

## **Developing Multicultural-Based Reading Tasks for Learning Reading of Junior High School Students**

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**Abstract.** *This study was aimed at developing multicultural reading tasks for the eighth grade students of MTs. GUPPI Kresnomulyo, Ambarawa, Pringsewu, Lampung Indonesia. The result of this study was expected to provide a set of suitable English reading tasks in response to the lack of supplementary learning source materials for learning reading. This study was categorized as a Research and development (R&D) study. The participants of the study were the eighth grade students of MTs. GUPPI Kresnomulyo Ambarawa Pringsewu, the English teacher, and English Education Program lecturers of Lampung university. The data were collected through questionnaires. The first questionnaire was distributed to the students to find out their needs and characteristics. The second questionnaire was administered to validate the first draft of the developed tasks. The third questionnaire was administered to get the feedback from the students toward the second draft of the tasks. The final product of this study passed through a series materials design steps, namely; collecting preliminary information, writing tasks, designing the first draft, validating the developed tasks, revising the tasks, conducting try-out, evaluating and revising for the final draft. The study found that the use of multiculturally familiar materials beneficial for the students learning. The result of the study also highlighted students' needs and prior knowledge as the main factors to be considered when developing teaching material. Therefore, it can be concluded that the tasks are appropriate for the eighth grade students.*

**Keywords:** *developing, multicultural, reading tasks, learning reading*

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### **I. Introduction**

The aim of English teaching-learning process at junior high school as stated in the Curriculum 2013 is to make the students master the four language skills, namely; reading, listening speaking, and writing skills. These skills are taught in an integrated way so that at the end of the teaching-learning process the students will be able to communicate in English. However, from the four language skills, the reading skill gets a great focus in the teaching-learning process. The language elements on reading material such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling are taught to support the development of the skills and not for the mastery of these elements themselves.

The teaching of English in the junior high school emphasizes the reading skill because reading comprehension is very important to master since English has a role as the linguistic medium for the transfer of education, science, and technology. Most international scientific publications in the forms of books, magazines, journals, and the like are written in English. Therefore, the reading comprehension ability is crucial for junior high school students and especially for those who want to continue their study at a higher level of education. The second reason which serves as a basis for emphasizing the reading skill is that the development of reading skills will support the development of other language skills, as it is known that most teaching-learning materials are usually presented in a written form. A reading text is also an effective means to teach linguistic items such as vocabulary and structure.

The English teaching-learning process in Indonesia junior high schools integrates the four skills under a certain genre. Materials are organized as integrated sequence activities around a text type being discussed. It is important for the teacher to provide appropriate materials which are more various, more challenging and more interesting, because material is one of the important factors that determine the success of the English teaching and learning. Materials in the form of task are the main sources for students to learn the competency they should acquire.

To be able to produce good material, the teacher should always start from the students (F. Rochman, Yulianti, 2010; Y. M. Harsono, 2007). The material should be able to capture students' need and, both present and future needs (Sismiyati, M. A. Latief, 2012; P. Whacob, 2006). The teaching material should also take into account students culture and background, for language is inseparable part of culture. Therefore, when teaching

English in the context of English as a Foreign Language, then both the English language culture and the students' own must be taken into account (C. Kramsch, A. Whiteside, 1998; H. Straub, 1999).

It has also been shown that cultural elements, some of them of an affective or attitudinal sort may also come into play (Jhonson, 1981). What has not been stressed much however, is that background and cultural determined expectancies are sometimes coded in what would seem to be almost trivially simple elements of surface form- such as names of persons and places appearing in the texts. It occurred to the writers that in texts drawn from EFL/ESL course books, names of city, department stores and persons in particular in Japanese readers the sorts of expectancies that an American or English speaker might have. At first blush this idea seemed almost too obvious to merit further consideration. Then, upon reflection, the idea began to take on a more interesting flavour. It turns out that very simple things like nouns referring to persons and places carry with them some fairly subtle semantic and pragmatic information. That information may be critical to the determination of certain facts that can make profound differences in ordinary experience, for example whether a character is male or female, old or young, or what sort of events and relationships to expect in a given context.

In addition, one of the topics that can be used in creating teaching materials is multicultural context text. Multiculturalism defined by context is a small but consistent theme across disciplines and overtime is defining individual-level multiculturalism by contextual factors, such as history, geography, cultural heritage, interpersonal relations, and national policies (e.g., Brilley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005; Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005; Cheng, Lee, & Benet Martinez, 2006; Ng, 2010). Similarly, it is assumed that all individuals whose ancestry is from more than one cultural group, or from a cultural group that differs from the main-stream society, are multicultural (e.g., Netto, 2008; Yampolsky, Amiot, & de la Sablonniere, 2013). An example of multiculturalism is an honor classroom with students from several different countries and who speak different languages.

Many studies have been conducted on developing multicultural based reading materials to improve students' reading comprehension. For instance, Novianto Trianto Hasibuan, Wisman Hadi & Sumarsih (2017) have conducted their research entitled the development of the teaching materials of multiculturalism-based fast reading skill for the VIII grade of SMP students in Medan city. This research aims to describe the feasibility of teaching materials of multiculturalism-based fast reading skills, the result of the students' learning in grade VIII in SMP Medan City, namely SMP N 27 Medan and SMP Taman Harapan Medan on the subject of fast reading skill with the developed teaching materials of multiculturalism-based fast reading skills, and the effectiveness of teaching materials of multiculturalism-based fast reading skill.

Madrasah Tsanawiyah GUPPI or MTs.GUPPI ( Junior Islamic School) is a school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia. There are several different ethnic groups here. There are Javanese, Sundanese, Lampungese, Palembang, and Sumendo. From the observation results revealed that English teaching in MTs.GUPPI poses several unique conditions for the teacher. The first is problems with comprehension in the L2 classroom occur when learners are given materials in which they lack the background knowledge or expertise to understand (Anderson, 2004; Grabe, 2004). The second condition is that the existing material for English course in students' book is suitable with the basic competencies but the material presented is still not complete. The third condition is the learners have problems in tackling their academic reading texts ( Isarji & Ainul, 2008; as cited in Rahim, 2013) because they are "unable to fully understand what they read, and fail to apply appropriate ideas from their reading to course related tasks (Kuldip, 2001; as cited in Rahim, 2013).

Based on the researcher's observation, junior high school students lack of reading learning material sources which concern on the development of their reading comprehension ability. Most of junior high school students only learn reading at English classroom in their school with the reading material given by the teacher, while most of English teachers use the reading task presented on a certain textbook rawly without any adjustment. The reading tasks on the textbook used by the English teacher are commonly in the form of testing type. Most of the reading tasks are oriented on the product rather than on the process of developing the student' reading comprehension ability. Regarding to the fact found by the researcher in reading materials, she then did her early preliminary information gathering by observing the English teaching-learning process in MTs. GUPPI Kresnomulyo Ambarawa Pringsewu. The researcher found that her thesis proposal met the problem of the lack of learning source for learning reading of eighth grade of students Mts. GUPPI Kresnomulyo Ambarawa Pringsewu.

The researcher has done an observation and found out that eighth grade need to have more learning sources which are suitable for the students on dealing with the reading part. On the fact that reading comprehension ability is important to be acquired, and that there are no various source on learning reading, designing reading tasks which are suitable for junior high school students is necessary. This study focuses on designing English reading tasks to support the development of student' reading comprehension ability.

**Research Question**

As the follow up for the afore mentioned backgrounds, the following research question is formulated: “How multicultural-based reading tasks which are suitable for the eighth grade students of junior high school are developed?”

**Objectives**

In relation with the problem above, the objective of this research is determined: to develop multicultural-contents of the reading tasks in developing the reading comprehension ability for the eighth grade students of junior high school.

**II. Method**

This study is classified as Research and Development (R & D). Borg and Gall (2003: 569) state that R & D is a process used to develop and validate educational products. Educational products can be teaching media, teaching materials, textbooks, or workbooks. In this case, the product of this research is a set of students’ sheetworks of multicultural task-based English reading learning material for the eighth grade students of MTs. GUPPI Kresnomulyo, Ambarawa, Pringsewu. With regard to the two models of material design proposed by Nunan (1991: 216) and R & D steps by Borg and Gall (2003:571) and Sugiyono (2009:298), the researcher adapts the framework of this study. The conceptual framework of the research is presented in Figure 1.

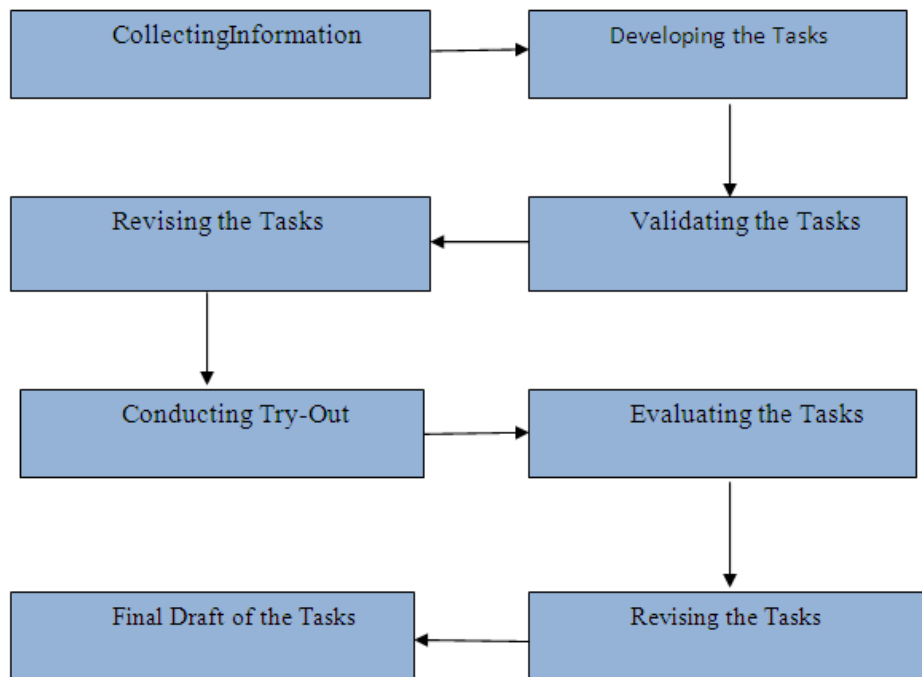


Figure 1. *The diagram of the research conceptual framework*

**Participant of the Study**

The participants of the study are divided into two groups. The first group consisted of the eighth grade students of MTs. GUPPI Kresnomulyo and their English teacher. They participate in the first and third steps of data collection of this research. In the first step, the students state their opinion and comments about an English lesson at school and their needs in learning source of reading comprehension ability by filling in the first questionnaire. Meanwhile, the teacher gives her opinion and comments about learners’ needs and characteristics to an interview that is conducted by the researcher. In the third step, the students and teacher state their opinion and comments by filling in questionnaires toward the draft of the tasks after the tasks being implemented.

The second group consisted of an English teacher and English Education Program lecturers of Lampung State University. They participate in the second step of data collection of this study. They evaluate and validate the first draft of the tasks by stating their judgments toward the tasks on questionnaires. They are also asked to give their comments and suggestions toward the tasks on the questionnaire.

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

To collect data, the researcher used questionnaires. The first questionnaire was used to get information about the students' needs and preference, and to gain information from the English teachers and lecturers to develop the tasks. The second questionnaire was administered to obtain information from the lectures and the English teacher (expert judgment) about the first draft of the developed task for evaluating and revising the task. The third questionnaire is used to get information from the students toward the implemented tasks for the second evaluation and revision of the tasks (to find out whether the task have been suitable for the students or not).

## **III. Literature Review**

### **The Schema Theory**

The researcher believes that schema theory plays an important influence in this study. The schema theory highlights that a text does not carry the meaning but the reader brings the information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture to the texts (Brown, 2001, p. 299). Therefore, when teachers select reading text to teach based on students' interest, the teachers use students' prior knowledge and experience to make students stay connected. As the learners stay connected to the text, they can pick up the words and learn the language. Furthermore, the schema theory highlights that comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. By doing so, students may able to achieve efficient comprehension by relating the textual material to their own knowledge.

### **Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism defined by context is a small but consistent theme across disciplines and overtime is defining individual-level multiculturalism by contextual factors, such as history, geography, cultural heritage, interpersonal relations, and national policies (e.g., Brilley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005; Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005; Cheng, Lee, & Benet Martinez, 2006; Ng, 2010). Similarly, it is assumed that all individuals whose ancestry is from more than one cultural group, or from a cultural group that differs from the main-stream society, are multicultural (e.g., Netto, 2008; Yampolsky, Amiot, & de la Sablonniere, 2013).

### **Need Analysis**

The term needs is not as straightforward as it might appear, and hence the term is sometimes used to refer to wants, desires, demands, expectation, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements (Brindley 1984, 28). Needs are often described in terms of a linguistic deficiency, that is, as describing the difference between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do. This suggests that needs have objective reality and are simply there waiting to be identified and analyzed.

### **Reading Tasks**

There are varying definitions that will be discussed by the writer regarding the tasks. Breen in Nunan (2004: 3) proposes task as a structured language learning effort which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a sort of outcomes for those who carry out the task. Task is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group of problem-solving or simulations and decisions making.

Nunan (2004: 4) defines tasks as classroom work which involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is primarily focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and which the intention is to convey meaning rather than manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. In summary, task can be defined as any classroom work which has a particular goal, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task and which facilitate language learning process

A task is crucial on a reading learning process. It engages three elements of reading comprehension namely, the reader, the text, and the activity. Reading tasks provide chances for the learner to practice and apply the reading skills and strategies on dealing with written text to develop their reading comprehensionability.

## **IV. Result And Discussion**

### **Result**

This section presents the research findings by describing the results of the preliminary data collection, and describing how the research procedure carried out until the final draft of the task done written.

#### **1. Description of the Preliminary Data Collection**

##### **a. Description of the Students**

In the early data collection stage, the researcher did an observation which aimed at collecting the information about the students characteristics and the English teaching-learning activities. There were 80 students studying at the eighth grade of MTs. GUPPI Kresnomulyo Ambarawa in the academic year of 2020/2021. Their ages range from 12 – 14 years old. Many of them come from middle-class families. They were divided into three classes; VIIIA, VIIIB, and VIIC. Based on the English teacher testimony, most of the students were on the lower learner level.

#### b. Results of the Needs Assessment

Beside doing a brief observation and having an interview with the English teacher, the researcher also distributed the first questionnaire to gather information about students' needs and interest towards learning English, especially on reading skill activities. The questionnaire was written based on the theory of the needs analysis proposed by Hutchison and Waters (1987: 53 – 63) and the theory of task components proposed by Nunan (2004: 40 – 72). It consisted of 22 questions in the form of multiple choice items. The students could choose one or more option(s). They could also add their own opinions on the developed tasks. After administering the first questionnaire, the researcher then analyzed the result of the students' responses. The complete results of the first questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively and presented as follow. Related to the students' general views of English in their daily life, the researcher found that the students perceived English, especially reading skills, as important skills but are difficult to be acquired. Most of the students did not get a lot of exposure toward written English material outside the classroom. They read English only from the material given by their English teacher. Based on the students' responses toward the questionnaire questions, the researcher also found that the students wanted to develop their English reading skill. In relation to what they wanted, the students stated that they needed to get more sources on learning English reading skills.

### V. Discussion

This section presents the discussion of the study by answering the question as formulated in introduction. Here, the researcher presents the discussion of the findings on how reading tasks which have suitable contents for the seventh grade students of junior high school were developed. Related to the steps of the study, the reading tasks were developed based on the research procedures adapted from material development models and steps proposed by Nunan (1991), Borg and Gall (2003), and Sugiyono (2009). In developing reading tasks which have suitable contents for the seventh grade students of junior high school, firstly, the researcher did preliminary information collection. In this stage, she reviewed some theories related to the research. The researcher also did an observation and gathered information about students' needs and characteristics. The results of the preliminary information collection show that reading ability has a crucial place in the English teaching-learning activities. It can be seen from the curriculum which states that the goal of the English class is stressed on the reading comprehension ability. It also can be derived from the theoretical review. Some reading experts suggest that teachers must teach reading comprehension ability explicitly. Hence, it is important for the teacher to be able to consider what skills, and how the skill might be presented in the teaching-learning process.

From the literature review, the researcher concluded that reading task is an important aspect on the development of students' reading comprehension ability, because it engages three element of reading comprehension at once namely, the reader, the text, and the activity. Thus, developing suitable reading tasks for the seventh grade students of junior high school is necessary.

From the needs assesment, the researcher found that the students wanted to develop their reading skills in understanding English reading texts. They need more reading learning source related to what they want. In addition, related to the learning resources, the students wanted to have materials which have various activities and input. The results of the theories review and the needs analysis were then used as the base for developing the tasks grids of the developed tasks. The tasks grids encompass the curriculum references, reading theories references, and the tasks components proposed by Nunan (2004). In this stage the researcher wrote down the objectives of each task, the input, and the activities. The tasks grids were used as the guideline in developing the tasks. After writing the tasks grids, the researcher then developed the first draft of the tasks. She formulated the tasks grids into ten types of reading skills. The tasks grids represented unit 1 previewing and predicting skills. Unit 2 scanning and skimming, Unit 3 vocabulary building and guessing meaning from the context, Unit 4 recognizing text organization skill, and Unit 5 interpreting reference and making inference skills. The first draft of the tasks was evaluated and validated by three experts. The validation results were used as the base of developing the second draft of the tasks and its tasks grids. After developing the second tasks grids and the second draft of the tasks, the researcher then implemented the developed tasks. The second draft of the task was tried-out in the real teaching-learning of the English classroom. In this stage, the researcher also distributed questionnaire for evaluation to the students to know whether the developed tasks met their needs and characteristics.

The results of the questionnaire were then used to revise the tasks for the final draft. Related to the developed tasks, the researcher found some data obtained during the research. From the validation questionnaire result, the researcher found that the three experts agreed with the first draft of the developed tasks to be said met their appropriateness. It can be seen from the minimum average score or mean of each unit that range from 3.3 to 3.7, while the minimum acceptance of the average score is 3.0. However, the researcher revised some parts of the tasks based on the corrections and the suggestions of the experts. From the evaluation questionnaire, the researcher found that the students agreed with the second draft of the developed tasks to be said appropriate for the students' needs and characteristics. It can be seen from the minimum average score on the questionnaire of each unit that range from 3.77 to 3.87, while the minimum acceptance of the average score is 3.0. Yet, the researcher revised the second draft of the tasks based on the implementation results. The final draft of the developed tasks was the results of the revisions in the previous steps of the research. They were developed based on the students' need and characteristics, reading ability theories, and the corrections and suggestion from the experts and from the students.

## **VI. Conclusions And Suggestions**

### **Conclusions**

This study is aimed at developing appropriate reading tasks for the eighth grade students of MTS. GUPPI Kresnomulyo Ambarawa Pringsewu. It is intended to serve a supplementary learning source for the reading ability development. The product of the reaserch is a set of reading tasks which have suitable contents for the seventh grade students of junior high school. After being validated, implemented, evaluated, and revised, the developed reading tasks are said to be appropriate.

Some conclusions of this study are presented as follows.

1. The result of this study which is a set of reading tasks was developed according to the theories of material designed proposed by Nunan (1991), and R & D steps by Borg and Gall (2003) and Sugiyono (2009). The set of this reading tasks consists of ten types of invitations which cover nine reading skills.
2. Based on the analysis of the validation and evaluation questionnaire results, the product of this study have fulfilled the requirements of being appropriate. The researcher concludes some characteristics of appropriate reading tasks for the seventh grade students of junior high school which can be found in the developed tasks as follows:
  - a. The tasks meet the students' needs and characteristics.
  - b. The tasks provide various and authentic inputs which meet the students' characteristics.
  - c. The tasks provide various and challenging activities which meet the students' characteristics.
  - d. The tasks contain input and activities which give the students opportunities on learning skills and strategies of reading.
  - e. The tasks use understandable language and instructions for the students.
  - f. The tasks provide texts which have correct grammar and punctuation.
  - g. The tasks provide activities which sequenced from easier to more difficult.
  - h. The tasks' pages are well organized.
  - i. The tasks present lay-outs which are clear and interesting for the students.
  - j. The tasks are typed in clear font and font size.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the research results, the researcher offers some suggestions to the teachers, other researchers, and the students.

#### **1. The English Teachers**

Considering the reading tasks development done by the researcher, she suggests the teachers to use the developed tasks as a supplementary source on learning in the afternoon English extracurricular for the seventh grade students. The researcher also documented that it is possible for the English teacher to design tasks by themselves. On developing the tasks, they should analyze the students' needs and characteristics first. They can use many references to

developed the tasks. The teachers suggested to design the tasks which can be the supplementary sources for the teaching-learning activities in English classroom.

#### **2. The Students**

By doing the developed tasks, the students get opportunities to learn and practice the skills and strategies of reading. They also can practice communicating in English with their friends and teacher. The students are suggested to actively participate in doing the tasks. They should also motivate each other to create a better learning atmosphere so that the task objectives can be well achieved.

#### **3. Other Researchers**

For other researchers, it is suggested that on developing whatever kinds of tasks/material, they should consider the students' needs and characteristics. Their study should refer to the theories of the teaching-learning English. It will be better if other researchers design other kinds of tasks so that they can provide various supplementary sources for the English teaching-learning activities.

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