CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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This chapter discussed the background of the project development, the statement of the problem, the objective of the project development, the specification of the developed product, the significance of the development, the assumptions and limitation, the definitions of key terms and thesis writing organization.

1.1   Background of the Development

In non-English departments of most higher educations in Indonesia, reading skill becomes the priority in English course among other skills. Reading skill happens to be the priority because it is believed that when learners have good reading ability, they will also be able to read rapidly and effectively the lecture materials, textbooks, information, and many other sources that are mostly in English. This skill, therefore, is assumed to influence the learners' achievement quality in learning activities and in obtaining knowledge. Moreover, the mastery of this skill is believed to encourage the learners' acquirement of other knowledge easier.

Nowadays, the information and other sources of knowledge are far easier to acquire than in the previous era, especially when Internet is introduced as one of knowledge sources. It is not difficult anymore for the learners to search for more knowledge and information. Through the Internet, the learners can access as much information as they need. They even can have information more rapidly than when they have to access or read books. The abundant information available

today happens in all segments of life including education. In line with it, as many other studies, Information system as one of the new studies in Indonesia experiences the explosion of information too. There is abundant new knowledge and information of Information system every day. The change of information is so fast that it will become obsolete quickly if the learners do not keep up with and update it. The excessive availability of information for the aforementioned study will be worthless if the learners do not have good reading comprehension skill since the information mentioned above is mostly presented in English. For this reason, reading skill becomes compulsory for the learners learning Information system. Recognizing the importance of reading skill especially to obtain the information quickly in order to support the learning achievement, Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen Informatika & Teknik Komputer Surabaya (STIKOM), as the school of information technology and computer engineering, has English courses in its curriculum as well. English is given in two credits in three semesters. The goal of the English courses of the first two semesters is to equip the learners with good reading comprehension skill in order to achieve faster information of information system and technology. The goal of the English course in the other semester is intended to prepare the learners with proficient oral communication skill which expects the learners to be able to communicate their ideas and thoughts by using English.

However, most of the English lecturers in the Information System Study Program found it difficult to achieve the main goal of the English course when teaching and delivering the English course materials in the classroom. The difficulties they faced were due to several conditions occurring in the Information

System Study Program. The major problems arising in accomplishing the goal of the English course were: (1) the large size class; (2) the lack of basic skill needed to support reading comprehension specifically structure or grammar; and (3) time allotment of English courses.

As STIKOM does not have English study program or English department, English course is only one of the minor courses or supporting courses in its curriculum. Its major courses are those related with information system such as programming languages; decision-making system; information system analysis, and so on (Information System Study Program, 2006 Curriculum). Provided that English course was a supporting course, it was given in the class which consists of 50 to 60 learners. This size was classified as large-sized class which was in fact not ideal for teaching English language skills. It was hardly possible to have ideal class management for such large class which then results in the difficulty to achieve the objective of the English course.

Following the problem of the size of the class was the lack of basic skill that was needed to have reading comprehension skill. Most of the students of the Information System Study Program did not have good mastery in structure or grammar, thus they often fail to grasp the meaning of a sentence in English text only because they could not identify the subject or the object of the language especially in a complex sentence. This phenomenon was in line with what Agustien (2004) claims that nowadays the students often neglect the importance of grammar even though, in fact, grammar plays an important role since it can affect the lost of meaning in each

piece of sentence. This weakness also contributed to the lecturers' failure to achieve the English course goal.

The next difficulty was the time allotment that was allotted for the English courses. This problem was stemmed from the status of English course in the study program as well. Due to its status, the time allocation and the credits given to this course were not as many as the credits given to the computer courses. This enhanced the problems of achieving the goal of the English course decided by the study program. The limited time provided made it difficult to teach or equip the students with enough prerequisites skills needed in reading comprehension as mentioned previously in the second problem. Consequently, the lecturers assumed that every student has more or less the same standard of language structure or grammar and started the lesson from the point that might not have been mastered or known by all students. Even though the English courses were given in three semesters, the objective of the two first semesters and two others were different and the English course for reading comprehension was only given in two semesters. In these two semesters, English course was presented once a week in two credits (100 minutes). The time allotment was not ideally sufficient concerning the objective of the course and the size of the class. In the classroom, the students who already had good knowledge at grammar would not have the difficulty to understand the reading texts given to them, while, on the other hand, the students with lower level of knowledge in grammar would have to make a greater effort to understand the text given to them. This circumstance finally led to the problems of low reading comprehension achievement.

The three problems above were aggravated by the different speed learning among students in one class. The class size and time limitation affected the lecturers in distributing the fair attention and treatment to both the excellent learners and the poor learners. As a result, teachers often only paid attention to either the excellent ones or the poor ones which accordingly made the other learners discourage to learn.

Based on the observation carried out during the academic year of 2005-2006, the scores of English I course of the Information System learners were various; some of the excellent learners could reach 80 until 90 with the score scale 1-100. However, there were some cases that these scores did not represent the real reading proficiency of the learners. The lack of this proficiency was found when many lecturers criticized the learners' reading ability especially in understanding the lecture materials and textbooks for lectures. The criticism continued when most of the students performed poorly in the international certification examinations that were given in English. It was found that the failure to pass the international certification examination did not concern with the student's technical skills in computer but merely with their skill in understanding the English instructions or problem items.

As the problems above seriously affected learners' achieving the reading comprehension which was the main objective of the English I Course, it was important to find the solution which benefited both teachers and learners without much influencing or changing the existing curriculum. With the rapid development of information system and technology supported with multimedia, the major problems obstructing learners' achievement of reading comprehension skill were

expected to be able to be solved. The solution proposed in this research was by developing a computer-based learning materials supporting the lessons given in English I courses in Information System Study Program. There were many commercially ready-made computer-based learning materials available in the market. However, there must have been some considerations to be taken before using them for the learners. The biggest problem of these commercial computer-based learning materials was that they were not designed based on students' specific needs and characteristics. It was usually found that the producer of the commercial computer-based learning materials promotes its product as a flexible computer-based learning program and thus could be customized. Nevertheless, how far the customization was had never been tested and therefore had not been proved effective. Since the characteristics of the foreign language learners and the needs of the learners, school, and stakeholders were quite various and exclusive, it was essential to carefully select the commercial computer-based learning materials which fully fitted with the needs. The implication was that it took much time and, if the certain particular computer-based learning material had been selected, it would not guarantee that the material was suitable for the learners. This fact encouraged the writer to design the computer-based learning materials which were based on the characteristics of and the problems faced by the students of Information System Study Program in Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen Informatika & Teknik Komputer Surabaya (STIKOM). The materials designed should have been able to meet the students' difficulty in English I course as it was designed based on the needs analysis carried out and on the profound observation done by the writer when she taught the course.

This design was intended to be the blue print of the computer-based materials development of English I course. Since it was intended to be the blue print, the developer would only take one lesson among ten lessons that were planned to be developed and the lesson chosen was lesson one, which discusses about noun phrase.

The choice of the computer as the media to develop the course for supporting English I course was as follows:

1. Computer-based learning materials did not need the involvement of the lecturers. The tutorials design was expected to emulate the lecturer's role in the classroom so that the students could learn by themselves.

2. Computer-based learning was flexible which meant that it could be accessed flexibly by learners whether s/he was in the school computer laboratory or at home and it could be accessed anytime the students wanted to learn.

3. Computer could offer immediate feedback so that students did not have to see the keys for an answer or wait for the teacher to answer the question.

4. The students' learning could be individualized in the sense that they could learn by following their own paces and choose the materials they need to learn as well as repeat it as many times as they need to understand the materials.

5. Because the students were free to direct their own learning, they gained the students' learning confidence.

6. It encouraged learner's centered learning in which the students could play active role and not only as a passive receiver of the knowledge.

7. Computer used as media for learning that was different from the material delivery of the regular class could motivate the students' learning.

Furthermore, by using computer-based learning materials, the students were expected to develop their knowledge in structure or grammar which was later needed to equip them to learn how to comprehend the reading materials since the materials designed were based on their characteristics and needs. This kind of learning media was also likely to provide the bridge for the not-so-excellent learners as they could access the reading materials repetitively especially for the difficult parts and they could make mistakes without being worried of feeling embarrassed (Beauvois in Stepp-Greanny, 2002). Most of poor learners usually felt inferior in the classroom and chose to keep silent when they found the difficulties in their learning process in the classroom. Moreover, owing to the large size of the class, teachers would also fail to pay attention to these learners and treated them specifically.

Projects on the implementation of CALL have been done by several experts. Vallance (1996) utilized the Internet resource to teach communicative English which results in the effectiveness of the materials in increasing participants' speaking ability. He called his program as Internet Aided Language Learning (INTALL). The second study was done by Pramono (1996) which developed a computer-aided design learning for Structure course. In his study it was proved that the software developed had a good quality in terms of learning characteristics therefore it could help the learners' learning process and improve their learning achievement.

The above projects were conducted using different media of CALL. Besides, they focused on different areas of skill. While Vallance focused on speaking

skill, Pramono focused on the Structure course which had been the problem faced by the students of the university where he took the research. The computer-based learning materials development which was focused on the structure or grammar to build the students' fundamental skill before learning reading comprehension had not been carried out yet thus this project was done with the purpose of assisting both learners and teachers to overcome the problems of achieving the goal of English I course mentioned above.

1.2   The Statement of the Problem

Based on the description on the background of the study, it could be stated that there were some problems faced as follows:

(1)   The students of Information System Study Program could not accomplish the objective of English course. The objective of the English course here was the students were able to comprehend the English reading text which later was extended to the textbooks, information system and technology articles and reports.

(2)   The students of Information System Study Program lacked of basic skill needed in reading comprehension. The specific basic skill of reading needed for students of Information System Study Program was the structure or grammar.

(3)   The time allotment for English course was insufficient to build a fundamental skill of reading comprehension as well as to encourage the

students to master the process of reading comprehension. Therefore, the objective of the English I course itself was also difficult to achieve.

Derived from the problems mentioned above, it was essential to develop a computer-based learning materials that could build the students' fundamental skill in reading comprehension that focused on English structure needed in understanding the English text which could also be learnt at a flexible time and would not be limited to classroom activity. It was also expected to enable learners to study by themselves at their own pace and encourage them to be free from inferiority and anxiety, the feelings that they might have had during classroom session. A computer-based learning material which was designed and developed could be the solution for the problems faced by the students of Information System Study Program.

1.3 The Objective of the Development

In line with the background of the development and the statement of the problem above, it could be concluded that the objective of this project development was to develop a computer-based learning material prototype for English I course for the students of the Information System Study Program in STIKOM. The product was expected to assist the students to build the fundamental skill for reading comprehension. The program developed the language component; i.e. structure since structure was not taught in the Information System Study Program. In fact, students needed to master structure to get the meaning of sentence as the elements of texts. Furthermore, this program was intended to be used as a supplementary learning

materials and used independently by the students at a flexible time and their own pace of learning.

1.4   The Expected Specifications of the Developed Product

As this reading program was designed and developed through computer, the media could be classified as a Computer-assisted Language Learning program. The computer-based learning program was the product of this project and the specifications that were expected from this program were as follows:

1.   It should have been able to function as a media to help learners to study independently. However, this program was not aimed to fully replace a lecturer's role in the classroom. Thus, this computer-based learning program was a supplementary media to help learners to achieve the goal of English I course.

2.   This product was a supplementary learning material which was intended to support and become the integrated part of the English I course. The materials given in this computer-based learning program were to support the classroom materials, to help the learners build the fundamental skill for reading comprehension which specifically focuses on English structure.

3.   There were three instructed programs used in this computer-based learning program, (a) tutorial, (b) practices, and (c) tests. Both practices and tests were followed with immediate feedbacks.

1.5 Significance of the Development

The result of this project was expected to give contribution for learners, teachers as well as for the institution where this project was carried out. This contribution was then projected to help them to overcome the problems of achieving the goal of English I course without influencing and changing the policy and curriculum of the institution.

The project further was also expected to encourage the learner's habit in independence learning which will be able to enhance their skill in gaining knowledge sources independently.

1.6 The Assumptions and Project Development Limitations

This project was carried out based on the following assumption:

1. The results of the needs analysis and characteristics represented the needs and characteristics of students of System Information Study Program.

2. The answers of questionnaires and interviews were the respondents or subjects of evaluations' answers and personal opinions.

3. The questionnaires and interviews given to the subjects were considered understood by subjects so that they could answer them accurately.

4. The students of STIKOM mostly owned computers at home because their major course was computer or at least they have flexible access to the computer such as in the school laboratory.

5. This computer-based learning material was designed for self-learning activities.

The assumptions of the project done take the developer to list some of the limitations that this project had, which were stated as follows:

1. Due to the limited time, the computer-based learning material developed was only the prototype of the whole materials planned. The lesson developed is only lesson one, that was the lesson which discussed about noun phrase.

2. The students of Information system taking the English course were the non-English department students; therefore, they acquired English courses in limited time.

3. The problems that happened in the English course or subject were various. Thus, those occurring in study program of Information System in STIKOM may not have been generalized with those occurring in other study programs and/or institutions or colleges.

4. In line with point number one, the developer only focused on and discussed the problems related with the English I course problems which were faced by the students of Information System Study Program in STIKOM taking English I course in semester 1.

5. Due to the limited time, the developer only developed Lesson Unit I of the English I course.

1.7   Definition of Key Terms

The terms need to explain concerning this project were:

(1)   Computer-based learning material is:

Learning materials which were designed, developed and presented by using the medium of computer and furthermore, made use by the users by using computer as well.

(2)   English I course was the English course taught for semester I students of Information System Program in Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen Informatika & Teknik Komputer Surabaya (STIKOM).

(3)   Sekolah Tinggi Manajemen Informatika & Teknik Komputer Surabaya (STIKOM) is the education institution where writer carried out this project. Its core is computer which is represented in each of its program of study. This institution has seven program of studies with the biggest program is Information System Study Program, hence the project was carried out in this program of study.

1.8   The Organization of Thesis Writing

This thesis consists of two separate parts. The first part consists of analytical discussions of the development process and the second part is the developed product in the form of CD ROM which contains a computer-based material for the English I Course in STIKOM.

The first part which contains the analytical discussions of the development comprises five chapters, as follows:

Chapter I Introduction which describes (a) background of the study, (b) statement of the problem, (c) the objective of the project, (d) the expected specifications of the product, (e) the significance of the project, (f) the assumptions and limitations of the projects, (g) the definition of terms, and (h) the organization of thesis writing.

Chapter II Review of Related Literatures which discusses (a) educational applications of computer technology, (b) Reading skill in a foreign language, (c) communication skill, and (d) other studies on the use of computer-assisted language learning.

Chapter III The Procedures of Developing Prototype which discusses (a) the procedures of developing the prototype and (b) product evaluation.

Chapter IV The Report of the Process and the Result of Development

Chapter V Discussions and Suggestions which provides the discussions of the development project and the suggestions for the further development project and research.