

## **COURSE SYLLABUS: RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' NEEDS IN THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

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### **Abstract**

Universities are required to improve their service mainly in offering effective reading course which meets diverse issues. Reading course syllabus should be designed appropriately dealing with the students' needs and the shift of current global issues. This study was carried out in the purpose of evaluating pre-existing reading course syllabus and intending the novel one. The study utilized various methods namely questionnaire, interview, and documents. The data were analyzed statistically and descriptively. It was found that students focus on the general-literary skills mastery only so they have unclear goals in the content-specific literary skills. Given that findings, backward design was employed. Skill syllabus and content-based syllabus are selected to promote students' skills in their contextual learning. Integration of contextual and flexible topics, materials, and mobile apps in the course syllabus is significant to transform their learning to be more fruitful.

Keywords: backward design, course syllabus design, need analysis

### **Introduction**

Conducting English course program which is needed by the Students is a highly prioritized in any level of education. Students are expected to have particular skills they need in order to improve their life standard as part of society and the world. The organization of education itself, recently, is widely influenced by the issue of 4.0 industry revolution (Kemenristekdikti, 2018). Thus, the educational practitioners must be ready for future challenges mainly in the English course program planning so students can cooperate each other by having less difficulties or barriers in the process of world collaboration.

Related to the organization of English course program specially reading course program for EFL students in higher education, the lecturer must have arranged, purposeful, and meaningful plan for them. Reading is quite significant to teach and learn altogether because in the digital era, "millions across the globe routinely access expository information from the internet written in English—a second language for the overwhelming majority" (Bernhardt, 2010). So, reading is not only an activity which enables students to obtain information but it also

challenges them to be more critical while reading those information widely available on the internet and social media. The EFL students' reading skills is required in order to assist them comprehending academic texts (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). The more students read, the more they are able to express their ideas in the written or, even, oral communication because they can produce a well-structured content referring to the topics they focus on. However, the practice of reading course program will not be optimally conducted when the lecturer does not do need analysis. Need analysis is important since it leads the lecturer to design appropriate syllabus based on students' needs. Certainly, one of the advantages of need analysis is to overcome students' reading problems. In short, the availability of reading syllabus which can cover up the students' wants and needs is necessary.

Considering previous explanation, this paper aims at proposing reading syllabus which meets the students' needs in order to hold the teaching learning process which employs technology-based and support 5Cs (Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, and Character) as highly required in the Indonesian higher education setting.

### **Method**

This study was designed to propose reading course syllabus. Hence, it is rooted within quantitative and qualitative approaches using questionnaire, interview, and documents. The quantitative approach was chosen because it provided the stated information by the students related to their needs. In addition, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to get the information from the trusted source in the field and documents. The participants were the fourth semester students of English Education Department at one of universities in Borneo island. The participants were selected purposively.

The data were collected through questionnaire, interview, and instruments. The questionnaire was modified from Richards (2001), Cunningham (2015), and Salam (2017). The interview was conducted in the semi-structure form. Then, the documents were English Education Department curriculum and existing reading course syllabus.

Related to the procedure of the study, the researcher administered the questionnaire and made it accessible through Google form. The participants were flexible in giving their response and finding less problem in submitting the questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted on May 19th, 2018 and the due date was May 21st, 2018. All submitted questionnaires were filled out completely. The questionnaire was based on the 4 and 5 point Likert scale rating of assessment, yes no options, and short answer. The collected data were downloaded in the excel format to be used for further analysis. Next, the interview was conducted in order to get the additional information from the course lecturer. Considering the different locus and time, the researcher made use WhatsApp to contact and gather the information from the interviewee. Then, the documents such as curriculum and current syllabus were collected and analysed in details mainly output profile, course description, and other components available in the curriculum and syllabus. After all the entry data were analysed statistically and descriptively, the

proposed syllabus for Reading 3 course program, then, was offered as the product of this study.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***1. Findings***

The findings are based on the students' needs analysis towards their reading course program named Reading 3.

#### **a. Demographic Information**

The age of the participants ranged from 19 up to 21 years old with the average of 20 years old. 90% of them are full-time students and it results in their use of English. 75% of them use English at school and other 60% responded that they make use of for internet browsing. Further, the participants have already been learning English for twelve years (15%).

#### **b. Overview Of Skill Needed and Difficulties Encountered**

60% participants respond that they expect to use reading skill in their course of study. 50% of them found that they have difficulty with the reading skill.

#### **c. Objective**

The majority of participants gave similar response towards the question related to their learning objective. 10% of them stated that their objective is to improve their reading skills.

#### **d. General Statements**

50% students respond, closely to moderate level (2.25), that they thought reading ability is important to be successful in their course of study. Meanwhile, 35% respondents asserted that reading ability is important to be successful after their graduation in between high and moderate level (2.15).

#### **e. Reading Skills in English**

75% agreed that "When I read, I understand most of the words immediately". 45% responded that "I understand the structure of texts I read". It shows that students do not get difficulty with the vocabulary. However, they get difficult for the text structure.

#### **f. Reading tasks**

##### **1. Types of material**

50% respondents chose journal articles as the material they expected to read. Meanwhile, the least chosen materials were photocopied notes and workbook or laboratory instructions.

##### **2. Frequency of difficulties in reading types of materials**

The least frequent difficulty was found for the newspaper article (2.3) while the most frequent difficulty was workbook or laboratory instructions(1.8).

##### **3. Difficulty level**

The least difficulty level was "Reading a text quickly in order to establish a general idea of the content (skimming)" (2.1) while the most difficulty level was "Guessing unknown words in a text" (1.6).

**g. Skills you would like to improve**

The high priority of skills to improve is knowledge of vocabulary (1.35) while the low priority ones are summarizing material and general reading comprehension (1.75).

**h. Genre of text**

The most frequent genre of text to read is biography (55%) while the least frequent genre of text to read is hints (20%).

**i. Reading Strategy**

The most frequent reading strategy to use is “Predict the content of the text to be read” (2.2) while the least frequent reading strategy to use is “Give criticism of the content of the text or the author’s opinion” (3.4).

**j. Topic of text**

The most frequent topic of text to choose is “education & language” (75%) while the least frequent topic of text to choose is “natural disaster” (10%).

**k. Learning Activities**

The most frequent learning activity to do is “group discussion” (70%) while the least frequent learning activity to do is “presentation” (25%). Moreover, the participants like to “Predict the text content” and “Guessing the meaning of a word or phrase by context” (1.35) and are less to “Criticize the author’s opinion on the author’s text” (2.3).

**l. Contents of teaching materials**

The most frequent contents of teaching materials to choose are “The examples given are easy to understand” and “The presentation of the material is balanced between the theory and examples of texts” (1.55) while the least frequent contents of teaching materials to choose are “Learning materials are in accordance with the level of student needs” and “Learning activities are associated with the development of listening skills” (1.85).

**m. Organization of teaching materials**

The order of the teaching materials organization is “sorting material based on text difficulty level is correct” and “loading the material between the learning units in the teaching materials is balanced” (1.7), followed by “sorting of materials based on the difficulty level of reading strategy is appropriate” (1.75).

**n. Evaluation of learning**

The order of the learning evaluation is “the test or evaluation at the end of each learning unit (formative test)” (1.7), “the test at the end of the learning program (final exam semester)” (1.75), and “test in the middle of the learning program (midterm exam)” (1.8).

**2. The Current Syllabus**

Curriculum has different designs and uniqueness, which is related to the educational program being organized. Hence, the curriculum designers in particular level of education arrange the curriculum based on certain consideration. Additionally, curriculum can be defined as teaching-learning program plan and how the content of the plan is used in order to achieve the learning output (Brown, 1995; J.C. Richards, 2001; 2013). In the context of Indonesian higher education, definition of curriculum is found in the regulation of

the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (Permenristekdikti) of the Republic of Indonesia Number 44 year 2015 article 1 verse 6 (Kemenristekdikti, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned definition and regulation, curriculum can be considered as a plan for the lecturers to run their teaching-learning activities starting from preparation, process, and evaluation. As a plan, curriculum contains the complete components such as students’ needs, goals and objectives, testing, learning materials, activities, and evaluation for students’ achievement and the program itself. However, curriculum must be actualized through the blueprint-making and implementation. Therefore, curriculum functions as plan and implementation mainly in the higher education system.

Curriculum is, then, used to make a syllabus as the operational document because it “provides a focus of what should be studied, along with a rationale for how the content should be selected and ordered” (Brown, 1995). It can be inferred from the statement that syllabus is more detailed in explaining the way of teaching-learning activities will be. Furthermore, it leads the language lecturers to be more organized, purposeful, and meaningful in their teaching practice. In addition, the syllabus has a payoff for the students because it enables them to learn the materials which are not only needed but also meaningful for them in the real- world context.

Syllabus ideally enables the language lecturers and the students as well to know what, how, and why the learning process should discuss certain topics of materials and should be taught in particular approaches, design, or procedure. However, in the field, the practice shows that syllabus cannot be used repeatedly to different students. Their various background knowledge, skills, needs, and wants should be put in the first place. As a consequence, the language lecturers have to redesign the syllabus in order to provide appropriate sequence, materials, and kinds of evaluation in pre-, during, and post-teaching learning activities.

In English Education Department at which this study was conducted, the need of redesigning syllabus was found especially for advanced reading course. The syllabus target is the fourth semester students who had previously taken prerequisite course. This advanced reading course aims to enable students develop their reading comprehension especially in analyzing English texts. Therefore, they deal with variety of longer texts in order to find topic sentences, predict the context, and paraphrase the texts. However, related to the two previous prerequisite courses named Reading 1 and Reading 2 the students had taken, the course aim of Reading 3 still require changes in order to meet students’ needs. Further, the analysis result of existing syllabus in Table 1 also showed that some components require completion.

Table 1. Analysis of present syllabus

Components	Available	Not Available
<b>Rationale</b>		√
<b>Identity</b>	√	
<b>Course description</b>	√	
<b>Course objective</b>	√	
<b>Session</b>	√	

Indicator of CLO		
Material	√	√
Learning activities	√	
Time allotment		√
Assessment		√
Resources	√	

Besides, the inconsistencies among the Reading series course description also influence the students' clarity on their learning purposes. The inconsistencies bring an impact on students' vocabulary mastery and reading skills as stated by lecturer A. Moreover, the students who take Reading 3 ideally focus on the critical and extensive reading because they are in the highest level of reading course. However, it is not reflected through the course content and the students' skills and readiness. This condition was depicted through the result of need assessment in which students sound their expectation, comments, and suggestions for the improvement of Reading 3 course especially focusing on the components of learning purpose, reading difficulties, reading strategies, preferred learning activities, preferred learning assessment, learning evaluation, and other related components.

To strengthen the needs of redesigning the syllabus, the serial course descriptions were also compared. The result showed that there was slight difference among them and it is recommended to carry out the analysis of current syllabus and propose the new syllabus for reading course.

### 3. *Syllabus Construction*

Based on the analysis results of students' need and the present syllabus, a proposed syllabus is significantly constructed. In order to be well-defined about the complete version of proposed Reading 3 course program syllabus, the following are the explanation covering description of syllabus rationale, course objectives, syllabus type, course contents, the assessment.

#### a. **Syllabus rationale**

This course is designed for the fourth semester students who wish to develop their competence in critical and extensive reading of academic texts at intermediate level. All the students have finished the prerequisite subjects of Reading 1 and Reading 2. It teaches students the intermediate reading skills needed to comprehend a variety of text types. The course seeks to enable students who will work as teacher, translator, and edupreneur to develop their visual reception strategies, comprehension, production of notes from academic texts, analysis on academic texts and credit sources of information. The course is conducted by utilizing students-centered approach. Case study, inquiry-based, media creation, KWL, problem based learning will be the major activities supported by the digital-based instruction in the course. Besides, in the purpose of developing reading skills and collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, character (5Cs), the students are expected to be independently and actively involved in the teaching learning processes both online and onsite classroom settings. Thus, students will have wide opportunities to work individually, collaborate with their peers or other members in a group.

Meanwhile, lecturer has a role as the navigator or facilitator during the process of teaching and learning. Concerning about the learning outcomes, students will be assessed through various appropriate kinds of assessment which are appropriate with the course contents, which take account of in and out-of-school experience, and meets the course objective.

**b. Course objective**

Regarding the students' needs and the level of students being expected after taking this course, the course goals of Reading 3 are to develop students' competence in critical and extensive reading, utilize strategies to improve their reading speed, skills on complex academic texts comprehension, employ strategies of writing production, strategies of using printed and/or online dictionaries to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary, conduct exploration and evaluation of research techniques and resources, credit and cite sources of information. Meanwhile, the detail information related to the skills being learnt is discussed explicitly in the course objective per meeting based on the arranged course goals.

In accordance with the goals of Reading 3, the reading focus is on reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, evaluation of features of texts, writing academic summary and report based on the readings. Certainly, in order to synchronize the learning objectives, the learning outcomes, the curricular objectives, and the measurement of learning objectives, the students will have to prepare themselves for the assessment emphasized on vocabulary, text evaluation, text comprehension, and writing production. And so, in the end of the course, they can be classified to achieve the level 3 or not based on assessment results.

**c. The entry and exit level**

Due to the terms of taking Reading 3 course program mentioned in the curriculum, the entry level of the students should ensure that they can interpret data, meaning, charts, visual information, graphs from academic and non-academic texts, decoding new words in particular contexts, comprehending simple and compound sentences in authentic materials, identifying main idea, supporting details, chronological order, and simple transitions in texts, recognizing the use of root words, prefix, suffix, antonym, synonym and homonyms, transition words, words with multiple meanings, and reading to compare and contrast information available in text to complete anticipated coursework successfully. Based on those indicators, students are classified as at pre-intermediate level. Data revealed that their average reading score is 76 ( $AB/ 75 \leq AM < 80$ ) for the Reading 2 course while the minimum score to pass Reading 2 course is C ( $60 \leq AM < 65$ ).

The exit level of the students ensures that students can read, evaluate, criticize, and write the results of their readings sufficiently in order to handle future work-related and/or education related reading tasks successfully. These indicators reflect the intermediate level of their reading proficiency. Besides, students are expected to demonstrate adequate achievement of exit level competency standards determined by the department (score is no less than C ( $60 \leq AM < 65$ )).

**d. Syllabus type**

Referring to the result of need assessment, course goals, and course objective, the syllabus was designed using backward design. It started from the the preferred results or outcomes, determined teaching and activities and contents, and assessment tasks (Taba in Jack C. Richards, 2013; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). In the effort of producing a sound syllabus, backward design was utilized because it is based students' need. Moreover, students' skills mastery (output) is the "pre-requisite to devising the means to reach them" (Tyler, Taba in J. C Richards, 2013). Based on the need assessment, students' belief of learning reading is to master reading skills for various types of texts. To facilitate students' belief, skill syllabus and content-based syllabus are selected.

Referring to the previous consideration, the skill syllabus and content-based syllabus are going to be manifested throughout the proposed syllabus. The content-based syllabus covers particular topics. Further, three other language skills are also included as they are interrelated in the learning activities and teaching practices of EFL context.

**e. Choosing course contents**

In order to meet students' needs, the course planner has to take into account of course content. According to Richards (2001), course content can expose the assumptions of the course planner about "the nature of language, language use, and language learning, what the most essential elements or units of language are, and how those can be organized as an efficient basis for second language learning." Considering those aspects, the course planner should also pay attention on what subject-matter knowledge to focus on, "students' proficiency levels, current views on second language learning and teaching, conventional wisdom and convenience." (J.C. Richards, 2001). More specifically, Day (1994) mentions several factors to cogitate in selecting a passage for the reading class. The factors are: (1) interest; (2) exploitability; (3) readability (lexical knowledge, background knowledge, syntactic appropriateness, organization, discourse phenomena, length); (4) topic; (5) political appropriateness; (6) cultural suitability; and (7) appearance (layout and type size and font). Based on the two given viewpoints about the factors in course content selection, the proposed syllabus reflects both of them.

In addition, to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century, students are also required to utilize and enhance their digital literacy skills. Briefly, they have to be literate and make use of "technology effectively in order to do research, reach information sources, read-write and comment efficiently, make reasonable choices, and make right decisions" (Özdamar Keskin, Özata, Banar, & Royle, 2015). Therefore, the use of online tools and/or apps such as YouTube, PowerPoint, Google Search, WhatsApp, Facebook, Prezi, Kahoot!, Instagram, Padlet, TED Talks/Ed, Powtoon, Google Scholar, Google Forms, Quizlet, Grammarly, and any other apps is highly demanded in order to support the course content to be more interesting, up-to-date, and meaningful for students. In addition, the use of online tools and/or apps is also an effort to familiarize students with the use of multimodal and multisemiotic texts on their learning process as one of the characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching-learning process. Concisely, new trends of



multimodal and multisemiotic pedagogy (M2P) (Suherdi, 2017) can be integrated in reading course syllabus since it can yield significant impact for the course instruction.

#### **f. Assessment**

In this course, there are three tests which are going to be utilized. They are formative, middle, and final tests. The formative test will be conducted at the end of particular unit while the middle test is done in the middle of the semester. Further, the final test is organized and conducted at the end of semester. The tests will be focused on students' content delivery based on their reading, students' writing on certain topics being determined/ appropriate with the syllabus, and mainly, suitable with the learning outcome, determined indicators, and students' learning experiences. Moreover, assessment can be held in both onsite and online settings by considering program learning outcome, course goals, and course objectives.

#### **Conclusion**

Needs analysis is significant to conduct since the center of teaching-learning process is students and their interest. Particularly, students' interest and their literacy of digital tools and/or apps can encourage students to reach the determined learning goals. Focusing on the needs analysis also provides fruitful information as basic steps for lecturer to plan the whole package of course program. Certainly, students' needs are still the priority in holding teaching- learning process. However, they are also being guided, supervised, supported, and evaluated by their lecturer. Moreover, lecturer has to consider several highlighted points such as students' difficulties on reading, learning orientation, learning activities, preferences of materials and its contents supported by use of multimodal and multisemiotic texts, evaluation, and the use of digital tools as the supporting media towards teaching-learning process. Undeniably, the use of digital tools is not the sole focus in the educational practices of the fourth industrial revolution yet it should be regarded as the context in which students improve their 5Cs (Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, and Character) by making interaction, learning, debating, arguing, and respecting for different viewpoints so they can expand their knowledge and improve reading skills simultaneously in the purpose of given tasks accomplishment in onsite or online classroom and their social physic world. Overall, course syllabus should be designed by taking students' interest into account, capturing students' barriers to overcome through the organization of materials, learning activities, use of digital tools, use of appropriate kinds of assessment, and use of evaluation.

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