The Utilization of Authentic Materials in Indonesian EFL Contexts: An Exploratory Study on Learners` Perceptions

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to find out the kinds of preferred authentic materials (AMs) utilized by EFL learners at Islamic State College of Kerinci (STAIN Kerinci), Indonesia; and, to explore the learners` perceptions on the utilization of preferred AMs in EFL classrooms. This study was carried out of phenomenological approach by employing focus-group interviews towards seven learners selected by using purposive sampling technique. The findings of the study show that the EFL learners utilize various kinds of AMs including internet-mediated AMs, printed AMs, audiovisual (video) AMs, and audio AMs. Based on the learners, each kind of materials has either advantages or disadvantages. The advantages of AMs are improving and developing skills or abilities on listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The materials also make the learners aware of the importance of native-speaker cultures through which real English is learnt. However, the disadvantages of AMs are unlimited in length and lack of academic instructions. The problems are solved by adapting each material based on EFL learners` levels and by providing instructions for each AMs. EFL teachers are to provide various AMs for EFL classrooms. The AMs should be selected and balanced with EFL learners` English abilities or levels.

Keywords: authentic materials, EFL learners, EFL classroom, advantages, disadvantages

1. Introduction

The importance of Authentic Materials (AMs) for EFL/ESL contexts has been revealed in several studies. AMs provide real cultural exposure and discourse (Kilickaya, 2004; Martinez, 2002; Morrison, 1989; Peacock, 1997), and become appropriate sources for learning since AMs bring EFL learners into real contexts (Spelleri, 2002; Swan, 1985; Kilickaya, 2004; Vigil, 1987; Wong, Kwok, & Choi, 1995). EFL learners are able to figure out the kinds of AMs for their learning. The kinds of AMs are selected based on learners` need and learning goals. In this case, EFL teachers are to select appropriate AMs for learning. Having selected and provided AMs, the EFL teachers can either directly use the selected AMs or adapt AMs based on EFL learners` abilities. If EFL teachers select AMs accurately, then EFL classrooms will, of course, be influenced and make the classroom successful.

Authentic materials (AMs) are any products or things designed or produced by native speakers for native speakers` daily activities. In ESL or EFL contexts, they are called authentic materials consisting of highly qualified or well-designed authenticity. However, authentic materials are not designed and produced for English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. The materials, consisting of texts or audios, are intended for being used by native speakers (Martinez, 2005; Nunan, 1989; Young, 1993).

In the teaching process, the teachers ensure that each EFL learners are ready with their AMs since they are asked to select themselves. However, the use of AMs in the EFL classrooms is always as successful as is expected. Several problems in EFL classrooms still remains, though advantages of AMs are more dominant. One of the problems is whether or not the selected AMs meet the EFL learners` needs and interests. This problem is a background of why this study was done. As the EFL learners attend classes for many subjects and use AMs for learning, the study is focused on analyzing any possible answers out of the following questions:

1) What kinds of authentic materials are preferable to Indonesian EFL learners?
2) What are the advantages and the disadvantages of authentic materials for Indonesian EFL learners?

1. The study design
   1.1 Methodology
   This study, which was undertaken through phenomenological approach, focused on exploring Indonesian EFL learners` point of views, experiences, and suggestions towards the use of AMs in learning English skills which include listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Denscombe (2007) states that ".......phenomenological research generally deals with people`s perceptions or meanings; attitudes and beliefs; feelings and emotions" (p, 75).

   This phenomenology study, situated at Islamic State College of Kerinci (STAIN Kerinci), was done for one semester in order to gather detailed, multiple information concerning with the use of AMs qualitatively since this method "opens up the possibility that different groups of people might see things differently or through multiple realities" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 79).
   1.2 Participants
   The participants of the study were seven EFL learners of Islamic State College of Kerinci (STAIN) who actively utilized AMs in their learning. They were selected through a purposive sampling. This kind of sampling was used, because through the qualitative sampling technique, "a researcher selects individuals or groups to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p.206) and "the groups or individuals are information rich" (Patton, 1990, p.169). The learners, the participants of the study, took the English course "Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)" when the study was taking place.
   1.3 Instruments
   The researcher observed the class and interviewed purposively selected learners respectively. The semi-structured interviews were administered through focus-groups interviews. Creswell (2012) states that "Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other" (p, 218) and "a focus-group is "typically from four to six interviewees" (p, 218).

   To keep the trustworthiness of the research, data triangulation was employed. The researcher collected, checked and linked up each result of data. Then data were, then, categorized and divided into sub-data based on the research problems decided earlier.

3. Discussion
   3.1. Kinds of AMs preferable to Indonesian EFL learners
   Based on the results of the observation and interviews, each participant (P) tends to choose different types of AMs for different subjects or courses. The kinds of AMs that P1 prefers are categorized into those used for listening, speaking, and integrated ones. For listening and speaking skills, the preferable AMs are BBC news, CNN channel, and VOA. These radio stations are used as media for improving listening skill. Besides, the stations can also improve speaking as the listener retells some topic or main idea of what is broadcasted. CNN channel, as one of the news channels, provides both pictures and voices. It is another kind of AMs that P1 prefers. Both TV channel and online radio stations are used for an integrated learning.

   The most preferable AMs that P2 prefer are English magazines and newspapers. P2 uses both print materials for the learning of reading skill. The reading, which is done every month, is done by finding out the main ideas of each article of the materials. Since that is P2`s hobby, P2 collects the materials that have been read. Besides, reading is not the only skill that P2 is used to doing, but P2 also listens to English news on TV channels such as *CNN*, *NHK world*, and *Al Jazeera*. These AMs are all broadcasted in English.

   P3`s preferred AMs are not different from P1`s. P3 prefers the internet from which P3 can browse and listen to online BBC news and online VOA news. The focused skill is not only

limited on listening, but also reading and writing. P3 browses and reads some articles from the internet. P3 also writes main ideas from the articles read.

The kinds of AMs that P4 prefers are the internet-mediated materials such as books and journals. It can be said that the skill focused is reading. The materials are browsed and downloaded from some academic websites such as international journals websites, educational organization websites, and university websites. One of the reasons that P4 has is that the AMs are up-to-date.

P5 prefers online chat as the AMs that will, of course, improve speaking, reading, grammar, and writing abilities. Chatting with native speakers or foreign acquaintances forces P5 to use English. P5 do not chat with no reason. Both native speakers and non-native speakers have good English. That is why P5 prefers such online materials.

The kinds of AMs P6 prefers are both internet-mediated materials and print materials. The articles preferred are those related to soccer and health. Besides, P6 listen to English songs. So, the focused abilities P6 prefers are reading, listening, and vocabulary.

The kinds of AMs P7 prefers are internet-mediated materials, audio-visual materials and print materials. The materials taken from the internet are English songs and books. P7 also watches British movies such as Harry Potter, Lords of the Rings, Pirates of the Carribean, and Hobbits. So, the focused skills P7 prefers are listening, reading, speaking, and pronunciation.

The interview results above shows there are four kinds of AMs that are preferable to EFL learners at STAIN Kerinci, Indonesia, namely, internet-mediated AMs, print AMs, audio-visual AMs, and audio AMs. The sources of AMs together several examples of the materials are qualitatively adapted from the participants whose choices of AMs are different one another.

Some participants prefer listening to online radio stations such as BBC news, while the others prefer listening and watching English movies or English songs. There are also participants whose hobbies are reading books or journals from the internet, while the others prefer the print ones. Such differences are contextual since each participant use the preferable materials for different purposes of learning English skills.

3.2. Advantages and disadvantages of AMs for Indonesian EFL learners

The interview was also conducted in order to find out any response of the following question "What are the advantages and disadvantages of AMs for Indonesian EFL learners?". The question is answered by collecting any information from the interview results towards the participants who are the EFL learners at STAIN Kerinci, Indonesia. In this part, each participant has their own opinions, experiences, and even suggestions towards the advantages and disadvantages of AMs for their English learning.

P1 thinks that online AMs has disadvantages. The topics broadcasted or discussed are sometimes difficult to understand, because the speakers are talking about a specific place or habit which are not the participant`s cultures. Another problem is that the length of the time needed for listening to the news is unlimited. It means that the news even does not have the end.

P1 feels that online AMs are beneficial. The AMs has motivated P1 to practice pronouncing English words everytime until P1 becomes successful or could pronounce the words correctly. P1 has also been motivated to practice speaking skill like the native speakers. P1 has been able to use good English as has been expected. So, online news should always be the materials for learning English.

P2 thinks that the advantages of using AMs for learning English are twofolds. One of the advantages is that AMs present real, natural English which is suitable and appropriate for learning English. Besides, the cultures including the way the express ideas or talk about a topic are good for enhancing EFL learners` knowledge. However, AMs is disadvantageous since AMs are not designed for language teaching. It causes difficulties to select an appropriate ones for EFL classroom.

P3 concerns with AMs in general. The advantage of AMs is that the materials contain natural English that makes EFL learners do not only learn English, but also acquire it if the learners are in an English speaking country in which language is naturally acquired. The

disadvantage of AMs is that the materials contain complex sentence structures and choices of words.

P4 focuses on the use AMs from the internet. The advantage of AMs is that the materials direct P4 to get a gist out of the articles or books read. What P4 does is reading and figuring out main ideas and details. The activities increase P4`s knowledge in using grammar and vocabulary. Due to the use of real English, P4 thinks that AMs are appropriate sources for learning. P4 does not exactly think that AMs are disadvantageous. The problem of signal quality is technical that teachers probably have another solution.

P5 gets some advantages from AMs. One of them is that by using AMs, P5 is motivated to learn English and increasing English communication skills such as how to express ideas, asking questions, ets. Online chat as an example of AMs enables P5 to learn grammar, reading, and writing. Moreover, P5 learns how to understand written speech. The advantage of AMs is that because some contents are cultural-based, then some culture do not fit with P5`s cultures. Teachers are hoped to select appropriate AMs that can be used for learning and are not contrary to cultures".

P6 thinks that the use of AMs reflects the way good language learners learn English. AMs provides native vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation for which good language learners expect. In order to recognize the contents of AMs, P6 thinks that time needed is too long. So, teachers have to participate in each activity in which AMs are used.

P7 thinks that online AMs are advantageous because the materials are always published in latest versions and forms. English movies and songs are also advantageous for P7 because P7 can learn English like native speakers through the materials. The disadvantage of AMs is that the availability of AMs can be a problem.

Based on the interview results above, it can be concluded that there are advantages and disadvantages of using AMs in EFL classrooms. Each kind of materials has similar or different advantages, disadvantages, or strategies for using them. The advantages of AMs are mostly concerned with the improvement on listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation abilities.

Besides, knowledge on native cultures is also an advantage. The disadvantages of AMs are related to the versions of AMs available either in internet, print, audio-visual, or audio forms. The versions are not designed for EFL learners unless the learners use them for learning English. Different cultures are also a problem since the participants` cultures may be different from the natives. Another problem, a technical one, is on the quality of signals. The strategies of the problems are selecting AMs carefully and appropriately, adapting the materials, and providing guidance for each materials used.

The utilization of AMs among EFL learners at STAIN Kerinci, Indonesia has been developed through the use of several kinds of AMs. Each kind has advantages, disadvantages, and solutions towards the problems. Even though AMs are designed in long formats and really difficult for EFL learners to comprehend (Rogers, 1988; Lund, 1990), the problem is described along with the advantages and strategies of utilizing AMs in EFL classrooms.

AMs are created for public use such as news, entertaninment, games, talkshow, experience, etc. Each material has communicative contents through which English abilities are trained. The use of AMs is useful for increasing EFL learners` ability in English since the materials are communicative in purpose (Hwang, 2005; Filice & Sturino, 2002). Communicative purposes enhance EFL learners` abilities in using English either for listening, reading, writing, or speaking. Abilities in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are no exception. In order to get the ability, EFL learners are to use different kinds of AMs such as internet-mediated materials, print materials, audio-visual materials, and audio materials.

Internet-mediated AMs are appropriate and interesting materials for ESL/EFL classrooms (Miller, 2003). One reason to prove this is that the materials enable learners to access communication sources in order to improve their English language abilities and enhance their motivation to learn English (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Szendeffy, 2005; Blake, 1997; Lafer,

1997; Hare, 1998). The materials from the internet are presented in various versions; EFL learners can find past, new, or even the newest issues or materials.

There are various materials taken from the internet such ebooks, journals, newspapers, online broadcasts, and podcasts. Each kind can be easily found, browsed, downloaded in the internet. One of them is podcast. The availability of online audio materials or podcasts on the internet has given valuable opportunities for EFL learners to access global listening, new language, and different voices or accents along with the reading of transcripts available (Constantine, 2005). The importance of using transcripts in listening skill has been promoted (Lynch, 2007; Constantine, 2005). A good way to utilize internet-mediated materials such as podcasts is by providing transcripts that can make an integrated learning.

EFL learners are enthusiastic to use the oral texts in learning English. Authentic oral texts show that EFL learners as listeners achieve positive results when they are tested by using the materials (Shrum & Glisan, 1999). A study proved that EFL learners whose learning used authentic radio tapes showed significant listening skill compared to those whose learning did not use the materials (Herron & Seay, 1991).

Video materials such as Television can be used for helping learners in improving their pronunciation and intonation (Manning, 1988) and for teaching native speakers` cultures in natural way (Saito, 1994; Bacon, 1992; Nostrand, 1989; Herron & Seay, 1991). Movies as video materials are helpful for EFL learners since the materials provide sound effects, pictures, and emotion that reflect real input (Wood, 1999).

The use of audio and video materials either via online or offline access in EFL classrooms may vary depending on teachers` choices. There are several principles to follow when the materials are used. The first principle is to setting a goal of learning materials through which teachers write a purpose of teaching and learning that can be exploited (Jacobson et.al, 2003; Nuttall, 1996; Brown, 2001; Berardo, 2006) and make a context out of a task that will be achieved either for a short-term period or a long-term one. The second principle is that since audio and video materials are designed for native speakers, the languages and contexts used must be based on the native speakers` cultures which are difficult for most EFL learners. In this case, teachers should pay attention on the language level of each material (Jacobson et.al., 2003; Kelly et.al., 2003). Both audio and video materials should be adjusted based on EFL learners` abilities. In doing this, explanation and tutorials throughout doing tasks are necessary. The teachers` intervention is needed for determining input quality (Rost, 2007). The third principle is that the tasks must be achievable or must not be too difficult for the learners to accomplish. The fourth principle is that EFL learners are involved in guessing meaning and predicting what is happening or what will happen inside the audio and video materials.

Conclusion

The utilization of preferred AMs for learning English at STAIN Kerinci, Indonesia varies depending on learning goals and EFL learners` interests. AMs are advantageous for EFL learners whose goal is to improve English abilities. However, AMs are also disadvantageous that the materials are specific and have higher difficulties for EFL learners. Basically, the problems are faced by using various materials which are helpful for EFL classrooms. The solution of the problems is that teachers and learners are committed to use AMs as main sources of materials.

EFL teachers and learners are two different groups that can accomplish every task and materials provided. Both teachers and learners have their own roles in the classrooms. Based on the roles on utilizing AMs, an important point to note as the conclusion of this paper is that EFL teachers should provide various kinds of AMs in EFL classrooms and ensure that all EFL learners are able to utilize the materials for their learning (Meyer, 1984; Rogers & Medley, 1988; Lund, 1990).

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