

IMPLEMENTATION OF COURSE SYLLABUS

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

Syllabus is specifically a description of the structure of the course and its significance within the general program of study. According to Millis (2009), “a well thought-out syllabus reflects careful course design with attention to clearly articulated student learning outcomes, activities that promote significant learning, and meaningful assessment” (p. 5). In short, the syllabus must at least contain the learning objectives, teaching materials, classroom exercises, home assignments, and final projects of the course.

Learning objectives are students’ knowledge and skills which could be measured. According to Fontaine and Bernhard (1998), the role of the learning objectives are to facilitate the choice of teaching materials, to be used in choosing learning activities, and to specify the purpose of the evaluation. In other words, the stated learning objectives acted as a standard in designing the teaching materials, and learning activities such as classroom exercises and home assignments. And also, it is used as an indicator in assessing students’ final projects.

Teaching materials should be designed based on learning objectives in terms of content and teaching aids. As stated by Fontaine and Bernhard (1998),

“Once the objectives have been written, the teacher must ask himself what educational material he will use in order to attain them more effectively. The objectives serve as criteria for the choice of teaching aids: collections of texts, volumes, films and others. He must, as far as possible, seek to ensure that the teaching aids are appropriate to the objectives set.”

The content should be clear and understandable in order to enrich students’ knowledge about the subject. And the presentation of the content should be supported by the suitable teaching aids.

Learning activities should also be chosen in accordance with the learning objectives. The activities might encompass classroom exercises and home assignments. Classroom exercises given after delivering the teaching materials aim to deepen students' comprehension about the subject. Moreover, home assignments are also given to help students' self-learning after the class. Those activities should be accomplishable based on what students get from the teaching materials.

At the end of the class, the final projects should be assessed based on the stated learning objectives.

“The evaluation of learning must seek to verify whether objectives have been attained, otherwise there is a considerable risk that the students will cease to attach importance to the objectives. However precise and however clear the objectives may be, they will remain a dead letter for the students if the latter do not perceive these objectives as having a connection with the instructional activities and with the evaluation of learning.”

The final projects must be linked to the instructional activities as well. Hence, the results of the final projects become an ultimate reflection of students' achievement to the learning objectives.

In short, learning objectives should be the main shaft. Therefore, each of the teaching materials, classroom exercises, home assignments, and final projects are planned to be manifested in accordance with the learning objectives. Moreover, each component should be planned to be interrelated with each other to meet the learning objectives.

However, not everything that has been planned was done perfectly during the real teaching and learning activities. There are many factors affecting the implementation of course syllabus. Maley (1984) stated that there were six major factors in syllabus implementation, such as culture, education, organization, learner, teacher, and material. Unless those factors support the syllabus implementation, students would perform poorly in final assessments.

It could be seen in the case of students' results of final projects in Widya Manda graduate school. More than a-third of the students batch 19 got minimum score B⁻ and they should submit the revision of their paper to improve their scores. Only one student got A and another one got A⁻. Other six students got B⁺. Other four students only got B. Detailed analysis showed two of non-English students got B and the other one got B⁻.

The students admitted in their reflective journal that they were struggling in, i.e. (1) finding the topic and narrowing it into the title, (2) developing ideas, (3) using correct grammatical rules, referencing, and academic language style. This fact was confirmed by the previous study conducted by Harjanto (2012). He found that the student's problems in previous batch, batch 15, were not only limited to those points, but also in expressing ideas in English.

Based on students' reflective journals, students realized that they had lack reading experience and writing experience before. And in classroom, they did not fully understand the teaching materials and its explanation from the lecturer, but they were reluctant to be more active in clarifying them. They were not very sure in doing the final projects due to with minimum lecturer's personal feedbacks in their classroom exercises and home assignments. It is obvious that some components such as teaching materials, classroom activities, home assignments, and final projects were not well-implemented and still continued till batch 19. It was assumed that learner and teacher factors strongly affect the implementation of course syllabus.

A previous study by El- Sakran (2014) evaluated a graduate English Specific Purposes (ESP) course in the United Arab Emirates. He analyzed the detail of participants' backgrounds and aspirations, course objectives, course contents, the students' perceptions of the whole course, the textbook used, the assigned tasks and activities and the staging and administration of the course. The participants' reflection earned some pedagogical

implications for respective ESP teachers and course designers. For example, the course textbook was appropriate to the course since it fulfills its objectives and increases students' knowledge of ESP. The language used in the book was clear and easy to understand. The book provided clear and reader-friendly explanations. However, based on students' perceptions, they needed for more examples of the case studies. Moreover, the assignment sequence was designed based on a scaffolding approach. An assignment would guarantee equipping the students with the essential and basic knowledge needed for upcoming assignments. As a result, all the participants perceived the overall course contents as interesting, relevant, and eye opening.

This research about the implementation of the course syllabus was categorized as objective –oriented evaluation. Tyler (1950) stated that “the process of evaluation is essentially the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are actually being realized by the program of curriculum and instruction.” In other words, the evaluation should determine the congruence between performance and objectives. Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997) stated that this approach is easily comprehended, applicable, and beneficial to the program directors in accordance with their mission. However, objective-oriented evaluations have drawbacks and limitations of focusing too much on program goals and objectives in the end and neglect the effectiveness and efficiency in the process. Therefore, the present research did not only focus on comparing the final product and the expected final objectives in the syllabus, but also analyzed the process related to the teaching materials, classroom exercises, and home assignments.

The present study was an evaluative study aimed to investigate how the Academic Writing course syllabus was implemented. It was limited to focus on how teaching materials, classroom exercises, home assignments, and final projects had been carried out during the course. The document analyses were conducted accordingly to investigate the content of the

collected data. To triangulate the results of document analyses, the graduate students' perspectives were elicited through semi-structure interviews.

Research Questions

As the study was an attempt to describe the implementation of the Academic Writing course syllabus, the minor research questions were:

- a. How was the Academic Writing course syllabus implemented in terms of teaching materials?
- b. How was the Academic Writing course syllabus implemented in terms of classroom exercises?
- c. How was the Academic Writing course syllabus implemented in terms of home assignments?
- d. How was the Academic Writing course syllabus implemented in terms of final projects?

The Purpose of the Study

In accordance with the research questions, the purpose of the study was mainly to describe the implementation of the Academic Writing course syllabus in terms of teaching materials, classroom exercises, home assignments, and final projects.

Theoretical Framework

The implementation of Academic Writing course syllabus ideally center on the learning objectives. Learning objectives act as a contract between teacher and students. According to Parkes and Harris (2002), specifically syllabus is made as a contract, a permanent record, and a learning tool. Teacher should deliver the teaching materials, give exercises, and feedbacks to help students meet the objectives. Students also have to follow and engage in every meeting to gain expected learning objectives.

In accordance with the implementation of Academic Writing course syllabus, teachers play a big role in introducing academic writing. Spack (1988) stressed that the most important skill English teachers can engage students in is the complex ability to write from other texts, which is a major part of their academic writing experience. Beside the teacher, students should also take part in the syllabus implementation by self-learning. First, they need to read many academic writings. Spack and Zamel (1998) aptly stated that to become better writers, students need to become better readers. Moreover, they need to practice referencing. “For this purpose summarizing, quoting and paraphrasing are skills students should master not only for linguistic purposes but also for analyzing an author’s style and logical reasoning.” (Gulcat, 2004).

All of those issues should be well-translated in teaching materials shared to students. Teaching materials are given to familiarize students with terminology, format, and style of the content-disciplined research reports. Thus, teaching materials should allow students work with samples of writing and explore their own writing in their discipline areas.

The knowledge that students got from the materials should be practiced in classroom exercises and home assignments. At first, students should gather sources to prepare their paper. Students should be directed to collect texts, work with texts by analyzing wider context of use and meaning, analyzing organization and structure of the text, and analyzing its lexico-grammatical choices (Friedrich, 2008). In this phase, students need to read more in order to have basic background on that field research. Further, they also should analyze typical linguistic and rhetorical features of a range of texts in order to understand how disciplinary ways of thinking.

After that, students need to write their topic. The first step in writing process is choosing and narrowing the topic. The easiest way is actually by thinking about things related to the course that the students is interested in. And then, the students may start narrowing the

ideas by choosing a specific problem, time period, or place to cover which fits the prescribed purpose of the paper. The students definitely need to do a little general research before specifying the topic.

Furthermore, the students have to write the topic as the question that will be answered in the discussion of the paper. The students need to start brainstorming by writing down all the possible answers to the research questions, and writing down all the information, opinions, and questions about the topic. A class discussion should be conducted to specify general topic into more focused questions. Students could also discuss with their peers about their work. Students still need to gather resources and learn more about the topic. The research questions should be revised until those were matched with the purpose of the study.

In planning the paper, the students need to make a basic outline, take notes of the information and ideas that he finds, and then creates a more detailed outline. After writing, the most important step is proofreading. It is suggested for students not to look at the paper for 24 hours. And after that, the students need to print the paper since it will help the students to see the mistakes that s/he could not see on a computer screen. The proofreading may start with the last sentence of the paper and read your paper sentence by sentence, and going backwards. This will help the students focus on the grammar, not the content. If the students are not sure, s/he may use a dictionary, grammar book, or ask someone for help. The teacher should give students more guidance students in revision.

The exercises and assignments lead to a complete paper as students' final project. It was noted that there was some typical mistakes in students' final assessment. Writing problems encountered by graduate students are not typically in the form of essay questions or short term papers, but are instead problems requiring organization of multiple texts; knowledge about scholarly writing appropriate to discipline is more critical, and presenting and sustaining a coherent discussion of a complex issue also becomes critical (Biggs, Lai,

Tang, & Lavelle, 1999). It could be solved by using graphic displays of information such as tables, grids, webs, and continua to highlight the relationships among texts. According to Musa (2010), one of the skill that should be mastered by students in writing is organizational skills. Students could analyze prior student papers or publish research to look for organizational patterns and highlight useful phrases and expressions in rhetoric.

The Significance of the Study

The result of this study was very useful both theoretically and practically as follow:

The theoretical significance. The result of this study which described the implementation of the course syllabus can be used by the lecturers as the reflection of the current course syllabus. And the students will understand that a well-implemented course syllabus will affect to their writing performance. For the researcher, this study will give a brief description in what ways and to what extents the implementation of teaching materials, classroom exercises, home assignments, and final projects could help students to meet the expected learning objectives as stated in the syllabus.

The practical significance. The analysis of the implementation of course syllabus will assist the lecturers and universities to evaluate and improve the Academic Writing course. Besides, students will reflect their writing experience during implementing course syllabus. From this, the researcher will be able to note problems and possible solutions.

The Scope of the Study

This study focused on describing the implementation of the Academic Writing course which was held in the second half of the semester. The course started from October 2, 2013 to November 20, 2013, and three hours per meeting from 6 pm until 9 pm. The participants of this study were 18 students of the Academic Writing course batch 19, excluding the researcher.

Definition of Key Terms

Implementation. Based on Oxford dictionary (2010), *implementation* means ‘the process of putting a decision or plan into effect.’ Based on Cambridge Advanced Learner’s dictionary (2013), *implementation* means ‘the act of putting a plan into action.’ In this study, *implementation* means the process on putting a plan into action.

Syllabus. Based on Merriam Webster dictionary (2008), *syllabus* means ‘a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements.’ In this study, *syllabus* means a summary outline of course mainly describing learning objectives, teaching materials, activities, and assessments.

Learning objective. According to Mager (1984), *learning objective* means a statement in specific and measureable terms that describes what the learner will know or be able to do as a result of engaging in a learning activity. In this study, *learning objective* is simplified as the measured goal stated in the syllabus.

Teaching materials. In this study, *teaching materials* are theories given by the lecturer before the class, during the class, and after the class.

Classroom exercises. In this study, *classroom exercises* are activities given after explaining the teaching materials and done in the classroom either in individual or in pair. The results of these activities were required to be submitted.

Home assignments. In this study, *home assignments* are activities given to help students follow up the material individually at home.

Final project. In this study, *final project* is a project given in the end of the course. This project required students to submit students’ research proposal consisting introduction, literature review, and references.