Developing English Writing Materials in the Form of Comic Strips for Grade VIII Students

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Abstract: This research aimed to develop appropriate comic strip materials for learning writing skills. This is a research and development (R & D) study. The subjects of this research were 32 students of Grade VIII of SMPN 3 Kalasan. The research procedure was adapted from the model of Jolly and Bolitho (1998) consisting of identification and exploration of needs for materials, contextual and pedagogical realization of materials, physical production, expert judgment, and writing final draft. The needs analysis data were collected by using questionnaires and an interview. Then, the results of questionnaires were calculated through percentage. Thus, the highest percentage was considered as the needs of students. Meanwhile, the results of expert judgment were analyzed in the form of descriptive statistics. Three units of materials were developed in this research. Each unit consists of introduction, main lesson and reinforcement. These materials used comic strips as an input text. According to the results of the expert judgment, the materials were very good based on a mean score of 3.7.

Keywords: learning materials, writing, comic strips

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Introduction

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture applies a new curriculum to replace the previous curriculum. The new curriculum is called *Kurikulum 2013* or Curriculum 2013. Curriculum 2013 focuses on student-centered learning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 502), in student-centered learning, a teacher is only seen as a helper, adviser or counselor. One of the subjects listed in Curriculum 2013 is English. Therefore, in order to meet the objectives of English learning, a teacher must be more creative in designing learning plans and learning activities. However, some of them are not ready to be creative teachers. They only concentrate on delivering materials without considering the creative aspects. Some teachers use the same methods many times without any change. Consequently, those decrease students' motivation.

There were several problems found in the SMPN 3 Kalasan: 1) the learning process was focused on using *LKS or* a workbook as the one and only learning

material, 2) students had a difficulty in developing writing skills, and 3) students had low motivation. In accordance with the problems stated above, the researcher aimed to make attractive materials which support writing skills. An attractive material entices students' learning attention and help students to learn writing skills. Therefore, the researcher developed comic strips as learning writing materials to help students enjoy the learning.

Comic strips are short stories that combine pictures and texts. They are simple, clear, and understandable reading materials. In addition, comic strips are reading materials which teens tend to like to read. As Gonzales-Espada (2003) says, most children and young adults love reading comic strips and they definitely attract junior high school students' attention. Thus, by developing comic strips as learning material, the researcher expected the teaching and learning process of English become more interesting and the students would be motivated to learn English.

Research Method

This study focused on developing a product that can be used for an educational program. Based on the goal, this study can be classified as research and development (R&D). The research was conducted in May 2015 at SMPN 3 Kalasan, Yogyakarta. The subjects of this study were 32 students of VIII D. This study used the research procedure adapted from the model of materials design proposed by Jolly and Bolitho in Tomlinson (1998: 98). There were five steps in the procedure. They are: 1) identification of needs for materials & exploration of needs, 2) contextual and pedagogical realization of materials, 3) physical production (first draft), 4) expert judgment, and 5) writing final draft.

The data of the research were collected through distributing two types of questionnaires and doing an interview. Those two instruments were used to gain learning and target need data and to evaluate the product. The first questionnaires and interview were used to collect learning and target need data while second questionnaire were used to evaluate the appropriateness of materials through expert judgment. The data obtained for needs analysis were analysed through calculating percentage of each answers. Then, the highest percentage was considered representing the needs of the students. The second questionnaire which was used for processing the material evaluation was analysed using descriptive statistics. To collect the responses of the questionnaire, the researcher used a Likert-scale. Then, the results of the data gathered from the second questionnaire were calculated by using formula proposed by Suharto (2005: 58 - 59) to find the range or the data interval. Then, the data result were converted to descriptive statistics in terms of its goodness.

Research Findings

According to needs analysis data, it described many learning needs and target needs. First, students' goal for learning English was to get knowledge about English. In addition to this, students' view of English was as communication tools in English classes and to help the students read English books. Then, the questionnaires' results show that students had difficulties in grammatical rules,

idioms and effective sentences. However, the English teacher said that the students lacked in the vocabulary. Their limited vocabularies brought into other problems – the error sentences and wrong paragraph composition. The English teacher also said, writing and speaking was the most difficult skill for students. However, the students wanted to be able to write with the right grammatical rules.

In terms of learning needs, leaners liked to learn in a group. Next, students wanted to learn by using media. Then, students stated using comic strips as learning media is helpful. Then, students chose hobbies and daily life as their favorite themes. In addition to this, the English teacher stated that the good themes for Grade VIII were those around the students' life, i.e. daily life. Then, students stated that a good material was having many pictures and colorful design, much explanation, and many examples and texts. However, according to interview results, the teacher stated that a good material was following the used curriculum and syllabus. Besides, a good material should give the students choices to do tasks and give spaces to explore their ideas.

Regarding the learners' role, students wanted to actively participate in the learning process. Then, students thought a good teacher was somebody who guides the students in discussing a text. According to the interview results, the English proficiency of Grade VIII students was still low, yet they already met with the expectation of Curriculum 2013. The materials consisted of 3 units with 15-16 tasks for each unit. Unit 1 was derived from core competences 1, 2, 3 and 4, and basic competences 1.1, 2.1, 3.10, and 4.12. This unit focused on descriptive texts. Then, Unit 2 was developed based on core competences 1, 2, 3 and 4, and basic competences 1.1, 2.2, 3.9, and 4.10. This unit focused on degrees of comparisons. Next, Unit 3 was developed based on core competences 1, 2, 3 and 4, and basic competences 1.1, 2.1, 3.12, and 4.15. This unit focused on recount texts and simple past tense as grammar focused.

The materials were developed with the same design and sequences. The materials started with a title page. In the title page, it consisted of the title of units, a picture which describes the topic of unit, and the brief explanation about what will be learnt. After title page, it was started with lead-in activities, which was called "Building Up". In this section, students were given a lead about the topic. The next part was the main lesson. The main lesson consisted of 4 parts. They were "observing and questioning", "looking for information", "associating" and "creating" activities. This part was developed based on the Curriculum 2013. The last part of the unit was reinforcement. The reinforcement covered the self-evaluation part. This part was called "reflecting". Students were encouraged to make their own summaries based on what they have learnt.

After the materials were developed, they were evaluated by the expert. Based on the questionnaire, there were some aspects that should be evaluated. They were the appropriateness of contents, the appropriateness of language, the appropriateness of presentation, and the appropriateness of layout. Those points were derived from BSNP. Besides those material aspects, the comic strips as media also were evaluated. The points which need to be evaluated were the appropriateness of content and language of comic strips, and the appropriateness of comic strip illustrations. Those points were taken from

McCloud (2006). Most of the evaluation given by expert was correcting the grammar. Another suggestion given by expert was to add more examples in using "one" as objects in Unit 2. Based on the results of questionnaires, it can be concluded that the materials were appropriate for learning writing for Grade VIII students. It can be seen from the mean value 3.7 which is very good.

Conclusions and Suggestions

In conclusion, the materials were considered appropriate. It can be seen from the mean value of 3.7, which is very good. The materials were developed by considering the findings of target and learning needs of Class VIII SMPN 3 Kalasan students. In addition, the developed materials were designed by dividing into three stage activities. They were introduction, main lesson and reinforcement. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to use comic strips as writing materials.

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