

THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Teachers often have difficulties in finding the appropriate learning materials in teaching reading. Without appropriate reading texts that suit them, students spend long hours in the classroom with poor achievement in reading comprehension. This research, therefore aims to find out whether the use of the authentic material can improve students' reading comprehension. With regard to the purpose of the research, an experimental research is applied where twenty-five pairs of students from two groups are observed. The data are obtained from pre-test and post-test. The data are statistically analyzed and then compared by using mann whitney U test. The result of the study reveals that the use of authentic material in teaching reading does not significantly improve students' reading comprehension. Nevertheless, it is recommended that teachers use authentic reading materials for a change. In addition, when bringing authentic materials into classroom, they should be used in accordance with students' ability, as well as with suitable tasks being given.

Keywords: Authentic Material and Reading Comprehension

A. Introduction

Reading is considered one of the most important skills that university students of English as a Second Language need to acquire (Levine et al., 2010: 84). Reading is important not only in developing language intuition and determining academic success, but also for completing certain task. Therefore, it is obligatory for students, especially those who study in colleges to have good reading skills. They should acquire such an ability that they can easily handle any reference they need for accomplishing every task given to them. In addition, it is avoidable that they will deal with accomplishing writing academic paper which finally forced them to read various books and references. In short, it is crucial for the students to acquire reading skill.

Acquiring reading skill requires one to be able to comprehend the text itself. However, students often have difficulties in learning English as a foreign language without appropriate learning materials in the classroom. Too often foreign language reading texts are designed either too difficult or too easy for students. Without appropriate reading texts that suit them, students spend long hours in the classroom with poor achievement. Students' performance varies according to the type of reading texts given to them.

Regarding the problem stated above, Harmer (2007) argues that getting students to read English texts is an important part of the English teacher's job because of four reasons. First, many students want and need to be able to read English texts for present study, for further study, for future career or simply for pleasure. Second, reading is very useful for language acquisition. Third, reading texts provide good models for English writing concerning construction of phrases, sentences, paragraph, and whole texts. Finally, good reading texts can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, excite creative responses, and provide the springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons. Based on the description above, it can be deduced that reading material is very crucial in teaching reading.

B. Literature Review

1. Reading Materials

One measure which is used to make the process of teaching and learning effective is related to selecting and adapting materials. Nuttall (1996: 172) states that the wide variety of different types of text means that it is easier to find something that will interest the learner and may even encourage further reading or reading for pleasure. The more learners reading, the better readers they will become. In addition, if the text interests the learners, they will feel more confident and more secure when reading the texts. It means they not only improve their language level but also confidence.

Brown (2001) says that affective factors also play a significant role in how reading helps one learn a language. Motivation plays a vital role in reading a foreign language. Those who like what they read keep reading. Consequently, they usually improve their reading as what Silver (1997 in Berardo, 1996) argues that there is a high correlation between those who read a lot and those who improve in their comprehension and vocabulary acquisition when they read. Thus, the teacher should provide the students the texts that can encourage them to keep reading.

Nuttall (1996) proposes three criteria that need to be taken into account when choosing reading material is suitability. It refers to whether or not the text interests the students to read and whether or not it is appropriate for their goals in learning English. Exploitability deals with the condition whether or not the text can be exploited for teaching purposes. Readability concerns with whether the text is too easy or too hard for the students. Thus, it is obvious that selecting relevant and interesting material for readers is a key to their engagement in the process of learning.

Tomlinson (cited in Cahyono, 2009: 167) mentions that there are basically two types of language teaching and learning materials: authentic and pedagogic material.

2. Authentic Material

Authentic material refers to those taken from real life sources and they are not designed for teaching and learning purposes. The most common sources of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom are newspaper, magazine, songs, literature and materials from the internet. Wallace (1998: 145) defines authentic texts as “real-life texts, not written for pedagogic processes”. One of the main purposes of using authentic materials in the classroom is to “expose” students to as much real language as possible. Therefore, the students can gain real information and know what is going on in the world around them.

Moreover, an advantage of taking a complete newspaper or magazine into classroom, instead of photocopies of an article, is that students can actually choose what they want to read. They are much more likely to read with enthusiasm if they have made decision about what they want to read.

Authentic materials are often more interesting because they reflect real life phenomena. It is in line with Brown (1999) s’ statement that the learners are more eager to learn when the language is authentic or meaningful. It is supported by Nuttall (1996: 172) who states that “authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people”. Moreover, they have a positive effect on comprehension and learner satisfaction (Berado, 2006). Thus, it can be implied that the use of authentic materials affect the students’ reading comprehension.

However, authentic materials often contain difficult language and unneeded vocabulary items, which can be unnecessary distraction for learners and teacher. In order to solve the

problem the authentic material should be used in accordance with students' ability, with suitable tasks being given in which total understanding is not important. In order to overcome the problems created by difficult authentic material texts, one solution needed is to simplify them according to the level of the learners.

3. Created Material

Created material refers to textbooks and other texts specially designed for learning purposes. It is designed generally based on the syllabus and provide a systematic coverage of teaching items. The language of created materials has usually been modified and adjusted according to the learning objectives and level of learners and their ability. The main difference between authentic and created materials lies on the naturalness of language used. Authentic materials have more natural language and reflect real life.

The use of created texts in teaching has both advantages and disadvantage. Authentic materials are useful for teaching structure but are not very good for improving reading skills. It focuses more on the form rather than on the language itself. It provides a variety of learning resources. However, it can deskill teachers. If teachers use textbook as the primary source of their teaching, leaving the textbook and teacher's manual to make the major instructional decision for them.

Considering the importance of reading material in teaching English, this study aims to find out whether there is a difference in performance when students read authentic and non-authentic texts. It is hoped that through the findings, lecturers will be able to identify the type of reading text that is most suitable for students.

C. Research Methodology

This study was experimental research where thirteen pairs of students from two groups are observed. The t-test with paired samples statistic is used in order to see the influence of the use of authentic materials to students' reading comprehension. The grand design is formulated in Table 1.

Table 1.The Grand Design

Class	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
G1	T1	X1	T2
G2	T1	X2	T2

G1 refers to experimental group while G2 refers to the control group. X1 is the treatment given to the experimental group, in which the use of authentic materials is implemented in the class. While, X2 is the teaching reading process with created materials carried out in the control group.

Research population in this study was the first semester students of STKIP Siliwangi Bandung from English Department in year 2010/2011. The sample of this study is 50 students who are taking Reading for General Communication subject. 25 students are chosen from class B which belongs to experimental group and another 25 students of class C which belongs to the control group.

The test consists of comprehension questions in form of multiple choices. It is divided into five parts. The first part consists of a reading passage. The second part is finding the closets meaning of the five words found in the passage. The third part is part of speech, the fourth part is ten items of a cloze test. Part five is finding the synonym of the ten words.

In this study, two variables are observed. They are dependent and independent variable. The use of authentic materials in teaching Reading for General Communication is independent variable (treatment variable) and the students' reading comprehension is dependent variable (outcome variable)

D. Research Findings and Discussion

The data obtained through the tests. The tests were the same, but they were used two times (pre-test and post-test). Pre-tests were given on November, 9th 2010. The results of the pre-test were intended to find out the students' capability in reading before they were treated. Furthermore, it was also used to match the students of experimental group who obtain the same score with those of the control group. The following were the results of means of pre-test and post-test of both groups (i.e. control and experimental groups).

Table 2
Test Scores of Experimental Group

No	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
1	65	66	1
2	47	66	19
3	68	76	9
4	67	79	12
5	60	62	2
6	63	64	1
7	33	36	3
8	61	60	-1
9	52	64	12
10	57	66	9
11	69	68	-1
12	45	52	7
13	70	74	4
14	64	66	2
15	45	48	3
16	66	70	4
17	72	82	10
18	41	68	27
19	63	56	-7
20	38	80	42
21	37	30	-7
22	41	46	5
23	35	34	-1
24	43	64	21
25	31	43	12

Table 3
Test Scores of Control Group

No	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
1	57	60	3
2	67	70	3
3	70	72	2
4	72	76	4
5	51	55	4

No	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
6	50	48	-2
7	54	54	0
8	46	63	17
9	61	62	1
10	66	61	-5
11	34	55	21
12	58	67	9
13	41	48	7
14	60	62	2
15	32	41	9
16	50	52	2
17	42	62	20
18	63	59	-4
19	65	66	1
20	62	60	-2
21	69	64	-5
22	40	59	19
23	39	63	24
24	45	48	3
25	36	50	14

Quantitative data obtained was statistically analyzed and then compared. For that purpose, the data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially (i.e. parametric test or non-parametric test). The former analysis was used to determine: the mean, variance, standard deviation, etc. The following was the results of descriptive statistics.

Table 4
Descriptives

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
V1	25	49.00	-7.00	42.00	7.22	10.82	117.09
V2	25	29.00	-5.00	24.00	5.88	8.56	73.19

Based on Table 4, the means of the experimental and control groups were 7.22 and 5.88 respectively. To compare whether the two means were significantly different, first of all the two sets of the data were tested to know whether they were (approximately) normally distributed. Below was the result of normality tests.

Table 5
Tests of Normality

V1		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
V2	0	.179	25	.037	.874	25	.005
	1	.227	25	.002	.894	25	.014

Based on Table 5, the data were not normal in that significant values (Sig = 0.037 & 0.002) were less than 0.05 (Field, 2009). It is because the data were not normal, they had to be analyzed through non-parametric test (i.e. Mann-Whitney U test). The following was the result of analysis.

Table 6
Test Staistics

	VAR00002
Mann-Whitney U	282.500
Wilcoxon W	607.500
Z	-.583
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.560

Based on Table 6, Asymp. Sig (1-tailed) of 0.280 (i.e. 0.560/2) was bigger than 0.05, then the two groups were not significantly different (Field, 2009). This suggest that the teaching of reading comprehension using the authentic materialsdid not produce significantly better learning outcomes than the teaching of reading comprehension using the created materials. In addition, the effect size (r) of treatment was 0.082, which was obtained through the following formula:

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}} \quad (\text{Field, 2009: 550})$$

Where r = effect size , Z = -0.583, and N = N₁ + N₂ = 50

According to Field (2009: 550), the effect size of 0. 082 represented a small effect for the authentic material (it is below 0.1 criterion for a small effect size).

E. Conclusion and Suggestions

From the analysis and findings of this research, the use of authentic reading text in comparison to created materials (non-authentic reading text) did not produce significantly better learning outcomes. It was indicated by the fact that significant values were less than 0.05. Additionally, the effect size was small. This conclusion suggested that the students' reading comprehension was affected not only by the reading materials, but also by other factors. Nevertheless, it is recommended that teachers use authentic reading materials for a change. Furthermore, when bringing authentic materials into classroom, they should be used in accordance with students' ability, as well as with suitable tasks being given (Berardo, 2006).

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