Teaching the KBSM English Language: Towards a Process Oriented Approach

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ABSTRAK

Situasi pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua dalam konteks KBSM memerlukan guru-guru yang kreatif dan pelajar-pelajar yang sedia bertanggungjawab dalam hal pembelajaran. Dengan adanya pendekatan pengajaran yang lebih menekankan proses pembelajaran daripada hasil akhirnya sahaja, pelajar-pelajar dan guru-guru bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua akan diusaha menjadi demikian. Kerja-kerja projek merupakan satu kaedah pendekatan proses yang mengutamakan pelajar dan kehendak-kehendak mereka seperti tujuan mereka menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris. Ia juga melibatkan penggunaan kemahiran yang berpadu bagi seseorang pelajar untuk memproses dan memahami input bahasa yang diterima serta bagi penggunaannya. Pendekatan ini juga menggalakkan pemikiran kritikal, pembangunan dalam pembentukan intelek dan pembelajaran bersama (cooperative learning).

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an approach that would help teachers to utilise the English KBSM text as creatively as possible, towards a more effective way of teaching KBSM English. This paper puts forward the notion of process-oriented approach for the teaching of English Language in KBSM. This approach emphasises the language as a means towards an end and not as an end in itself. With this approach language learning processes become student centered, hence putting the responsibility of learning on the students and not the teachers as is the norm now. Students set purposes for language use by completing projects or tasks decided upon by them. Multi-media language input requires students to use integrated combination of skills making the processing of language and comprehension as well as production of it more efficient. In addition, this approach promotes co-operative learning, critical thinking, and skills related intellectual development.

INTRODUCTION

In its present form the KBSM syllabus might accurately be termed 'language for General Purposes' because it is not designed with a particular objective, but designed to teach more or less everything. However, the syllabus is very specific in terms of the themes and topics to be covered to ensure in certain important respects specifically the inculcation of moral values and good citizenship. Teachers, long in the teaching service, however, would vouch presented in their present form, these syllabus content could cause the creation of a world that may be quite unreal as textbooks would keep strictly to the literal interpretations of the specifications.

Our Malaysian students, given their distance from the language literally as well as figuratively speaking, would not be able to identify nor appreciate this unreal world. Hence the same low motivation level, disinterest and "English is not vital to learn" syndrome will keep on occurring becoming an epidemic as the years pass on. Malaysian students should be shown how the English language can be exploited to their benefit. It is a language that they can do things with and get ahead with.

For the English language syllabus be it KBSM or the phased out Communicative Language syllabuses it is how the syllabuses are interpreted and exploited that would make the difference in learning and not just the major revamping in the contents and objectives.

Hence the purpose of this paper is to show how the new KBSM syllabus could be approached by teachers so as to ensure dynamic interaction between teacher, student and syllabus rather than the static norm of teachers being the slaves of the syllabus, and the students the innocent victims.

THE KBSM ENGLISH SYLLABUS

It is a universally accepted fact that a language programme is as good as the teaching-learning strategy adopted to convey this programme. Central to this teaching-learning strategy are the pedagogical techniques and the materials designed to affect the strategy.

The aims, objectives and content of the language programmes are laid out in the teaching syllabuses which outline the basic items to be taught in terms of skills, values, vocabulary, grammar and other relevant items.

Therefore, any syllabus is typically a plan for what is to be achieved through our teaching. The plan is constructed before the actual teaching-learning process to provide an ordered framework of achievable

objectives. There are also what may be called reflective or retrospective plans which are constructed during or after the actual teaching-learning process. This is usually in the form of either what could be achieved as we go along, or one which reviews what has actually been achieved by the students. A consequence to this could either be adaptations or changes made to the original plans or a whole revamping process occurs as in the case of our education system which led to the birth of the KBSR and KBSM (Kurikulim Baru Sekolah Rendah dan Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah).

However, even a predesigned plan is inevitably and continually reinterpreted by the teachers and the learners. Ultimately, in the lesson-to-lesson reality or language teaching, one is continually concerned with three syllabuses:the teacher's version of the designed syllabus, the individual learner's syllabus, and the unfolding syllabus of the classroom. The latter is in actuality a synthesis of the other two being that the two interact and correspond to each other in the classroom". This is in accordance with Breen (1984) who interprets syllabus as being one which is "positively amenable to alternative interpretations and open to reconstruction through interaction in the classroom."

The emphasis of the English language syllabus in the KBSM as in any conventional syllabus design has been upon organizing and presenting a knowledge of what spoken and/or written performance is like. For example in the form three KBSM description, it is stated that the learner should be able to understand descriptions of events, be able to relate descriptions of events, and be able to write descriptions of events. The focus of the syllabus is on the systems of knowledge external to learners rather than upon skills and abilities which learners initially bring to communication. Although cultural, thematic, and moral content have been intergrated into the syllabus, the KBSM English syllabus being conventional, has oriented itself towards language as primary subject matter, that is, on knowing "what" and not "how". The "how" here refers to the capabilities of "applying reinterpreting, and adapting the knowledge of rules and conventions during communication by means of underlying skills and abilities" (Breen 1984). To focus not only on the "what" but the "how" of language, the syllabus concerned needs to provide a change of focus from content for learning to the process of learning.

THE PROCESS-ORIENTED APPROACH

Given that teaching and learning are creative and dynamic activities which inevitably involve the reinterpretation of content perhaps we

should allow for a second type of syllabus which could coexist alongside the predesigned syllabus in the classroom. As discussed earlier, this coexisting syllabus would be the unfolding syllabus in the classroom. It is not intended that this syllabus should replace the predesigned one. It is only brought forward as an expansion to the existing syllabus to help with the transfer stage of learning and using the target language. With the adoption of this type of syllabus, learners and teachers would be sensitive to the changing processes of learning and the potential of the classroom situation. The result of twinning these two types of syllabus would be the gradual creation of the real syllabus of the classroom, jointly and explictly undertaken by teacher and learners. Primarily, students will be learning about learning when priority is given to process rather than content and when they are active participants of creating a syllabus. Consequently, the predesigned KBSM syllabus becomes subsumed within and changed by the pedagogic and social process of the classroom when the genuine priority for the participants in the classroom is that knowledge be worked upon in ways which facilitate its teaching and learning. Therefore, a greater concern with capacity for communication rather than what is communication, and with a focus on means rather than predetermined ends are indications of process over content pedagogy.

The use of a process oriented pedagogy over content-oriented pedagogy especially in our Malaysian environment is advocated because of the problem in motivation and interest level of learning the English Language. Immediate and future needs for learning and using the target language is not spelled out by the KBSM syllabus. It only emphasises on English Language learning for communicaton. A typical rural student or an average urban student could question back "When will I be communicating in English?"

Objectives of a process oriented lesson or course would be to develop purposeful skills in using English Language as a tool. Hence, learning English becomes useful and purposeful. This is important in learning environments such as Malaysia and its state of learning of English as a second language where immediate nor future needs are not established by policy makers nor individuals.

PROJECTS AS PROCESS ORIENTED APPROACH: A PROPOSAL

The teaching and learning process can be viewed as involving a range of decisions - decisions to be made by teachers and learners especially in relation to classroom language learning. Decisions have to be made

concerning the participation, procedure and subject matter of classroom work. Matters of participation entails such questions as "who works with whom?" That is, whether the teacher works with the whole class, sub-groups, or individual students; and whether students would work in group, pairs, or individually. The procedure would question "who does what with whom, with what resources, when, how and why?" And the final decisions to be made concerning subject matter would answer to the question "on what should we (learners) work?" Such questions would be proposed as matters for joint decision making in the process oriented classroom. They could be appropriately applied to the whole course, to a single week of a course, to a lesson, or even to a single activity or task.

In the context of language learning, projects are multi-skill activities focusing on themes or topics rather than on specific language objectives that emphasises performance. It does not outline functions, notions, or structures to be learned by the student. Rather, these are treated as skills that would be acquired when the need arises in view of the project at hand.

Most importantly is the part which the students themselves play in the initial choice of subject matter and in the decisions related to appropriate working methods or procedure, the time scale and timetable of the project and the eventual end product. This is not to say, however, that the end product is the focus of the learning experience. By making the students aim for a planned outcome, learning and carrying out of tasks become purposeful. Prior to this however, whatever project was decided on by the students should genuinely be of their own choice and interest. This is to ensure commitment and motivation in carrying out and completing the project.

One main advantage of project work as an expansion to class work is that it provides students with opportunities to recycle known language and skills in a relatively natural context. This allows for the transfer stage of knowing the language to actual use of language in the true sense of competency. In project work, students are constantly involved in and responsible for all major decisions, especially those related to the choice of topics, procedure, and nature of end product. Learner's interest and involvement are essential ingredients for successful projects as activities would be planned and carried out in collaboration with others.

In true fashion of the process approach, project work takes students' interest and needs as its starting point and this inturn allows students to use language more creatively. And by dealing with real subject matter the students's knowledge of the world is also increased. This can therefore be regarded as "authentic" rather than purely "linguistic." Projects most commonly involve a number of related skills, integrated in nature and will lend naturally to the systematic practice of specific language

function, notion, or structure. An additional skill that would arise out of project work is study skills such as note taking. The feature of end products in project work provide a natural conclusion to the task established beside setting a purpose and aim for the acitivity (Haines 1989).

Beside the advantages already discussed above, project work has many other benefits. Most obvious of all is that projects provide contacts with real world subject matter, requiring students to transfer, apply, adapt what they have acquired. Students of all abilities and levels can work cooperatively on tasks of equal importance. This participatory factor may restore confidence to less abled students and so improve their attitude towards language learning in general. Unlike in most communicative language teaching activities where the emphasis is on communication of fluency at the expense of accuracy, project work makes students aware of the importance of accuracy especially in the end product. This is because the end product becomes an extension of their capabilities. As a result, students are constantly concious of the fact that the end product should be a finished product and therefore free of error (Hutchinson 1987).

The teacher takes on many roles in a process oriented approach technique-like projects. This is because as the projects progress, the teacher takes on various roles. At the beginning stage of the project the teacher takes on an initiator role.

Clearly it is for the teacher to decide when project work is appropriate and the length of time it should last. The teacher should then introduce a broad discussion topic which may develop naturally into a project. Once interest is aroused, elicit students' ideas for:

1. the thematic direction of the project.
2. methods of working and group formation.
3. a project timetable listing a provisional sequence of stages and activities.
4. a suitable end product.

Students should also be encouraged to think about resource implications. However, once decisions have been taken and students are involved in their group tasks, the teacher takes on a facilitator role. This will probably involve the teacher in becoming a source of ideas and advice, a chairperson or even a referee. As the project draws to a close, the teacher would be more actively involved in making sure that the targeted end product is achieved. In other words the teacher now takes on the role of the organizer and, finally, an evaluator.

ORGANISING PROJECT WORK

The fact that project work in essentially student centred means that the teacher is no longer in absolute control either of the precise sequence of classroom activities or of language input or output. Perhaps the largest single factor in successful project work is the teacher's belief in and commitment to this method of working. Commitment implies a willingness to adopt a new teaching style. The clear message expressed by those who have experienced project work is that teachers should learn to keep out of the way (Hazita 1989).

The nature of project work makes it impossible to predict confidently that particular projects will succeed. Projects should be adapted to suit students and the teaching circumstances. Certain topics will simply not work if the necessary "raw material" is unavailable or inaccessable to students. To ensure maximum involvement in projects, students should be encouraged to participate fully in the choice of topics. However, in certain circumstances, for example where a class finds it impossible to agree amongst themselves, the teacher may simply impose a single title or present students with a limited choice of titles to decide from. This situation may arise when students are of a weaker group as well.

There are certain skills and activities that can usefully be practiced before students become involved in a full project. These lead-in activities may be done either before the beginning of the project or during the execution of the project at a time when students realize for themselves that practice in a specific skill is needed. The skills that are categorised as lead-in activities are usually subskills such as questioning technique, study skills such as note taking, and integrated skills such as dictation skills where main skills such as listening and writing are utilised. Once initial classroom discussion has produced content ideas, agreed objectives, and suggested working methods, a preliminary project timetable can be drawn up. This should outline the main activities and grouping as well as the intended outcomes for each stage. The function of the timetable is to record and remind students of the suggestions and decisions that were made during the opening class discussion.

A majority of project work can be done successfully in the classroom. However, there are certain tasks particularly information gathering activities, for which student will need to consult reference sources, visit particular places or talk to "outsiders" either in other parts of the school or entirely outside of the school. A vital ingredient in the smooth running of project is to allow suffcent time for purposeful, structured discussions and reporting back sessions. This reminds students that they are involved in a cooperative learning environment and that there is still constant monitoring of their progress. It is also essential that teachers prepare

their students for project work. Prior to starting a "real" project give them practice in working independently in groups for increasingly long periods of time. It is also wise for the teacher to build a stock of accessible resources in preparation for as well as while the project is in progress. Students would be the best source in the latter situation. And finally it is wise to start with short uncomplicated projects.

Following is a description of a simple project that could be carried out by students and teacher based on theme or topic already indentified by the KBSM syllabus.

SAMPLE

Form three KBSM English Language Syllabus
Integrating syllabus items 1.6, 2.5, 1.10, 2.14, 3.6

Syllabus Items:

1.6   Read/listen to and understand directions to places of interest in the country, such as the zoo and the museum.
2.5   Ask for and give directions to places of interest in the country, such as the zoo and the museum.
1.10 Read/listen to and understand information about places of interest in the country, such as the zoo and the museum.
2.14 Ask for and give information about places of interest in the country such as the zoo and the museum.
3.6   Write directions to places of interest in the country such as the zoo and the museum.

(Curriculum Specification for Form three, 1988).

A possible project that could transpire from above items – Project topic: Young person's guide to places of interest (in your own town or Kuala Lumpur).

A stage by stage guide:

1.   Suitability

     Level :   Elementary/intermediate.
     Class .:   It will be an advantage if students are already familiar with the town in which they are schooling. (If not however, the

class could organize a trip to be made or consult agencies in the tourist business.)

Time : 8 – 12 hours approximate.

2. Project Description

In this project students are going to produce a Young Person's Guide to the places of interest in the town they are schooling at. This guide should be aimed at young English speaking visitors visiting Malaysia for the year 199__. It should be a lively alternative to any official town guide which may be rather "stuffy" or irrelevant to the needs and interest of young people. It is important that from the beginning, students are encouraged to look at and explore the town through the eyes of these potential future visitors. Students may produce a more interesting guide if they are allowed to go into the town or places nearby to gather information. Interviews with foreign visitors would also add an additional perspective. Organize a trip to be made or consult agencies in the tourist business.

3. End Product

Format : a) A booklet which can be reproduced cheaply.

　　　　　 b) The booklet should be visually attractive as well as informative.

Contents : Include sections on some of the following subjects –

　　　　　 i. Places to eat and drink
　　　　　 ii. Tourist attractions
　　　　　 iii. Where to get help and advice
　　　　　 vi. Maps, shortcuts
　　　　　 vii. Value-for-money shops
　　　　　 viii. Budget accommodations

4. Summary of steps in Project

Steps	Main Activities	Outcome	Time (hr)
1.	Class discussion	Ideas for scope	$\frac{1}{2} - 1$
2.	Group discussion	Group plans	$\frac{1}{2} - 1$
3.	Research/writing	Information in note form	$1\frac{1}{2} - 2$
4.	Writing/proof reading	First draft of guide	$1\frac{1}{2} - 2$
5.	Discussion/Rewriting	Final texts	$1 - 1\frac{1}{2}$
6.	Reporting/Discussion	Display	1
7.	Production	The places of interest guidebook	$2 - 3$
	Total anticipated time (hrs)		$8 - 11\frac{1}{2}$

5. Resources/Materials
   - existing guide pamphlets
   - maps
   - local newspapers
   - camera
   - access to a typewriter and photo copier
   - local libraries
   - tourist information offices
   - foreign residents (if any)

6. Location
   Steps 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 – the classroom
   Steps 3 – town (during or after school hours)
   Steps 4, 5 – classroom or home

7. Lead in activities
   a) Discussions – Coming to an agreement, allocating tasks, etc.
   b) Conveying information in different ways
   c) Proofreading
   d) Giving a short talk

CONCLUSION

Project work however provides no easy option. The practical pitfalls are numerous and the choice of a worthwhile project, bearing in mind learner's language needs, relevance and authenticity is difficult to define. The teacher having once established a project theme, needs the ability to envisage from beginning to end to achieve the objective within the time alloted. Diligent attention to minute details, encouragement and total participation can however, have rewarding results on a variety of levels. The rewards for students on the other hand would be a wider perspective of language learning and the ability to cope with unpredictable communicative needs. With the development of more mature and independent learners it is hoped that the process approach could contribute towards achieving the country's objectives as stated in the KBSM Curriculum.

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