internationalize itself. By the help of proper activities and materials, students are given more exposures and expose themselves to English. The use of technology will, too, benefit the schools in accelerating the autonomous language learning process as it is a reservoir of self access resources and students are more closely attached to it. Self Access Center (SAC) can then be the center of activities where students are assigned to watch or listen to multi media, download or upload authentic materials, work as groups to find solutions to the problems, or conduct research to answer stimulating questions posted on the SAC's posts.

The lack involvement of Information Technology, however, need not necessarily hinder schools from creating an international (English) -environment. Paper based materials like articles from magazines and newspapers or even teachers' made materials, with proper strategies, may emerge to become effective tools to bring the international flavor to school.
Study the following paper - based activity and imagine its effects on students and how it could help boost the English atmosphere at your school.

7.3.2 Pair Activities

Activity 8: developing oral descriptive skills

Level   : Intermediate

Title   : Record and Listen

Aim   : To develop good oral descriptive skills

Resources   : Instruction sheet. A bank of interesting photographs, a tape recorder, paper and pencil.

Instruction:

Learner works in pair to practice their descriptive abilities. Learner A looks at a photograph for 1 minute. The tape recorder is then turned on and learner A tries to describe the picture for 2-3 minutes. After this tape is rewound, both listeners listen to the description and transcribe what learner A said. They discuss how the description could be improved, and learner A records a second description of the same photograph. The learners then listen to both descriptions to see if there is an improvement. The procedure can be repeated as many times as the learners wish. The learners then reverse roles and begin again with a different picture.

Figure 1 Pair activity for Self-Access Learning
Taken from the Adapted Idea of Dwyer (1996, in Gardner and Miller, 1999)

The above activity, when it is done in the class room and under the tight supervision of a teacher, may only look like an ordinary interactive speaking class. It becomes special activity when a few students coming to you, a counselor, hand you the learning contract (figure 2) and place themselves in the SAC or school area and then spend some time to do the above activity. This could happen once students are given autonomy to set his own learning target based on his own capability and pace that they can manage. When a student is trusted to do such things, they will tend to become more enthusiastic and comfortable in learning as they will *only* have to fulfill targets that they have set themselves.

What teachers need to be aware of is the fact that learners are not all autonomous and they have diverse English competence. Nunan (1997, in Gardner and Miller, 1999) argues that students have their own degree of autonomy. Autonomy level of students, furthermore, may even be partial: for example, one student may be very autonomous on one skill, yet, he can be less autonomous on another skill. Therefore, it is vital that teachers put their self access activities based on learners' competency level so that students will be able to pick materials or activities suit their level. The early stage of using self access materials for learners start when they come to a person in charge of the SAC and tie themselves with contracts that consist of details of: name, period and time of learning, goals and study activities. Have a look at the following learning contract sample.

CONTRACT FOR SELF-ACCESS LEARNING

NAME: _____

CONTRAT PERIOD: Begins: _____ Ends: _____

1. TIME I WILL SPEND ON SELF-ACCESS LEARNING:

I will study for _____ hours each week/month (delete one)

2. MEETINGS WITH THE SELF-ACCESS COUNSELLOR
During the contract period I will meet with the self-access counselor as follows:

	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4	Meeting 5
Time/Date					

3. OVER ALL GOALS FOR THE CONTRACT PERIOD

My overall goal is:

_____

_____

4. STUDY ACTIVITIES/MATERIALS:
To achieve my goal I will do the following things:

ACTIVITY: e.g. writing/grammar	STUDY MATERIALS: e.g. book/tape/program	REASON: How will this help you?

Signed: _____

Figure 2 Self-Access Language Learning Contract
An Example of a Learner Contract Taken from Gardner and Miller (1999)

Designing Self - Access ESP Materials for the SBI Contexts: Things to Consider

The discussions over Self – Access are mostly related with the selection, organization and preparation of learning materials so that they can be used without the intervention of a teacher (Dickinson, 1981 in Gardner and Miller, 1999). Therefore careful needs and context analysis need to be done prior to implementing such language learning concept to ensure that learners meet their needs

and the school gains the maximum advantage. To cater learners' various needs, self access learning materials should be composed based on the following considerations: methods in designing, understanding of the contexts and plans for future use.

According to Gardner and Miller (1999), materials for self access learning can be in the forms of published language learning materials, authentic material, specially produced materials, and students' contribution to materials. Published language learning materials are the published materials available in the market designed for classroom learning. For example, books and graded readers. Authentic material is the kind of material which was produced not on the purpose of teaching the target language. It may be digital or printed materials like magazines or newspapers. Specially produced materials are materials produced intentionally for the sake of self access learning. Teachers are expected to produce these in-house materials that would help students with the familiarity of the contexts. Lastly, is the material coming from students' contributions where students are given the authority to give input, co produce materials with teachers or provide authentic materials.

These four sources of materials, however, have their own advantages and drawbacks in terms of time, money, availability and suitability. As easy as it is to simply use the available published ESP materials, teachers may need to consider the nature of materials which were, mostly, designed not for the sake of self access learning. Closeness to the context and needs analysis may also become an issue once a decision of using a published material is made. Keys may not also be available and students will likely need the teachers' frequent involvement like they usually do in the normal teacher – centered classrooms. The ESP published materials can be found available in book stores; teachers will only need to find materials that meet the students and school needs.

Using authentic materials is another option that teachers can do. The use of authentic materials in the ESL classrooms has been suggested a long time ago by TESOL experts. Little et al. (1989) list three reasons why authentic materials make effective and useful language tools: it motivates learners, it promotes acquisition, and it contributes to language immersion. As good as it sounds, the use of authentic materials in the self-access context, still needs teachers' involvement. Teachers will still have to control the content and the grammatical points of the materials. It will, indeed, take much more time devoted. Bear in mind that authenticity does not always mean quality.

The third kind of material is the kind that teachers produce by themselves. The advantages of using this type of material lie in the teachers' understanding of the context and the learners' needs. Time of production, quality of the materials produced and the quantity of the materials could become an issue in producing this type of materials.

In relation to producing materials, Kit (2002) suggests that Self-Access materials should have the following qualities: First, aims are clearly stated. It functions to inform learners of the kind of activities or tasks assigned to them. Second, use conversational language style and avoid using too much passive voices. Third, it has some simple illustration and easy-to-remember information. Fourth, it has feedback, where learners can get suggested answers to tasks. And lastly, it has evaluation card at the back of a material unit to obtain learners' comments and suggestions. The following figure is a sample cover of a specially-produced material.
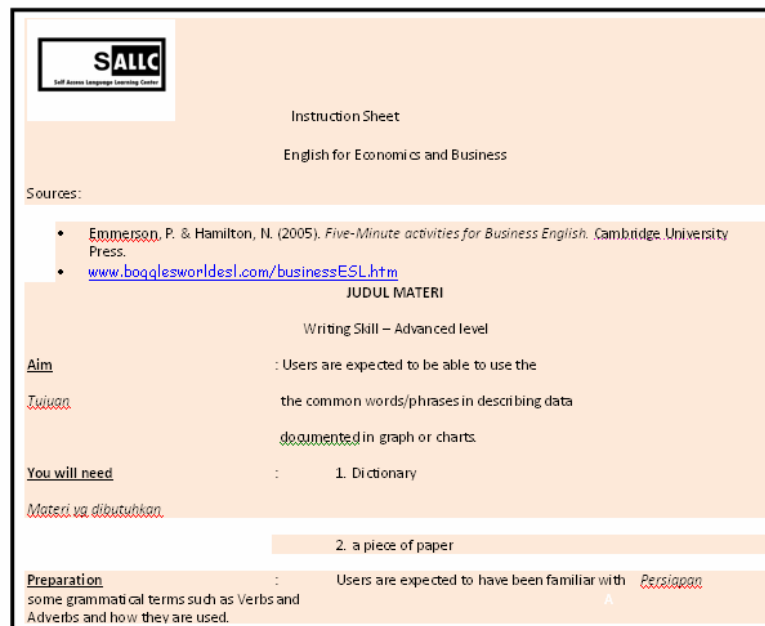
Figure 3 A Cover of Specially Produced Material.
Taken from English for Business Self Access Module,
SALLC Bina Nusantara University (2008)

The fourth kind of self – access material is materials contributed by students. The idea of involving students in making self-access materials is based on the opinion that it affects them positively and gives them a sense of commitment and responsibility for their own self-access learning. It is also based on the fact that students are making the best content analyst as they are the ones who have been using the materials. By learning from their experiences, teachers can make use of their feedbacks in fixing the materials. Time in guiding learners in providing this sort of materials is, perhaps, the only obstacle.

Students can contribute to self-access materials in different roles. It could start from being a provider of feedback, moves up to becoming needs analyst, then, by time, being co producer with teachers. Depending on how good the students are, they may end up being a sole producer of a material or a supplier of authentic materials, where they can really be part of the team.

Using ESP Self Access Materials: Making an ESP Material Self Access-Able in the SBI Contexts

The obvious difference between managing Self-Access learners in the university level and those in the school level is, perhaps, the independency nature of the students. Due to this issue, teachers play vital roles in: selecting proper materials, setting the visiting time, counseling, and assessing students' works.

It may run with or without technological support. The materials can be made by the teachers, taken from copies of reliable exercise books, or even papers of sorted articles from magazines or newspapers. With the support of technology, the SAC would even have more resources and activities; the use of some self-help language learning software like *tell me more*, TOEFL or IELTS practices, or even exercises developed by the teachers which can directly be accessed by the students.

When can students go to SAC? Ideally, SAC is to be visited at times other than schooling time. What teachers can do to achieve this ideal timing is by encouraging students to spend some time during their recesses. Or, have a look at the following scenarios: first, Use of SAC during recesses: teachers could assign students to do some exercises available at SAC. Second, Teachers take 2-4 hour

of his/her schedule for students to learn autonomously on a weekly basis. Third, study at SAC and make use of the materials with the students.

In order to 'control' students' autonomous learning, teachers could create a learning contract in which students make an agreement that they will do certain materials in the time and pace that suit them. Teachers should remember that the learning contract may not be appropriate for students younger that the 6th grades. With the assumption that the students of below the 6th grades still can not measure their properly, teachers could be involved in monitoring the students' progress through a learner's log made by the students to put history of their learning. Have a look at the proposed process of the ESP self access materials use in the SBI context in figure 4 below. Considering that each school has its own characteristics, you may come up with a totally different scheme.
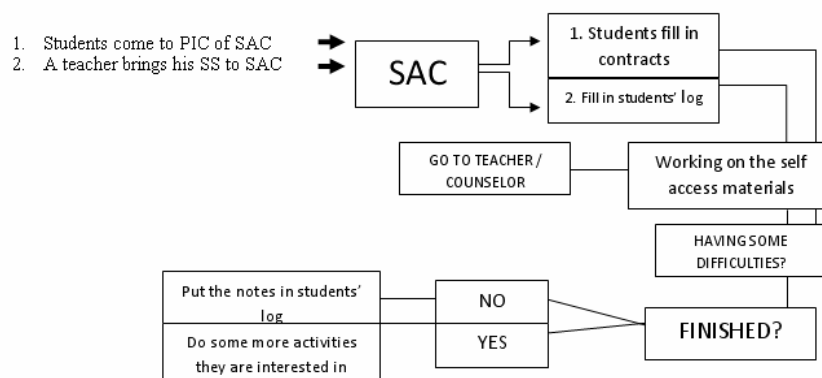

Figure 4 Self-Access Language Learning Process in the SBI Context

CONCLUSION

Designing ESP materials which are self – accessible for the SBI students requires careful thoughts and preparations. Beginning with the analysis of the needs and students, the course developer can then start to collect the required materials from four different sources: published materials, authentic materials, self-made materials and materials from students' contributions. The use of these materials will still need the active role of teachers in setting visiting time, counseling or even assessing students' works. The less autonomous nature of the self access context for the SBI context is based on the assumption that younger students still require guidance and supervision from their teachers.

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