Developing English Proficiency Model in the Indonesian Context: A Design-based Research Approach

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Abstract: The models of language proficiency have been informed by various linguistics schools of thoughts ranging from structuralism, generativist, cognitivism, and functionalism. There is no regarding the model of English proficiency. This leads to the confusions among English language teachers, particularly those in countries where English is taught and learned as a foreign language. This article describes the implementation of the design-based research for designing an English proficiency Model intended to meet the needs of local learners. The process of this research consists of four main stages, i.e., 1) the analysis of practical problems, 2) the development of solutions, 3) the evaluation of the solutions in practice, and 4) the reflection to produce design principles and enhance solution implementation (Amiel & Reeves, 2008). This research also involves design and scientific methods to generate the model of English proficiency as a product directed to the goals of English language teaching and learning in the Indonesian context..

1 INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency is a notion commonly assumed to be as the aim for language teaching and learning (Harch, 2017). It encompasses various aspects which may serve as directions for language educators. For example, Canale (1983) suggests that language proficiency encompasses language users' communicative ability, language knowledge systems and language skills. However, the concept of proficiency becomes more complicated due to different views of linguistic schools of thoughts which contribute to its definition. As a result, there is no consensus on the definition of language proficiency.

Four well-known linguistic schools of thoughts have also contributed to the plurality of the meanings of language proficiency. The first one is Structuralism which views language proficiency as a system that consists of four language skills i.e., listening, reading, speaking, writing and along with linguistics components such as phonemes. Morphemes, phrases, clauses, and sentences (Lado, 1961). In other words, language proficiency is viewed by structuralisms as a strategic point because language components and language skills are separated.

Of course, this model of language proficiency by structuralisms causes criticisms among other linguists of generativist who believe that language has the creative aspects and universal characteristics that are applied to all language (Chomsky, 1965). Regarding language proficiency, Chomsky coined the distinctive use of the terms 'competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in the concrete situation)'. His ideas inform the aspects which constitute language proficiency (Chomsky, 1965).

The third linguistic school of thought is cognitivism which emerged during the 1950s in response to generativism. It is the result of the disagreement on the separation of language and cognition (Matsumoto, 2008). According to cognitivism, language is influenced by human cognition, perception, categorization, and human interaction and experiences. These aspects also influence language development and change (Fillmore, 1975). In addition, cognitive linguistics views 'language as a kind of cognitive activity, and studies the formation, the meaning, and the rules of language with cognition as its departure' (Chen, 2009). Thus, cognitivism sees language learning as gaining proficiency in the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing, which are

taught sequentially along with related knowledge components.

The paradigm shift into functionalism creates the model of language proficiency as Dell Hymes (1972), a leading anthropological linguist, proposed the notion of "communicative competence" as a substitute for language proficiency (Walcott, 2007). In addition, Hymes enhanced Chomsky's notion of *competence* by including communicative ability (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Several other scholars of functional linguists also enhance the model of communicative competence which makes the conceptual framework of language proficiency more complicated (Canale, and Swain, 1980; Bachman, 2003).

Standard English and World Englishes paradigms which focus on the English language have also helped build the meaning of English language proficiency. For Standard English paradigm, the native-like proficiency based on native English norms becomes the appropriate model of English. While for the World English paradigm, a pluralistic view of English maintained that non-native varieties of English are suitable for teaching and learning in local cultural contexts. Within the World Englishes view, Canagarajah argues that to be proficient in English, one needs to have strategies for negotiation and situated performance, as well as a communicative repertoire and language awareness. It means that English language learners need to have multidialectal competence for the post-modern globalized world where, he believes, there are no boundaries between communities or countries because of economic relationships, technologies, the internet, and the media (Canagajarah, 2006).

It is clear that there are some models of proficiency in English language. As confusions arise regarding which models should be followed among teachers of English, particularly in the Indonesian context where English is taught, learned and used as a foreign language, it is necessary to develop a model of English proficiency which is appropriate for the Indonesian context. In addition, a dearth of literature is found regarding the use of design-based research for developing a theoretical model such as this one as this study explore the problems and solutions for specific educational context. Thus, this article describes the implementation of the design-based research for designing a model of English proficiency which is intended to meet the needs of local learners

Methods

For designing a model of English proficiency in English which is suitable for the local context, the design-based research approach is adopted. Design-based research (DBR) is a ''a systematic, but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings, and leading to contextually-sensitive design principles and theories'' (Wang and Hannafin, 2005). As the primary goal of this study is to improve educational practices particularly English language teaching in high schools based on the Indonesian context, this research design can collaborate with other teams of researcher and language educators in real world setting.

This design-based research also comprises cyclical and iterative processes (Wang and Hannafin, 2005). Moreover, the development of design principles will undergo a series of testings and refinement cycles. Data is collected systematically in order to re-define the problems, possible solutions, and the principles that might best address them. As data is re-examined and reflected upon, new designs are created and implemented to produce a continuous cycle of design-reflection-design. In other words, the problems, solutions, methods and the designed principles are continuously refined, tested and developed as enhanced knowledge. The process of this research consists of four main stages i.e. 1) the analysis of practical problems, 2) the development of solutions, 3) the evaluation of the solutions in practice, and 4) the reflection to produce design principles and enhance solution implementation (Amiel and Reeves, 2008) as seen in Fig.1.

Based on the nature of design-based research, this is a dynamic and flexible research process. Therefore, it is important for the researchers to document the process systematically, the findings and changes to the initial plans (Wang and Hannafin, 2005). As the research problems and foci would emerge as soon as the data is collected and analyzed, it is possible for the researchers to change the research foci, the interventions, and the research context if they need to.
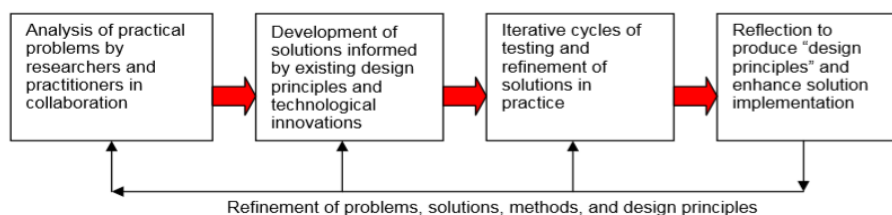
Figure 1: Design-based research, based on Amiel and Reeves (2008)

2 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DESIGN-BASED RESEARCH

The research process consists of four main stages. Each of which is described in the following subsection.

2.1 The analysis of practical problems.

Within this stage, the researchers gather the data from 40 English teachers who serve at senior high schools in 19 districts of West Sumatra province. During their classroom practices, these teachers' activities were recorded then their utterances were transcribed. They were also interviewed regarding the meaning of English proficiency according to their understanding of the given construct. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Inductive and thematic analysis was employed for analyzing a the large amount of the qualitative data. The literature was also reviewed to interpret data analysis results. At this stage, some attributes of the meaning of English proficiency were found. The English teachers' mental states were also corroborated with their actual classroom practices in order to understand the phenomenon and identify the problems.

2.2 The development of solutions

After practical problems emerged from the analysis results, the researchers tried to reconstruct the model of English proficiency based on the English teachers' conceptualization and their real classroom practices. The model was then subjected to the expert appraisals of English language teaching scholars. Their feedbacks provided further refinement to the model within which a set of English teaching principles in the Indonesian context was formulated, operationalized and explained. That is to say that the theoretical meanings were turned into practical ones. It is hoped that the designed model could give

directions to English language teachers at high schools in the Indonesian context.

2.3 The evaluation research of the solutions in practice

At this stage, the model will be introduced and socialized to a small number of high school English teachers in West Sumatra province, Indonesia. Their insights and feedbacks will be used to refine the model and its principles. Some focus group discussion will be conducted with those English teachers in order to formulate the suitable model of proficiency in the local context. The evaluation process will be conducted to find out the effectiveness of the model as a solution for directing English language teaching in the Indonesian context. The evaluations will also be done several times, iteratively and documented.

2.4 The reflection to produce design principles and enhance solution implementation

The last stage is to create final refinements of the model of proficiency in English after it is tested to a large number of English teachers in West Sumatra province. In this case, a new theory which supports practices in coping with the practical problems of English proficiency will be formulated. Then, its effectiveness and acceptance among English teachers will be documented and shared to inform English language teaching pedagogy in the Indonesian context.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Developing the model of English proficiency first starts with English teachers' understandings, and then works with their needs. The design-based research is accommodating can accommodate all this. Research teams and English teacher/practitioners worked

collaboratively, cyclically, and iteratively during the research process. In the context of educational research, this design-based research has become an emerging framework for guiding improved educational research (Amiel and Reeves, 2008). Even though some models of English proficiency already exist, this developed model may be useful in the local Indonesian context as it may provide guidance and directions for English language teaching in Indonesia.

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