

RECONSTRUCTING SYLLABUS AND TEACHING MATERIALS FOR CREATIVE WRITING CLASS

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Abstract: This paper reports on our attempts to reconstruct a new syllabus and its course contents based on the existing syllabus and its teaching materials for *creative writing* class at our department. With the ADDIE (*Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate*) approach (Branch, 2009), we redesign the syllabus on the concentration how to teach fiction or in this case to teach short story writing and what instructional materials suitable for our students. Since the outcome of need analysis for this class showed that the majority of students voted for short story for subject to be discussed in the entire course, we designed teaching materials on how to write short story based on intrinsic and extrinsic elements in their story writing exercises and individual tasks. With the reconstruction of the syllabus and its contents, we hope the objective of this course can be reached, that is, students are able to write short story in English in desired level both in English sentence structures and story contents.

Keywords: *Syllabus, ADDIE, Short Story, Intrinsic, Extrinsic Elements*

One of the key successfulness of teaching and learning process is the availability of well-prepared of syllabus and well-organized teaching materials of the subject being taught (Nunan, 1988; Nunan, 2004). Why is it so? Syllabus or also called lesson plans highlight topics for one semester, that is, from what topic coverage to present in each lecture to what students need to read in the reading lists. While teaching materials refer to how the lecturer used resources to deliver instruction. In the case of our classroom practice, the teaching materials include what is the selection of short stories from the canon to read and what set of activities of writing to develop students' skills in writing fiction or in this context how to write a good short story. Since the vital role is played by syllabus, it is very important to set clear learning objectives and learning outcomes that want to be achieved in our course design. Through well-defined learning objectives and learning outcomes, the entire instructions such as reading materials, classroom activities, and evaluation of student mastery for the intended skills can be implemented in each section of the syllabus.

In our department the revision of curriculum is consistently exercised every year under some considerations, and one of them is to keep up with the demand of equipping our students with new skills and expertise needed in current time. The course called "Creative Writing" was introduced in our curriculum since 2015 and ever since the syllabus of this course never been revised or reconstructed yet. With the reconstruction of the syllabus of creative writing course, it is expected both of lecturer and students can gain benefits in teaching and learning process of this course. For the lecturer, he can deliver the course contents more effectively as stated in course objectives and learning outcomes; while for the students, they can learn what they really want to learn as they wish.

Creating writing is strongly rooted from American and British universities tradition in teaching fiction at university level (Henry, 2012; Harper, 2012). Henry argues that indirectly the process of writing fiction was influenced by some important figures in American literary landscape such as "Hawthorne, Emerson, Fuller, Thoreau and other New England writers of the 1840s" (2012, p. 17). He commented that these important figures had created the trends the so-called "an American school without walls" (2012, p. 17). Interestingly, according to Henry (2012), the early writers of fiction disseminated their thoughts and vision through talked with other writers and they didn't live from writing and publishing stories. Henry (2012) wrote that many of the writers in the early mid nineteenth century lived their lives with doing other jobs such as "churchmen, teachers,

editors or clerks in custom houses” (p. 17). The impetus of creative courses, according to Levy (as cited by Henry, 2012, p. 18), was “The Art of the Short Story” offered at the University of Chicago in 1896, along with similar type of courses offered at Princeton and the University of Iowa.

Different from creative writing in American history, the trace of creative writing in British universities can be tracked much earlier in time (Harper, 2012). In the opinion of Harper (2012), the earlier form of creative writing was influenced by higher learning to adults in the form of creative activities. The earliest record about creative writing was found in the work of Anthony Wood (cited in Harper, 2012, p. 9), who published about the learning of writers and bishops at Oxford in 1500 to 1690. Harper argued that there was slight difference between writing tradition in 16th century and 20th century with the reference how the writings were distributed. With the invention of printing technology in the 20th century, the commercialization of writing began to take place in Britain in which the motive of writers was for profit and fame (Harper, 2012). The writers gained more benefit with the introduction of copy right laws for their writings which might not be an issue one or two centuries before.

With strong root both in American and British tradition of literary writing and academia background, many university in America and British now have offered creative writing courses for MA and PhD level (Henry, 2012; Harper 2012). Recent trends also take place in both countries in which creative writing courses have been introduced in undergraduate level at some universities (Thomson, 2013; Vakil, 2008). Contrary to American and British universities, as far as we are concerned in Indonesia there is no university that offers degree in creative writing both for MA and PhD let alone undergraduate degree. We assume that in Indonesia creative writing is only offered as an independent subject at university as part of their curriculum. This is also what has been practiced by our university. Creative writing subject is only an optional subject in the curriculum in our department.

Unlike the fact that creative has become independent field of study in American and British universities, there is dearth of literature which discusses how to design suitable syllabus and course contents in creative writing. Many books and edited book chapters, and articles only highlight how to teach creative writing and how to teach fiction (e.g.: Laksana, 2013; Hamand, 2014; May, 2007; Young, 2009; Earnshaw, 2007; Harper & Kroll, 2008; Hartingan & James, 2014; Naning, 2015; Beck, 2012; Cox, 2011; Day, 2012; Thomson, 2013, Vakil, 2008). With regard to this, we would like to fill in a gap or gaps in available literature on how to design suitable syllabus for our needs with ADDIE model approach.

In his video lecture, Dr Mark Bullen, an education specialist, highlights that instructional design is one of favorite techniques in designing and developing course materials (Commonwealth of Learning, 2014). In the words of Bullen, instructional design will enable teachers and lecturers to start with the premise: “what do students want to learn” instead of “what I want students to learn” (Commonwealth of Learning, 2014). To put the first premise in different words, teachers and lecturers must accommodate the needs and wishes of students in designing the course contents. With reference of this first premise, we feel ADDIE model is one of the solution needed to bridge the needs of students and the ideas and ambition of lecturers. The core idea of ADDIE model is to design the course materials and activities based on the needs and interests of students and not in vice versa, that is, the contents of course imposed by lecturers by personal preferences.

Method

In this study we employed qualitative design in which we used students and colleagues’ recommendations, suggestions and critiques to reconstruct syllabus and teaching materials for teaching creative writing (Kumar, 2014). As for the methods for collecting our data, we used several ways that fall into the category of qualitative research data collection techniques. Kumar (2014, p. 172), classifies two broad methods of data collection technique, i.e., secondary sources and primary sources. We will deal only with primary sources as a way to get the intended data. Further, Kumar (2014) divides primary sources of data collection into observation, interviewing and questionnaire. With regard to our study, we used mostly questionnaire and unstructured interview to hear perspective from our students and our colleagues about things that needed to be improved and elaborated from the sample of syllabus and contents of course.

To implement our study, we used ADDIE model to reconstruct syllabus and select proper materials for creative writing course. The instructional design in our study is adapted from the ADDIE model which consists of five steps as follows: “Analysis”, “Design”, “Develop”, “Implement” and “Evaluate” (Branch, 2009; Dick, Carey & Carey, 2015; Gagné, Wagner, Golas, & Keller, 2005; Gardner, 2011, Morrison, Ross, Kalman & Kemp, 2013).

The process of reconstructing and designing both syllabus and course contents was done in the class of the first author of this paper. It was a small size class that comprised of 17 students, but only 15 of them participated actively in the course from the beginning until the end of semester. The total time we spent for collecting data and redesigning the course syllabus and class contents was around six months, starting from January to June 2018.

Findings and Discussion

The following discussion will be revealing what had been found on data gathering and the use of those data in the new design of syllabus and the contents of creative writing activities throughout last semester. We will discuss ADDIE’s steps based on its chronological order, that is, analysis, design, develop, implement, and evaluate. The cycle of ADDIE model can be summarized in fig. 1 below.

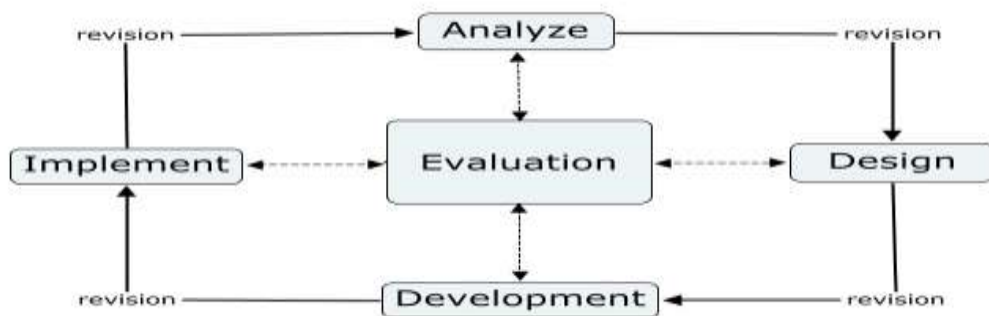


Fig. 1: ADDIE MODEL CYCLES (Kurt, 2018, Online)

Analysis Phase



Fig. 1.1: ADDIE ANALYSIS STAGE: (Kurt, 2018, Online)

Garner (2011) recommends four divisions in the analysis stage, i.e., *instructional goals*, *instructional analysis*, *learning analysis* and *learning objectives*. We will discuss these elements one by one shortly. In our project, we start the analysis by looking at the previous syllabus in order to see what things need to be revised and what things can be added for creating the new syllabus. The first thing that we notice needing revision is the scope of creative writing subject itself in the old syllabus. We found that the old syllabus discussed something which was not in the subject matter covered in creative writing, that is, editorial writing. This may happen because our colleague

who taught the course before did not use the correct definition of what creative writing is and did not know well what are not counted as creative writing. When she was confronted why she put editorial as one of the scopes of creative writing, she acknowledged that she did not know that it was not creative writing topic. Barb Howard, an author and writer explains that creative writing “[is something] that uses figurative language, an image, picture, and it tries to make ways harder than it is, and it tries to draw the senses and emotion of its readers” (UCalgary continuing education, 2011). She argues that things that could be classified as creative writing are: Prose which falls into fiction (novel, novellas, short-stories), nonfiction (memoir, essay); Poetry, and Hybrid forms (UCalgary continuing education, 2011).

We did a survey in the class by administering open-ended questionnaire as the first step in the analysis in collecting as much as possible the information about what students wanted to learn in creative writing class. The result of this survey was the majority of students wanted to learn how to write short story. By collecting this very important piece of data, we can outline now the first element of analysis, i.e., *instructional goal* of teaching short story in our instructional design (Garner, 2011). In our instructional design, we formulate the following instructional goal in teaching short story writing: “Students know how to write a good short story in English”. The next step to do in ADDIE’s analysis is to create *instructional analysis* in which we would do some approaches how to execute instructional goal (Garner, 2011). We believe that the instructional goal can be achieved through the following instructional analysis as follows: (1) know how to find idea or ideas for writing short story, (2) know how to outline the story, (3) know how to write the first rough draft, (4) know how to do multiple revisions to the draft, and (5) know how to write the final draft.

The next sub-component of analysis stage is to carry out *learning analysis*. What is meant by this technical term is the instructor or lecturer must know what have been known by the students related to short story (Gardner, 2011). We knew that some of them have some experience in writing short story. One student confessed that “I wrote anime stories on web while I was in Australia and I had many readers but I stopped writing when I came back to Indonesia”. This student is very advanced since she has written some sample of creative works even published them online. Based on discussion that we did in the class, the majority of students taking this course have had some experience in writing stories even though the stories only for themselves.

The next component in ADDIE’s analysis is to describe *learning objectives* for this subject. With the reference to instructional goal and learning analysis of this subject, we can define the learning objectives as follows. By the end of this subject, students are expected to be able to: (1) *identify* source or sources for writing short story; (2) *demonstrate* sufficient skill in writing short story; (3) *edit* the text of their own stories; and (4) *elaborate* suggestions and critiques voiced by their classmates in story reading session into their text.

Design Phase



Fig. 1.2: ADDIE DESIGN STAGE (Kurt, 2018, Online)

After the first phase of ADDIE model is complete, now let’s us continue with the second stage that is *design* process. Garder (2011) suggests that this phase could be broken down into three

components, namely: *design assessments, choose a course format and instructional strategy*. In the words of Gardner (2011), the instructor and curriculum developer should know that design assessment is closely related to the first phase of ADDIE model, that is, analysis stage. He strongly believes information collected through instructional goal and instructional analysis can help us to decide what kind of assessments can be used to measure students' skills and knowledge in writing their short story. He emphasizes that by looking at students' performance objectives or what students can do, the teacher or lecturer could devise tests that can measure what students have learned from the course contents.

After we know the insight of students' needs during the analysis phase, we decide to use combined techniques for modes of delivering course materials in the course format. We use some techniques such as lecturing, discussion, presentation and practice writing story. In the first mode, lecturer discusses some theoretical concepts in creative writing. Discussion is a good way to train students to argue about some issues regarding stories that have been read as well as to suggest revision to their classmates' story in reading session. Presentation is used to see how the students come up with idea and they write it up into story. The practice of writing is very important because it trains students to gain confidence and skill in transforming their imagination into readable text.

The next component after the selection of course format is instructional strategy. Gardner (2011) suggests some possible instructional strategies in the design phase. He lists the strategies as follows: lectures, readings, discussions, projects, worksheets, assessments and activities. In regard to instructional strategy, Dick, Carey and Carey (2015), have outlined five instructional strategies: (1) pre-instructional activities, (2) content presentation, (3) learner participation, (4) assessment, and (5) follow-through activities. In pre-instructional activities, Gardner (2011) explains that teacher or lecturer should give motivation before coming to the content of the course. He believes the learners will be motivated if the teacher or lecturer discusses clearly what is the goals that they want to achieve in the course. Successful learning process can be determined by precision of the course content presentation. Gardner (2011) suggests the precision of content presentation and always sticks with the objectives of class. He also highlights the importance of learner participation in which they will be made sure to do sufficient practice and get feedback that they need to improve their skill and confidence. While for drafting instructional assessment, Gardner (2011) recommends that the instructor or lecturer should look at practice assessment and attitude assessment as well, and not only at final assessment. Last but not least, in follow-through activities, Gardner (2011) recommends instructor and lecturer to do review of class strategies in order to find out whether the students have grasped the course content or not.

As for our syllabus, we have elaborated tips and theories based on what have been discussed above in order to achieve maximum results in terms of instructional goals and learning objectives.

Development Phase



Fig. 1.3: ADDIE DEVELOPMENT STAGE (Kurt, 2018, Online)

In development stage, Gardner (2011) puts forward three major steps as follows: (1) create sample, (2) develop course materials, and (3) conduct a run-through. We have developed a sample of syllabus and showed it to our colleagues. One of our colleagues brought up the issue of how to achieve the instructional goal--“Students know how to write a good short story in English”. She

argued that writing is the ultimate skill and it is very difficult acquire. In her belief, writing fiction in this case short story writing is very different from writing for academic purposes, in which, in the former, students must struggle with English grammar but also the use of many figurative languages. We explained to her that our exercise start with something easy before climb to more difficult topic. We also gave more freedom to students to write story on genre that they may have more interest and knowledge about to achieve better result. The students may develop the desired level of skill if they are discipline and diligent in practice the topics that have discussed at their convenient time.

As for the course materials, Gardner (2011) argues that what are things to include and use in class should be based on instructional goal and instructional strategy. We focus on several important issues for teaching creative writing as follows: (1) learn from the master of short story writers or read the canon in the anthology of short stories, (2) know the elements of short story well in order to write a great story, (3) write the story in good English so that the readers will understand the story relatively easy, and (4) develop your own style for your to make story is truly yours. For point no. 1, we have good selection of short stories either written by native speakers or translated into English. For story elements and features in point no. 2, we have some texts to consult with in our syllabus plus this issue also discusses repeatedly in class. The relevant books for learning short story are: (Bell, 2004; Hamand, 2014; Hartingan & James, 2014; Laksana, 2013; May, 2007, Naning, 2015). For audio materials on you can be accessed online on youtube are: litutor.com (2016) under the title *How to write better stories*, UCalgary continuing education (2011) with the title *Creative writing—An overview* (Part 1 and 2). For point no. 3, we have session for reading story and get some feedback from fellow students. This includes the comments for grammatical problems found in the text. And specially for point no. 4, students should find their own style by practicing a lot and develop their own style further in terms of storytelling techniques and the use of figurative languages.

The last element for this phase according to Gardner (2011) is to conduct a run-through which means we ask students and our colleagues to comment on the sample of syllabus and teaching materials we have designed. We have received valuable feedback and critiques in order to improve the present syllabus and its course contents or teaching materials.

Implement Phase



Fig. 1.4: ADDIE IMPLEMENTATIONSTAGE (Kurt, 2018, Online)

In the fourth phase or implementation phase, according to Gardner (2011), the course developer or lecturer should take into consideration the following aspects: (1) train the instruction, (2) prepare the learners, and (3) arrange the learning space. For point no. 1, it only applies to the developer who is not the person teaches the course, therefore, he or she should get the necessary information to carry out this fourth phase. But in our case this does not happen since it is we who design and implement the materials in our class. As for point no. 2, the learners should prepare themselves with tools and knowledge required by this subject. The example of the tool is the computer or laptop where they will read their course materials for this subject. While for the knowledge, they should read beforehand the materials under discussion and know some theories related to short stories. This is important in order to be able to participate actively in discussion and

classroom activities. The last point or point no. 3 is the availability of supporting equipments for enhancing teaching learning process such as projector in the classroom. The availability of boardmarker for writing on the white board.

Evaluation Phase

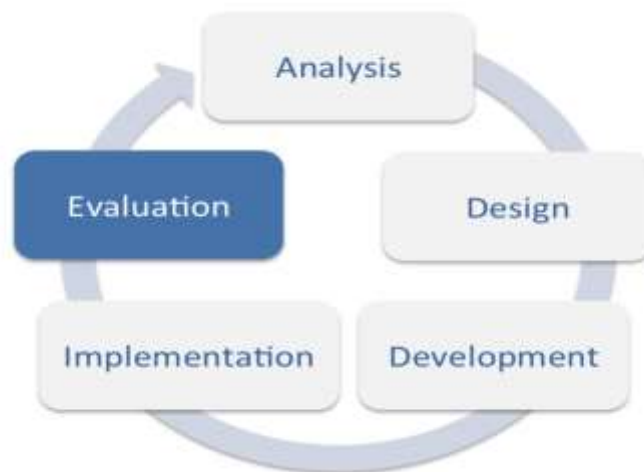


Fig. 1.5: ADDIE EVALUTION STAGE (Kurt, 2018, Online)

The last part of ADDIE model or evaluation stage is very important since on this stage we will able to see the results of learning outcomes. Gardner (2011) recommends two approaches to do evaluation, namely: (1) formative evaluation, and (2) summative evaluation. Dick, Carey and Carey (2015) divide three categories of formative evaluation: (1) one-to-one evaluation, (2) small group evaluation, and (3) field trial evaluation. For one-to-one evaluation, the course developer or lecturer should look at the successfulness of instructional goals and instructional strategy in terms of their clarity, feasibility and impact on single learner. While in small group evaluation, the instructor or lectures must make sure that participants under investigation should represent subgroup of population. The last one or field trial will be done in larger setting if the last two categories are successful.

On the other hands, summative evaluation, in the opinion of Gardner (2011), is the evaluation that wants to prove the worth of instruction after it completed. Gardner (2011) says that summative evaluation will look at: (1) reaction; (2) learning; (3) behavior; and (4) results. We did evaluation on these four components with the use of open-ended questionnaire at the end of course. For example, on the level of “reaction” with the question ‘What component did you strongly find useful in our course content?’ An answer given was: “I could write story based on my personal preference and my critical thinking.” We let them to write on any topic that they liked very much instead of imposing them with certain topic that they didn’t like to write. The example of “learning” reaction was with question: “What did you learn from writing your own story?” A response for this question for was: “I learned how to create imaginative dialog between characters”. Another response from student was: “I learned how to end my story with twist and I never expected this when I started drafting my story”. To measure “behavior” of students, we asked this kind of question: “What positive value that you learned from your characters?” One of the responses for this question was: “I found it was hard to be bad even in my fiction”. And for the “results” we look at the quality of story produced by students. Overall, they managed to write stories but some still had serious problem with grammar, mechanics, and creative use of figure of speech.

Conclusion

We have learned a lot throughout the process of designing and writing of the new syllabus for this subject. The biggest problem we faced in designing and finding teaching materials was that we did not know whether the students wanted to study them and read them. The use of ADDIE model has helped us to put things the students really wanted to learn and not what things that we wanted them to learn. The evaluation made for each stage and the last stage also helped us to better understand what should be included in instructional design and what to exclude from the design.

Something that we could not do was to make the stories better even though we could come up with many tricks on how to write a good and interesting piece of fiction. It was because the students who had to write and struggle with all difficulties in terms of language presentation and contents of their stories.

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