

## INVESTIGATING ALTERNATIVE RESOURCES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

ELIH SUTISNA YANTO

*elihsutisnayanto@gmail.com*

PENDIDIKAN BAHASA INGGRIS-FKIP UNSIKA

### ABSTRACT

It is unquestionable that the availability of English language teaching and learning resources is often associated with the financial ability of an institution. Consequently, teachers at new institutions rarely enjoy vast resources. At Department of English Education, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education Unsika, for example, recent materials and ICT equipment are scarcely available. To cope with such conditions, teachers have to be creative and innovative. In this paper, we describe how teachers can cope with limited resources by utilizing free resources and networking. We also propose a triangle concept in which teachers, students and the management work together to cope with limited resources. A teacher has to move from simply a planner of lessons and a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of communication. Students have to be encouraged to be autonomous in learning. And, the management has to be informed about the selection of beneficial and affordable resources for English language teaching and learning.

*Keyword: Investigating Alternative Resources, Teaching, Learning*

### INTRODUCTION

English language teaching and learning resources play a significant role in teaching and learning process. Resources comprise of anything which a teacher uses to help students learn or anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of the English language. The nature of resources can be linguistic, visual, auditory or kinaesthetic, and they can be presented in print, through live performance or display, or on cassettees, CD-ROMs, DVDs or the Internet (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 66). They can be instructional, experiential, elicitive or exploratory, in that they can inform learners about the language, they can provide experience of the language in use, they can stimulate language use or they can help students to make discoveries about the language for themselves.

The availability of teaching and learning resources in an institution is often associated with the financial ability of the institution. Consequently, teachers at small institutions, with low financial ability, rarely enjoy vast resources. Given such conditions, the teachers have to be creative and innovative in performing their daily tasks. A teacher has to move from simply a planner of lessons and a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of communication. Students have to be encouraged to be autonomous in learning. And, the Management must show their commitment to education quality and be informed on selection of resources to support the teaching and learning processes.

In this paper, we focus on a particular case which occurred in a relatively new institution called Department of English Education, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika, West Java, Indonesia. Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika is one of the institutions which provides Teacher Training and Education in Indonesia. In this case, we describe how teachers or lecturers in this institution have coped with limited resources by utilizing free resources and social networking. We also propose a triangle concept in which teachers, students and the management work together to cope with limited resources. In this paper, the term 'teacher' is used as a general term which also refers to lecturers when we discuss the role of the lecturers in this institution.

### **The Conditions Of Department Of English Education Faculty Of Teachers Training And Education, Unsika And Its Limited Resources**

Unsika is one of the higher education institutions in West Java, Indonesia. Unsika aims at creating and developing professional teachers to teach at primary and secondary schools. It was founded under the name of *Universitas Singaperbangsa*. At present, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika has approximately 2,000 students who are studying in one of the departments: Mathematics Education, Physical Education, Indonesian Education, and English Education. It has one lecturer with doctoral degrees, and more than 100 lecturers with master degrees. Unsika is also supported by some administrative staff including a laboratory assistant and a librarian.

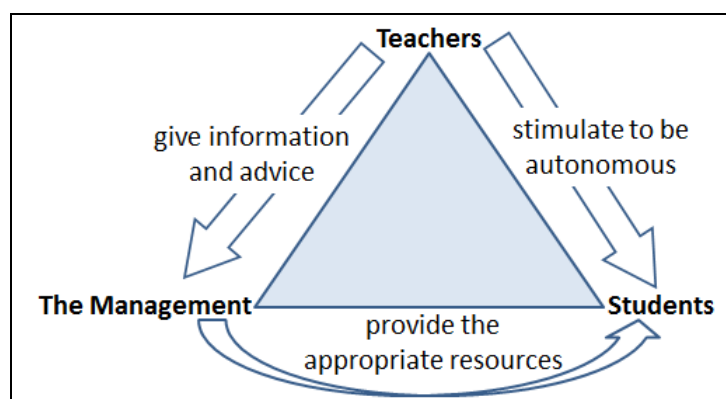
To support the academic services for the students, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika has built more than thirty classrooms, one computer laboratory, a canteen, and a language laboratory equipped with simple electronic facilities. All the classrooms are equipped with LCD projectors. In addition, it has a library which provides around 200 books in the field of English language. These books, however, are not only inadequate in numbers, but also out-dated. Therefore, lecturers at Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika often found difficulties in creating teaching materials. The limited budget has always been the reason for not providing the latest books and resources.

In this Internet era, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Department of English Education Unsika has not developed a sustainable information system that supports the improvement of quality academic services for the students. It has not had a well-resourced self-access centre and a Hot Spot Area that enables students to easily access the internet in the area of Department of English Education Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika campus. Consequently, lecturers and students often face difficulty in keeping up with the latest developments due to the inadequate library and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) facilities.

### **Coping With The Limited Resources: The Triangle Concept**

In order to cope with the limited resources, the three main actors: teachers, students, and the Management must have great motivation towards the improvement of education qualities. In this paper, we call this a triangle concept, which is shown in Figure 1. With this concept, teachers become the facilitators of

communication. Teachers have to stimulate the students to become autonomous in learning. Teachers also need to give information and advice to the Management so that the Management can provide the appropriate resources to the students. We explain this concept further in the following sub-sections.



**Figure 1 The Triangle Concept**

### Changing Teachers' Roles

Based on the triangle concept we proposed, teachers have to move from simply a planner of lessons and a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of communication. In this case, teachers have to be resourceful in supporting both the students and the Management. Obviously, no teacher knows everything about the English language. However, by being resourceful, teachers should be able to offer students where they can go to look for the answers to their questions, e.g. direct students to a good dictionary when the students want to find a definition of a difficult word.

In facilitating the communication with the students, the teachers should always try to build students' self-motivation in learning. Harmer (2007, p. 110) mentioned that teachers should encourage students to use the available resources so they become more independent in their learning. At Department of English Education Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika, even though the campus does not have a Hot Spot Area that enables students to easily access the internet, the teachers still inform the students some useful web resources available in the internet and encourage the students to explore the web resources. The students can browse the web resources at home, at internet cafes, or even at fast-food restaurants which provide free Internet access. A list of web resources which are useful for English language teaching and learning is presented in Appendix A. The list is adapted from Brown (2007).

The internet has really changed the way teachers teach and students learn. Warschauer, Shetzer, & Meloni (2000, p. 7) stated that web resources help bring English teaching ALIVE: Authenticity, Literacy, Interaction, Vitality and Empowerment. Authenticity refers to the authentic materials; Literacy refers to the use of emails and chatting in increasing the ability to read and write; Interaction is related to the increase in communication between people from different geographical areas; Vitality is related to the enormous source of

information available in the internet; and, Empowerment is the ability to continue learning outside school or university.

### **Stimulating Students' Autonomy**

In language education, it is a fact that no language schools or programs can teach students all that they need for their communication outside the classroom. If students have three English lessons a week, it will take a great number of weeks before they have had the kind of exposure and opportunities for use which are necessary for real progress (Harmer, 2007, p. 394). To compensate for the limits of classroom time and to strengthen the chances for successful language learning and acquisition, students at Department of English Education Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika are encouraged to develop their own learning strategies so that as far as possible, they become autonomous learners. In other words, the teachers stimulate the students to be doers rather than the recipients of learning action. Moreover, the students are made aware that learning a language is a life-long endeavour that can be done mostly by the students themselves.

The following points are the list of techniques which have been used by the teachers at Unsika to stimulate students' autonomy. The ideas are based on Dörnyei (2001) and Dörnyei & Murphey (2003).

- a) Allowing the students to choose about as many aspects of the learning process as possible. For example, students are allowed to choose their activities, research projects, teaching materials, topics for book reports, composition assignments, due dates, or the peers they want to work with;
- b) Encouraging the students to contribute to their peers. Some students are very resourceful to find ways to obtain new materials. These students are often asked to share their findings to the rest of the class, including to their peers and to the teachers.
- c) Encouraging the students to involve in project work. When students are given a project to carry out, they will function in an autonomous way. Students will organize themselves, decide on the most appropriate course of actions to achieve the goal, and plan the way in which they will report their findings back to the class.
- d) Allowing the students to use self-assessment procedures. Self-assessment increases the students' awareness about the mistakes and successes of their own learning, and gives them a concrete sense of participation in the learning process.

### **Advising the Management**

The Management, especially of a small institution, always tries to save money as much as possible. Consequently, good communication between the teachers and the Management is a must. The teachers need to find and select the right resources, in order to help the Management decide on which resources to purchase. The selection of the resources should take into account the financial ability of the Management. For example, if the Management would like to run e-learning classes, the teachers can advise the Management to use Moodle instead of WebCT; it is because Moodle is a free-ware, whereas WebCT is too expensive for a small institution. In the next section, we present several resources, which we

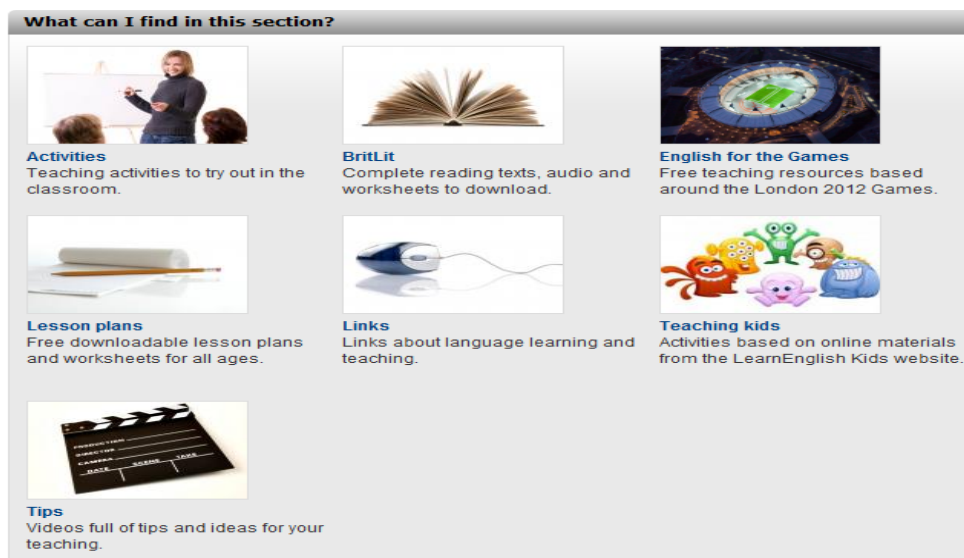
consider appropriate to support English language teaching and learning processes, and are affordable to a small institution with a limited financial ability.

### **Coping with the Limited Resources: Selecting the Appropriate Resources**

In selecting the most appropriate resources, the teachers need to fully understand the meaning of the term *appropriate*. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th edition (OALD8, 2010), *appropriate* means suitable, acceptable or correct for the particular circumstances. In this case, when we select a resource, we need to ask ourselves three main questions: Is the resource suitable to the teachers and the students? Is the resource acceptable to the Management (i.e. its financial ability)? And, is the resource correct for the circumstances in our school or university? The following subsections present the resources which we have selected in terms of their appropriateness to support the English language teaching and learning processes at Unsika.

### **Using online resources**

There are a lot of online resources which are available for free. However, we need to select the most appropriate ones which can really help us in teaching English and help our students in learning English. In the Appendix A, we provide a list of web resources which are useful for English language teaching and learning. The list is adapted from Brown (2007). One of the web resources in the list is the Teaching English website ([www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk)). According to the information from the website, Teaching English is produced by the British Council with content and editorial support from the British Broadcasting Corporation. Actually, the teaching material or resources on this website are designed for secondary education level. However, we still find the material suitable for students at Department of English Education Unsika, which is a tertiary level education. The screenshot of the first page of the teaching resources (Teaching Resources, 2012) is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 Screenshot from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources>**

## Using Dictionaries

Dictionaries have evolved from merely references to find the definitions or equivalents of difficult or foreign words into resourceful information tools. Following our triangle concept shown in Figure 1, the teachers have to be able to select the most appropriate dictionaries, so that the Management does not have to spend too much money to buy all dictionaries, and the students will obtain the benefit by learning from the right resources. From the various types of dictionaries available in Indonesia, we have selected two dictionaries which we think most appropriate for our purpose. The dictionaries are the *Password English Learner's Dictionary for Speakers of Bahasa Indonesia*, 3rd edition (PBI3, 2011) and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th edition (OALD8, 2010). PBI3 is suitable for pre-intermediate to intermediate level students, while OALD8 is mainly for post-intermediate and advanced level students.

PBI3 is selected because it is a semi-bilingual dictionary which provides both the English definitions and the Indonesian equivalents for the English headwords. This means that if a student cannot understand the English definition of an English headword, the student can be assisted with the Indonesian equivalent of the English word. In addition to the main dictionary function, PBI3 also provides two groups of resources, called *Apendiks* and *Ilustrasi*. Both resources can be viewed directly or printed. The *Apendiks* consists of notes or explanations of several topics, such as Question tags, Comparison of adjectives, etc. The *Ilustrasi* consists of pictures of items along with quick links to the dictionary entries. For example, if we choose the picture of a car, and move the mouse or pointer to a part of the car, e.g. the sidelight, we will see the name of the part of the car. Then, if we click it, the dictionary entry will be shown (see Figure 3).

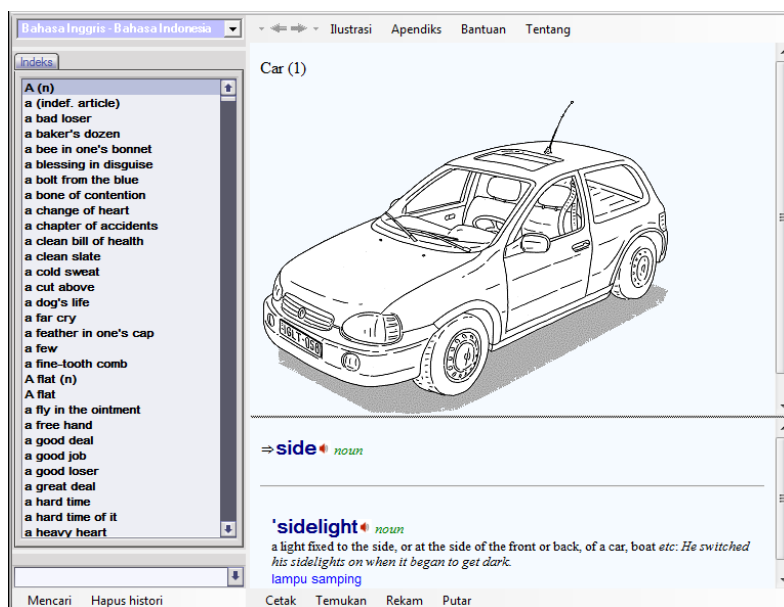


Figure 3 An Example of Ilustrasi in KBI3

For advanced students, we suggest that teachers use OALD8 instead of KBI3. It is because OALD8 does not provide the Indonesian equivalents of the English

headwords, so the students have to be able to know or guess the meaning of the English words based only on the English definitions. Similar to KBI3, OALD8 also provides additional resources besides the main dictionary function. For example, if the students are asked to write about 'waste and pollution', they can use the menu 'My Topics' to see the list of dictionary entries which are related to 'waste and pollution'. They will be able to use the words listed and to get some ideas on what they will write. OALD8 also has a menu called Resources which contains explanations and exercises on Dictionary skills, Grammar, Word lists, and Maps.

The menu in the OALD8 which is significantly important to help students to write effectively in English is in iWriter. It is an interactive tool that provides models of fourteen different types of writing. It provides outline structures or frameworks into which we can add our own content. Figure 4 shows the screenshot of iWriter when a student wants to write a report based on a graph, and the student would like to see the language which can be used to describe general trends.

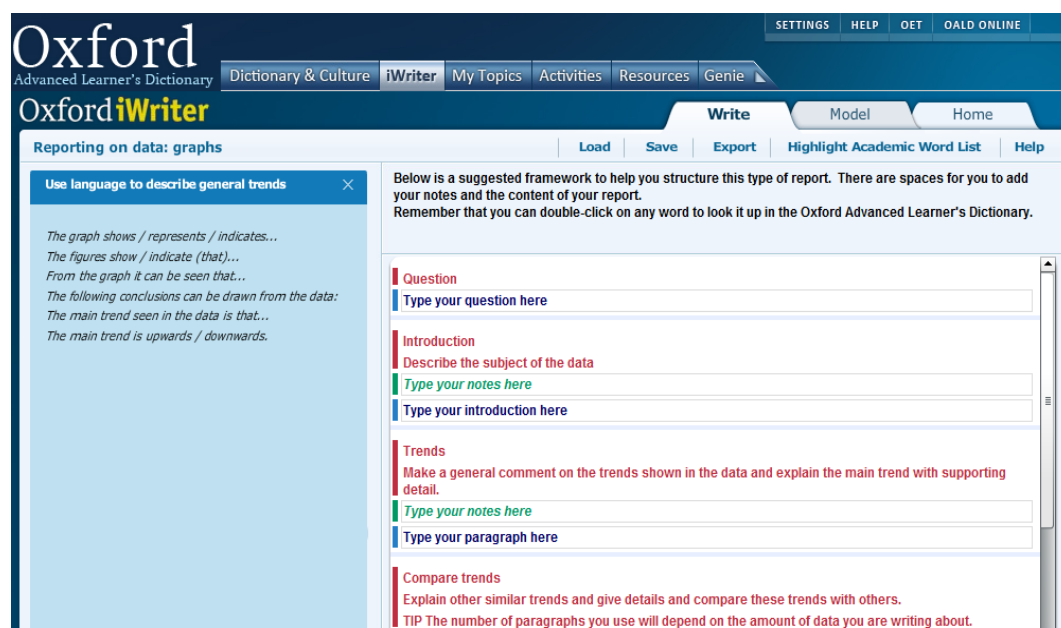


Figure 4 the Writer Menu in the OALD8

### Using corpora

In every English class, it is not uncommon to find some students who raise critical questions that need descriptive instead of prescriptive answers. For example, consider a student who looks up the prepositions of the word *bored* in OALD8 and she is not satisfied with the information given in the dictionary. OALD8 only states that the word *bored* is followed by the preposition *with*. Nevertheless, this critical student thinks that she has seen somewhere in the internet that the word *bored* can be followed by other prepositions. In responding to this, we can use corpus tools to provide descriptive answers. If we want to show them how the word *bored* is actually used in the American English, we can

use the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) which is available for free, after a quick registration, at [www.americancorpus.org](http://www.americancorpus.org) or <http://www.wordandphrase.info>. Figure 5 is the search result if we search for the word *bored* followed by prepositions in academic texts. We can see that the possible preposition is not only *with* but also *by* and *in*. When we click on the preposition, we can see the concordance lines or the context of use.

	CONTEXT	TOT
1	WITH	55
2	BY	27
3	IN	17
4	TO	7
5	OUT	3
6	INTO	3
7	DURING	2
8	OUTSIDE	1

SECTION: ACADEMIC (55)			
1	2009	ACAD	Writer A B C glancing out a window to escape a math-induced stupor " tell us the character is <b>bored with</b> school.
2	2009	ACAD	SouthwestRev A B C the afternoon, and I was beginning to feel tired, hungry, and surpassingly <b>bored with</b> my own thou
3	2009	ACAD	Style A B C envied people dying of cancer. I hated my life. I was tired and <b>bored with</b> my job and my furniture
4	2008	FIC	ArkansasRev A B C talking; he could talk hours about nothing. Talk about stupid. Lind got <b>bored with</b> staring at him. Sh
5	2007	ACAD	PhysicalEduc A B C Steven stated in his reflection, " I didn't want the class to get <b>bored with</b> one game of tag, so I cha
6	2006	ACAD	Humanist A B C of circumstances. The young and beautiful Hetty Sorrel, Bede's fiance, is <b>bored with</b> the coarsenes
7	2006	ACAD	PhysicalEduc A B C several students indicated that the three week unit was too long, and they became <b>bored with</b> the
8	2006	ACAD	MusicEduc A B C future). Without these additional benefits of music education, some students will become <b>bored with</b>

Figure 5 COCA Search Result for the word *bored* followed by prepositions

If we want to show the student how the word *bored* is used in academic British English, we can use the *British Academic Written English* (BAWE) which can be accessed for free at <http://ca.sketchengine.co.uk/open>. However, the data from BAWE is quite limited. BAWE (Nesi, Gardner, Thompson, & Wickens, 2012) consists of approximately 8 million tokens, while COCA (Davies, 2012) contains more than 400 million tokens. If we want to access a lot bigger corpus and more various corpora, we need to sign up at the Sketch Engine (<http://sketchengine.co.uk>). There is a 30-day free trial for this, after that we need to pay, but the subscription is quite affordable (GBP4.99 per month). The Sketch Engine has more than 70 corpora including several languages, not only English, and including the gigantic corpora, e.g. the ukWac (more than 1.5 billion tokens) and the enTenTen (more than 3 billion tokens).

With the Sketch Engine, we can see a word sketch which is a one-page, automatically-generated summaries of a word's grammatical and collocational behaviour. Figure 6 presents the word sketch of the word *bored* in the British National Corpus. With this word sketch we can see that the most frequent subject for the adjective *bored* is *people*; the most frequent modifier is *so* (i.e. *so bored*); and, the adjective *bored* most frequently modifies the word *kid* (i.e. *bored kid*). By clicking on the numbers, we will be able to see the concordance lines or the actual use of the words in context.



**bored** (*adjective*) British National Corpus freq = 1323 (11.8 per million)

adj	subject	97	10.0	modifier	222	0.9	modifies	161	0.8	and/or	197	1.8	pp	with-p	144	19.9
people	6	0.03	so	31	4.24	kid	6	4.71	bored	14	8.46	game	8	2.97		
audience	5	3.95	very	19	2.93	voice	6	2.41	lonely	13	7.93	job	6	2.08		
child	4	0.46	bit	15	6.09	housewife	5	6.76	tired	13	7.11	life	6	0.81		
hole	3	3.06	easily	13	5.98	look	5	3.25	stiff	9	7.4	repetition	4	6.29		
			never	10	3.27	girl	5	2.17	silly	6	6.32	conversation	4	3.78		
			rather	7	4.33	teenager	4	5.5	restless	4	7.28	idea	4	1.46		

Figure 6 A sample of the word sketch of the word *bored*

## CONCLUSION

It is the fact that most small institutions rarely have a wide selection of up-to-date English language teaching and learning resources. Nevertheless, the teachers can still find ways to make the appropriate resources available to the students. As we have presented in this paper and based on the case study at Department of English Education Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Unsika, teachers can cope with the limited resources by implementing the triangle concept in which the teachers have to become the facilitators of communication, students have to be autonomous in learning, and the Management has to be informed about the most appropriate resources to be provided.

We believe that web resources can satisfy most of our needs for teaching and learning resources. We presented a list of web resources which can be accessed for free and be used to look for the right material for our students. If the internet access is not available, we can use resources available in dictionaries because most of the current dictionaries have provided not only the definitions of words but also other resources such as pictures, grammar notes, and writing assistance. In addition, we can use the corpora to make the teaching and learning process to be more interactive and to show the students the actual use of the words. Consequently, the limited resources should not hinder the teachers to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. On the contrary, teachers have to be creative and innovative in finding and selecting the widely available resources for English language teaching and learning.

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