

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND GRADE SYLLABUS FOR BILINGUAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the syllabus for second grade of the elementary level at private bilingual school in Banda Aceh. It is a qualitative case study which analyzed the syllabus using a coding system. Out of six aspects to be reviewed based on Breen's (2001) concepts, five aspects were fulfilled by the syllabus. However the syllabus did not cover one important aspect for an ideal syllabus, namely local content. Moreover, the syllabus was developed without a balance of language skills. It failed to describe the methods to be used in the teaching and learning processes and only specified a small number of games. On the other hand, this syllabus had a theme-based syllabus design which favors young language learners learning a foreign language. The syllabus had also a good time table for assessment in order to monitor the progress of students during and at the end of the course. Finally, this syllabus specified the teaching objectives which thus enabled teachers to expand the teaching materials.

Key Words: Syllabus, Analysis, Elementary School Level.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

English-Indonesian bilingual education systems have been implemented in Indonesia since 2003 with the aims to promote the proficiency of learners in English. However, this system was banned in Indonesia because it contradicted the Indonesian constitution of 1945

and Indonesian Law Number 20 of 2003 (Riana, 2013). In addition, Riana (2013) suggests that the system is forbidden to be implemented because it gives unfruitful results for the Indonesian final National Examinations (UN) in term of putting too much pressure on the teacher and the students to have to learn the other school subjects in English. She continued that discrimination happened amongst poor and rich students as well as between faster and slower learners. In terms of language, Safitri (2013) argues that bilingual teaching had demolished the language identity of Indonesian students. However, this paper does not focus on the conflicts raised within this system; this paper would like to see if the syllabus design really works to help students studying a foreign language to enhance their target language in order to elevate themselves in the global community.

Generally, a syllabus design should contain the content or knowledge, the aims and the method of teaching (Graves, 2008; Bourke, 2006; Breen & Candlin, 2001; and Breen, 2001). Moreover, Breen (2001) has laid out a detailed syllabus definition comprising six important aspects that should be covered in a syllabus design, namely: knowledge, continuity and direction, course record, formative test, summative test and content. The authors analyzed the second term syllabus for second grade at the elementary school level using Breen's (2001) concepts in order to see if the syllabus is in line with the concepts.

Research Questions

Based on the background for this study above, the research questions that were formulated were as follows:

1. Is the second grade elementary level syllabus at the private bilingual school in Banda Aceh in line with the concepts proposed by Breen (2001)?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the second grade elementary level syllabus of the school?

Objectives of the Study

This study is aimed at finding out whether the syllabus development for the second grade elementary level syllabus at a private bilingual school in Banda Aceh is in line with the syllabus concepts proposed by Breen (2001). Furthermore, this study tried to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the present syllabus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum and Definitions for Syllabus

The curriculum for language learning is the overall program and/or processes which includes the teachers and the students, the classroom settings and any activities in order to achieve specified objectives which have been planned within the system (Richards, 2001; Graves, 2008). However, as stated earlier, the curriculum neither touches the processes in the field nor is made by the language teachers. The one that is authorized to plan the curriculum design and organize its implementation in the classroom based on the syllabus is the teacher.

Breen and Candlin (2001) assert that a syllabus works based on the curriculum, but its scope is relatively narrower which allows the teacher and students to directly interact with each other during the teaching and learning processes. Indeed, syllabus design plays a crucial role because it should contain the students' need and expectations. Moreover, the planner should also consider the environmental factors such as the background, motivation, family, socio-economy, etc., of the students where the syllabus is to be applied. An important note to differentiate the curriculum and the syllabus based on Breen and Candlin (2001: 25) is set out below:

'Curriculum' can be distinguished from 'syllabus' in that a syllabus is typically a specification of the content of the teaching and learning and the organization and sequencing of the content. Content and its organization is subsumed within a curriculum as part of methodology. A syllabus is therefore only part of the overall curriculum within which it operates (Breen & Candlin, 2001: 25).

Therefore, a syllabus is a tool to identify what will be done by the teacher to be applied in the classroom in terms of content, teaching aims, methodology and evaluation.

According to Breen (2001:151), an ideal syllabus should provide:

1. A clear framework of knowledge and capabilities selected to be appropriate to the overall aims of the course.
2. Continuity and sense of direction for classroom work to be followed by the teacher and her students.
3. A record for other teachers of what has been covered in the course.
4. A basis for evaluating the progress of students.

5. A basis for evaluating the appropriateness of the course in relation to the overall aims and students' needs identified both before and during the course.
6. Content appropriate to the broader language curriculum, the particular class of learners, and the educational situation and wider society in which the course is located.

Based on the above aspects, this paper analyzes the syllabus for grade two students at elementary level at a private bilingual school in Banda Aceh.

Elementary School Children

Describing elementary school children is not as easy as describing children in general because different literature offers different explanations though they are interrelated to each other. In this discussion, due to the learning process and students' development, elementary school children are defined as young people who are growing physically and developing mentally. Their development starts at age around six and develops in the form of motoric, cognitive, memory, language, intellectual (IQ, EQ and SQ), creativity and social characteristics (Desmita, 2009).

Teaching English to Elementary School Children

Teaching a second language to elementary school students has raised a debate among theorists. Young children are claimed to pick up a second language faster than adults because of their willingness to take risks while adults are not so willing. In fact, children have an advantage in learning accents whereas adults learn language skills better.

Today, teaching a second language to young children has become central to the education world. The formal introduction of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) to young learners in European countries has influenced many other countries across the world (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990).

Elementary school children encounter a second language classroom with language awareness and readiness. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) assert that they are equipped with an innate ability to grasp language unconsciously both first and second languages especially at around seven and eight. They already produce language long before they learn the concepts of language. However, teachers play an important role in second language learning. Language teachers of primary children

should work harder because the children have various needs. Some need more motivation, some need more movement, some love to play, and some require variety in learning.

Teaching Language Skills and Language Aspects to Young Learners

Teaching language skills to young learners should not be separated. The four basic skills each have their own techniques in order to be taught but they are interrelated thus listening and speaking and also reading and writing are interrelated. Not only language skills but aspects of language (grammar and vocabulary) are also interrelated to each other.

Listening

Teaching listening to young learners is a difficult task if the pupils are not motivated and do not enjoy the lesson. Teachers need to carefully create purposeful and directed learning activities that will be fun for the children. Brewster (1991) admits that “learners will also sometimes listen just for fun, without having to do anything with what they hear”. Conversely, when teaching listening English primary teachers should pay much attention to the different listening tasks in particular to testing techniques and listening to understand.

Speaking

Teaching speaking skills is perhaps challenging for teaching young learners. This is because children often use assumptions or expressions to express themselves in their second language which are based on their first language. This limitation should be balanced by giving them controlled and guided activities (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). According to them, the teacher should give a lot of speaking practice in the classroom since children may have few opportunities to practice English outside of the classroom. When teachers are controlling and guiding activities, children may be expected to produce correct sentences, thus every mistake could be corrected straight away. However, Scott and Ytreberg (1990) also suggest that with free talk, children should not be expected to speak correctly and no corrections should be made. They further added that, however, when pupils are working on free-oral activities, teachers try to get them to say what they want to say, to express themselves and their own personalities.

Reading

The second skill to learning a language either first or second language after listening is reading. Reading is the second most important way to improve language learning ability. To be sure, Japanese and Arabian children will probably need extra stages and more time to learn English because they need to learn to recognize the Roman alphabet after their own native language letters and sounds (Scoot & Ytreberg, 1990). Reading will make it more effective and easier to learn the language if children read more and more because reading is a window to the world.

Writing

As mentioned earlier, reading and writing may be taught together at the same time for young learners but the teachers must be aware of the different needs of their pupils. Slow learners and fast learners are different in term of picking up a language both oral and literary skills. Formerly, the phonic approach was used and then was followed by learning short meaningful sentences in reading and writing. In the EFL writing classroom, it is suggested to get children to write with us not after us (Paul, 2003). Write down sentences on the board and encourage the children to continue the sentence until the class produces a story. Copying sometime looks good to parents but it can have a negative result for children although the parents may be satisfied and delighted to see their children beautiful writing. It is always good to have children's mind working actively rather than just copying although copying is very good for making memories. Seeking perfection in writing skills for young children could make them "less likely to experiment and risk making a mistake" (Paul, 2001:97). Children should be encouraged to express their ideas rather than striving for correctness and good writing. Bad hand writing is not a big problem for those who want to study seriously.

Vocabulary and Grammar

Many have argued that in teaching English, between vocabulary and grammar, vocabulary should come first because without vocabulary the language could not be transferred to our interlocutor. In contrast, using grammar without vocabulary is impossible. It is important to consider this issue when teaching children because they can easily pick up the language through words/vocabulary when compared to picking up grammar.

The roles of vocabulary and of grammar are both significant in teaching language. Vocabulary cannot be taught in isolation from grammar because grammatical information is tied into words and learning grammar cannot be split from the words (Cameron, 2001). In teaching children vocabulary, we have to consider what will work and what will be too difficult for them. In constructing a syllabus for young learners, some argue that grammar has no place in young learners' classrooms. It is claimed to be too difficult and not relevant for young children (Cameron, 2001). However, as discussed earlier learning vocabulary cannot be separated from grammar and vice versa because they are so closely interrelated to each other. Therefore, language grammar, particularly English grammar is obviously learnt but it can be taught without presenting the formulae for grammar but inserted as spoken utterances.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This is a qualitative case study. In the qualitative paradigm the researcher is directly involved in collecting the data and seeks in depth explanations for the data. Specifically, descriptive data such as documents, interview transcripts, videotapes, and photographs become the focus of the data (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992). Data is analyzed inductively where the things are open at the beginning and narrower at the end.

This study was conducted to investigate the relevance of the syllabus for an elementary level at a private bilingual school in Banda Aceh to the theory of syllabus as offered by Breen (2001). The instrument used was the syllabus document for second term in the second grade at elementary level.

Research Subject and Object

The subject of this research was the syllabus and the object was the content of the syllabus. The content was analyzed based on Breen's (2001) concept of an ideal syllabus.

Method of Data Collection

Documentation

The document refers to the syllabus, specifically the content of the syllabus which was the primary data of this study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the document, content analysis method was used. In the content analysis method, the common units to be analyzed include words, paragraphs, books, documents and so forth (Babbie, 2010). In analyzing this qualitative data, a coding system is the key process used to categorize the data based on the principle of similarities.

The data was collected by analyzing the syllabus. For example, the first aspect is knowledge which involves language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and language aspects (vocabulary and grammar). The researchers analyzed the data carefully and counted how many meetings for listening, speaking, reading and writing skills were given in a week, then the number of occurrences of each skill accumulated within a week, a month, and finally within a semester. This technique was also applied to the language aspects. In analyzing the evaluation, the researchers checked whether the evaluation is a formative or a summative test by considering the time given for the pupils. The objectives of study were clearly described in the syllabus. Lastly, the duration of teaching divided and sequenced orderly from months, weeks, days and hours that described ‘continuity and direction’ as well as the ‘course record’.

The analysis also led the researchers to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the present syllabus used for the second grade elementary level of the school under study.

RESULTS FROM THE STUDY AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of Syllabus

In order to answer the first question, the researchers analyzed the syllabus and the result of this study is shown in Table 1. Recalling Breen’s (2001) concepts for syllabus, the components of this syllabus design appear to fit these concepts or to match most of the elements except for no. 6 (i.e. Content).

Table 1. Comparison with Elements of an ideal Syllabus based on Breen (2001).

No.	Aspect of Review	Description	Statement (tick one)	Remarks
1	Knowledge	A clear framework of knowledge & capabilities selected to be appropriate to overall aims	Yes (√) No ()	

Table 1 continued...

2	Continuity and Direction	Continuity & a sense of direction in classroom work for teacher and students	Yes (√) No ()	
3	Course record	A record for other teachers of what has been covered in the course	Yes (√) No ()	
4	Formative test	A basis for evaluating students' progress	Yes (√) No ()	
5	Summative test	A basis for evaluating the appropriateness of the course in relation to overall aims and students needs identified both before and during the course.	Yes (√) No ()	
6	Content	Content appropriate to the broader language curriculum, the particular class of learners, and the educational situation and wider society in which the course is located	Yes () No (√)	

Knowledge refers to language skills and aspects taught to the students during the semester. These were taught under the themes of basic competencies. Besides language skills and aspects, the syllabus also included pronunciation which was covered under speaking skills; capitalization and punctuation were covered in writing skills and grammar. The teacher developed the syllabus based on the Standard Competencies and Basic Competencies required for elementary students; these are clearly shown in the syllabus.

Continuity and direction are clearly shown in the meeting times within the semester. The semester started in the second week of January and ended in the final week of May. Within each week, there were 9 hours for English which was divided into two meetings each day. In each meeting, they spent 2 x 35 minutes. For instance, in pronunciation, students learned to listen to the beginning vowel sounds “a” and “e” followed by “i”, “o” and “u” in the later meetings. Thus, students were not confused because they were directed by the teacher.

Course records were signaled by two indicators which were the topics and the aims of the lessons. Both of these gave a course record both for the teacher herself and for the other teachers. The course records helped teachers to prepare and continue the next lesson; they outlined what had been covered and what had not.

Formative tests were given periodically by the teacher during the semester. A unit review and a midterm test were given to the students in order to know what their progress was in each unit and for the half semester.

A *summative test* was also given at the end of the semester. This final test aimed to see whether the students' achievements met those described in the standard competencies and the basic competencies.

Content was the aspect from the syllabus that was not fully met. The teacher did not include local content from where the course is taking place. Social values are important in constructing a syllabus because they explain the social background of the students.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Syllabus

The next research question inquires the strengths and weaknesses of the present syllabus used for the second grade elementary level of the private bilingual school. Based on the analysis, the researchers recognized some strengths and weaknesses as follows.

Strengths

- The syllabus belongs to the theme-based teaching and learning or topic-based syllabus which is believed to trigger student mastery of a foreign language (Richards, 2001).
- The syllabus includes good management for assessment. Formative and summative evaluations are clearly present; these two kinds of assessment measure the target language proficiency of students during and at the end of the course in the form of unit tests, reviews, a midterm test and a final test.

Weaknesses

- The syllabus designer ignored the local social values where the course is taking place (Breen & Candlin, 2001; Breen, 2001).
- Imbalance in the proportions of the different language skills as well as in the aspects language being taught to these young children has made this syllabus futile.
- A good syllabus design contains the methodology, yet this syllabus did not mention it straightforwardly or describe it implicitly so this syllabus could not be defined as a good syllabus design.
- This syllabus had a very limited number of games. During the term, there were only two meetings involving games. While playing games

is believed to be one of the best methods from amongst many which are suited to the learning style of young children (Paul, 2003).

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the syllabus, there are several points which are basically not relevant to the teaching and learning process for children. These irrelevant points are the weaknesses in the syllabus design. The following is a discussion of these points.

The Need to Balance Skills

There are four skills in language learning which EFL students need to master, namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills should be taught in balance for ESL/EFL language learners (Cameron, 2001; Paul, 2003). However, the syllabus was not designed properly. Based on the analysis, the highest number of teaching hours per semester is for writing followed by speaking, reading and listening, respectively. In fact, these skills should be given to the pupil in the same amount of teaching hours. Paul (2003) asserts that a balanced portion of skills is needed in order to ease pupil in mastering the target language from a number of different approaches and directions.

Vocabulary and Grammar Issue

Teaching grammar and vocabulary for young learners cannot be separated from each other (Cameron, 2001). However, it can be seen from the syllabus analysis that grammar began from the start of the semester whilst vocabulary only started in March. In fact, the sequencing of teaching vocabulary after grammar does not match to the theory. The teacher should teach grammar and vocabulary at the same time because these language aspects are strongly interrelated.

Minimal Value of Local Content

Graves (2008) says that in preparing language curriculum, socio-educational context is embedded within the curriculum which is later reflected in the syllabus development. The socio-educational context itself consists of the nation, the state/province, city/town, community, educational institution, and finally the classroom. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, there are many factors that affect syllabus design according to Pantaleoni (1991), one of these factors is 'the pupil demographic and geographical conditions' which refers to the social

background and geographical area (country/town, big/small city, and so on). It is clear that it is important to include local content in the syllabus design. An easy example to bring cultural value into the young children EFL classroom situation is to insert how Acehnese shake hands, how Acehnese young people show respect to their elders by bowing their body, etc. Thus the children will learn the values behind these actions. The teacher plays an important role in modeling and coaching the students (Moran, 2001).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the conclusion can be drawn as follows. Firstly, the syllabus for the second grade at elementary level at the private bilingual school in Banda Aceh is in line with the concepts proposed by Breen (2001). Out of six aspects to be reviewed from the syllabus, five aspects are consistent with his concepts and one aspect is not completely so. The knowledge, continuity and direction, course record, formative and summative test aspects are present in the syllabus design when analyzed. These are its strengths. The syllabus only missed out by not including local cultural values in the curriculum. Despite few other weaknesses are present, thus, the syllabus is in line with the concepts advocated by Breen in 2001.

Suggestion

The results of this study show that there are many significant aspects which should be maintained with the present syllabus. Yet, some improvements still need to be undertaken. However, suggestions for further work related to the syllabus analysis are offered as follows.

First, it is suggested that the syllabus for the second semester of second year elementary level at the school under study to cover the six points proposed by Breen (2001) because these concepts are strongly linked with the English learning process. In order to upgrade the syllabus, it is suggested that the teacher should teach the students with a balanced division of language skills and language aspects, they cannot be taught in isolation. In a syllabus design, oral and literary skills must support EFL young learners to master their English whilst grammar and vocabulary building exercises should be planned at the same time and inserted whilst teaching the language skills. In order to meet the learning behavior of young children, the teacher as the designer of the

syllabus should use imaginative and effective games for their young students. Whilst playing the games, the English teacher should drive the class to focus on the learning aspects. On the other hand, the strengths of this syllabus should always continue to be maintained.

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