

PICTURING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS IN USING AUTHENTIC READING MATERIALS TO TEACH LITERACY IN SAMARINDA, EAST KALIMANTAN

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Abstract

The investigation on teachers' beliefs in using authentic materials becomes very important as it deals with the professional development of teachers as it can reflect to the quality of language teaching especially teaching literacy in Senior High School. This study was aimed to explore the beliefs of Senior High School teachers in using authentic materials. Five teachers who teach English 11 graders were the subjects of this qualitative study. The data were taken from a semi-structured interview, classroom observation and document analysis. The findings showed that there were three themes emerged in this study, (1) the roles of authentic materials, (2) the text types of authentic materials, and (3) the use of authentic materials in classroom practices. However, they had difficulties in finding and selecting authentic materials which are appropriate to their students' cognitive level. Therefore, they needed to provide extra time to search and validate the authentic materials to be suited to their students' cognitive level.

Keywords: beliefs, English, teachers, authentic materials

INTRODUCTION

Selecting teaching materials in English language teaching is one of concerns by many, if not all, English teachers. It is believed generally that massive inputs are needed for so that they are able to develop their language skills. Experiences of language learning in the classroom provide students with the language input. From the researcher's observation, it is quite often that students have lack of initiative to find English learning experience outside the class or even become involved in reading English text as a relaxed activity but a course requirement. So, it becomes the teachers' concerns on motivating their students to enjoy reading English texts by providing interesting reading materials. The reading materials should reflect to the natural usages in English as a target language. The materials should consist of extensive vocabularies and appropriate sentence-structure in order to familiarize students with the real use of English.

In language teaching instruction, bringing the world outside into a classroom language becomes the focus of the functional use of authentic reading materials. It is often found in the textbook, the reading materials consist of sentence structure drilling, listening exercises, and reading texts. As a matter of fact, introducing the reading texts containing the real usages contexts is necessary for students so that they have enough exposures to English. In line with this, Harmer (2004:200) argued that authentic materials provide opportunities for students to develop their productive skills. It is believed that authentic reading materials link the knowledge of world outside with the students' classroom knowledge (Wong, Kwok, & Choi, 1995). In addition, it is proved that the use of authentic reading materials assisted students to acquire communicative competence in using English (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

However, in spite of its advantages in providing students with the real language uses, it is assumed that authentic reading materials are challenging to be integrated for language teaching (Kilickaya, 2004). Regarding to its context and contents, some of the authentic reading materials are found to be culturally biased. The structures of sentences sometimes are not appropriate for the lower

levels students. Therefore, they will find a hard time to decode the text. It is even worst when students learn to comprehend the reading text merely to get good score and pass the examination. Authentic reading texts can become a burden to students because they only expose to real use of English rather than emphasize on the mastery of English test (Martinez, 2002: 68). Accordingly, this study aims to describe a deeper understanding of what beliefs held by senior high school teachers in using authentic reading materials in the classroom practices in Samarinda.

It is noted that beliefs becomes socially defined as the mental image of experience in which this reflected into principals and actions. In other word, beliefs are considered as proportions which are acknowledged from one's action or words. According to Stephens *et al.* (2000:535), beliefs can be analyzed through four dimensions, they are tenacity, authority, a priori, and scientific method. In reading English texts practices, beliefs are translated as a bridge between knowledge and action. It is created from the teachers' experience during schooling when they observed their teachers' teaching in the classroom. (Richard, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). In other words, the first perception about teaching experience emerged when teachers were students. The way the teacher perceives their learning experiences at school remained as concept that later influence the way they teach English text in the classroom. The beliefs become a set of references that guide teaching English texts decision. Beliefs also influenced the teaching English texts practices. In some cases, beliefs can cause reorientation. It is quite often that beliefs are episodic they do not need to approve to be truth. Beliefs are formed based on presumptions and they are adaptive to their practices (Erkmen, 2010:22).

As guidance, beliefs linked between teachers' knowledge and their behavior. They provide information of how teacher interpret the knowledge of teachers into practices. Beliefs also can be an indicator for teachers to decide what kind of teaching design that they feel comfortable with. As a bridge, beliefs connect the teachers' concepts of teaching English reading texts and their actual practices. Beliefs as an attached knowledge cannot be taken out from ones' mental image. They show the knowledge as an abstract things to be seen in form of teaching practices.

There are two kinds of beliefs, core and peripheral, according to Kumaravadivelu (2012:67). Compare to peripheral, the core beliefs shape teachers teaching English texts practices. The peripheral beliefs contribute to the discrepancy between what teachers admitted to be known and how they essentially conduct in the classroom context. By understanding core and peripheral beliefs, it raised an issue that teachers may have various concepts and actual practices of teaching English texts. Farrel (2013:14) argued that the association between beliefs and practices can develop an understanding of why teachers behave certain practices in their teaching and learning process. It also makes people aware the adjustment that teachers have done in terms of to be appropriate with all possible factors (education policies, professional development, etc.) to their teaching practices.

Studies on beliefs investigated that teachers who perceived theoretical beliefs as a sets of guidance will be likely to teach the same way as their beliefs (Youngs & Qian, 2013:251; Zhang, 2013:71) However, the discrepancy between beliefs of teaching authentic reading texts and its practices is leading to further investigation to understand what lies in it (Northcote, 2009:71). In fact, there are many settings can influence how teachers conduct their teaching and learning process. The link between beliefs and practices can lead to the understanding the quality of teaching and learning process (Farrell, 2013:9).

In language learning context, students are expected to be competence in communicating English as a target language. It is important that students experience themselves with English when they communicate each other (Rogers & Medley,1988). To do so, students need to be familiar with materials that support this purpose. The use of authentic reading materials is one of ways to bring the real context of using English. Morrow (1977:13) defined authentic materials as texts that are "produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience", for example, newspaper articles and

radio programs.

Basturkmen (2001) noted the benefit of using authentic reading materials for students to develop their communicative competence. In addition, the exposure to the real use of English can upsurge their learning motivation. However, in spite of its benefit in developing and motivation students to be competence in using English, there are some opposed findings. Widdowson (2003) argued that authentic reading material may contain mixed lexical difficulty so that it confused students. In addition, this may cause unpleasant feeling to students because they have to learn something beyond their ability. Therefore, it is necessary to select appropriate authentic reading materials based on students' cognitive level. In fact, this is not easy as it seems. It will lead to another difficulty. Finding appropriate authentic reading materials based on students' cognitive level may take times. Teachers have to be careful and thoughtful in choosing and selecting authentic reading materials that best suited to their students (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). This argument seems run on and on. Therefore, it is necessary to hear from the teachers' voice in the using authentic reading materials in the classroom practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

Five English teachers who teach English at senior high schools in Samarinda participated in this study. They were two males and three females. As the criteria set by the researcher, all participants in this study have more than 10 years teaching experience. They are certified teachers and followed more than one trainings or seminars in teacher's development fields. These teachers had submitted their consent form before subjected to this study.

The main instruments of this research were interview (pre and post interview), and classroom observation. In order to make the observation accurate, the researcher made an audio recording and field note of the teaching reading practice and also transcribe the pre-interview and post-interview. Before the researcher observed that classroom practices, she did pre interview to each teacher related their understanding of authentic materials for reading used in the classroom practices. After knowing teachers' conceptual knowledge of authentic materials, the researcher observed their class to see the manifestation of teachers' beliefs in using authentic materials for reading. Post interview was conducted to confirm teachers' activities in the classroom with their previous interview. It is also conducted to clarify activities that do not match with what the teachers had explained before.

The data was analyzed deductively in which the teachers' beliefs are compared to the theories of using authentic reading materials. Thus, the researcher started her data analysis with deriving themes from the teachers' interview. In avoiding losing track, the researcher utilized codification system. The researcher created a table and recorded all possible categories. Then, she grouped related categories together under broader themes so that only a few themes remained.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

There were three themes emerged in related to the teachers' beliefs in using authentic reading materials, (1) the roles of authentic reading materials, (2) the types of authentic reading materials, (3) the use of authentic reading materials in classroom practices.

The roles of authentic materials

Authentic materials have important roles in teaching literacy to students. It is assumed that the students' progress and success in literacy knowledge is indicated by the implementation of what they have learnt during literacy education in daily lives rather than relying upon standardized tests. Almost all teachers believed that authentic materials can support their students to the real interaction of English. This made students shifted from only using textbook to more realistic function of literacy. It has purposes to open more exposures to the target language used by native

speakers in a real context. Students are expected to be more motivated in reading the English text when it is associated to the real uses. In addition, there are various authentic reading materials that make students get away from boredom of learning textbooks only. Authentic reading materials provide a new experience and challenge for students to explore the real uses of English. It is seen the excerpts below.

.....My students can imagine the use of English in real context...It's.. it is good if they see how the sentences were being used in certain contexts. I mean...the students can see visually how the sentences were used by the native speakers. Then, they had clear pictures on how to use English...(Ida, Ln25,AUTMat, rol).

.....My students were more interesting to learn English when I teach them by using newspapers, magazines, cards, flyer, songs, short animated stories, or even short movies of native speaker. ...especially when I played short movies, usually during watching the movies, they like to imitate the pronunciation of words...when the movie session ended, they continued talking the movie....I had to stop them...otherwise it will become chaos.. Well, of course, I had to control them to what topic they can discuss because ...otherwise it will be run out of nowhere..(Mira, Ln134,AUTMat, rol).

As it had been observed in classroom observation, three out of five teachers mostly used authentic materials in their teaching practices. They searched the authentic materials from the internet. They selected, prepared, and brought the materials to the class. They used the materials to make their students focused and engaged on the topics. They also integrated the materials with learning activities needed of that day. They also explored the vocabularies used. After that, the students were asked to make reflection about authentic reading materials that had prepared as one of teachers' consideration for the next teaching. They also asked their students to wrap-up the conclusion related to the topic.

The authentic materials bring students' positive attitudes in learning literacy. Through the use of authentic reading materials, the students are able to increase their vocabulary size. The students also know how to use those vocabularies in appropriate contexts by looking at its uses in authentic reading materials. As the consequence, the students can develop their cultural awareness related to the use of English in real contexts. They will be able to decide appropriate vocabularies to be used in communication. Therefore, the level of understanding toward texts can be achieved. On the other word, the students are able to improve their language proficiency (Berardo, 2006). In addition, some studies noted that authentic reading materials can motivate students to learn English (Gilmore, 2007; Kilickaya, 2004; Sherman, 2003). This is in line with Ghosn (2002) that claimed students raised their motivation to learn English through reading authentic short stories. This becomes a learning medium for students to foster their motivation as well as the thinking skills. It is because the short stories contain complete plots for example opening the action, introducing the conflict, peak of conflict, and solution to the conflict. In addition, these short stories also offer the curiosity experience for students so they try to keep engaged with the reading texts until the resolution comes.

The types of authentic reading materials

There are two types of authentic reading materials used by teachers in teaching literacy, print (newspapers, magazines, menus, flyer, brochures, job application, job vacant, etc.) and auditory (voice mail messages, animated short stories, movies, songs, etc.) materials. English teachers in senior high school assumed that authentic reading materials are meant for communicating ideas of writers to public. They are not used for classroom purposes to teach a language, however, they

can be used as excellent learning tools for students to learn English reading texts. It is quite often teachers rely on their teaching materials merely from the textbook. For example, students are introduced with texts about job applications on their textbooks. Regarding to this, teachers have to be creative to not only use the texts provided in the textbooks. They should find texts about job application taken from newspapers or advertisement column of vacant in the internet. It is done so that students are able to see the real uses of writing job application based on the vacant position found in the newspapers. It is revealed from the interview, all English teachers are able to identify the texts that match to their students' needs but they admitted that they have limited sources and time to find. The researcher highlighted four text types of authentic reading materials used in the classroom practices, they are newspapers, flyers, brochures, and schedules.

Based on classroom observation, the researcher noticed that teachers used print and auditory authentic materials in their classroom. After giving affirmation to students, one of teachers divided the students into groups and distributed menus to her students. She had the menus from searching in the internet. She had had to prepare it before she taught reading in the classroom. From another teacher's classroom, he used auditory authentic materials, for example a short animated movie, describing the travel of a seed into a tree. After watching the movie, the students are expected to answer list of question related to the story. Then, they discussed the answers. In this session, they may give responses to each other questions. The interview to these teachers also revealed that they used both types of authentic materials.

.....I spend my free time in my office to search for materials to teach reading text. It is easy to find examples of brochures, menus, parts of newspapers and magazines in the internet. I use them for my teaching material. I also searched short stories. My students were interested when they can see the visual materials....(Hadi, Ln45,AUTMat, typ).

Jacobson et al (2003) conducted a study and found out that authentic reading materials either printed or auditory are able to assist students to understand how English is used in the real contexts. This is done to show the students that the non-natural aspects of language items used in the textbook are different with what are used in the authentic reading materials. It is expected that students become familiar with the language that used in the real world. Familiarizing them with authentic reading materials is expected to be useful for student to encounter the real texts. Teachers can find many sources of authentic reading materials but the most common are newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature (Berardo, 2006).

However, finding and integrating authentic materials were not always an easy task. Teachers face this challenge, as it seen in the excerpt below.

.....Although, my students preferred to learn by using visual materials, and there are so many visual materials, like movies, songs, or others, I found difficulties to integrate it to my slide presentations. I think, I am not good in technology....(Hadi, Ln 50, AUTMat, typ).

Despite its positive voice in teaching literacy, there is also negative voice related to the use of authentic materials. Kilickaya (2004) investigated that using authentic reading materials in teaching literacy contribute to the teachers' teaching problems. Teachers need extra times to search, find, choose and select appropriate materials for their students. To do so, teachers need to consider on vocabulary used and appropriate sentence structure, which somehow need to be simplified and explained. In Samarinda, teachers have to consult the authentic reading materials to syllabus to decide whether the vocabularies and sentence structure cover the skills stated in the syllabus. It becomes a great challenge for teachers to sort the material found in the newspaper, magazines, flyers, brochure, etc. They cannot use any authentic reading materials for their students.

In addition, they also need to figure out the way to present the authentic reading materials in the classroom practices. It needs certain teaching strategies. Therefore, teachers should consider many aspects in using authentic reading materials as one of sources in teaching literacy to students.

The use of authentic reading materials in classroom practices

There are many investigations of the use of authentic reading materials in teaching language. Those studies proved that authentic reading materials are effective for language teaching. They highlighted the utilizing of authentic reading materials for teaching and learning language (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Paltridge, 2001). In senior high school in Samarinda, most of teachers believed that students are motivated to learn English when the teachers provide them authentic reading materials in the class. They seemed to enjoy reading the text and discuss it with peers. The teachers believed it is because the authentic reading materials provide news or information that students have previous knowledge, or students have interest related to the topic of the reading texts, for example when the text discussed about the roles of smartphone in students' daily life. The students were eager to discuss about that topic. The student becomes active in analyzing such phenomena. Thus, it is concluded that students were eager to learn the language when teachers use authentic reading materials as a teaching aid. Utilizing authentic reading materials have indirect effect on developing learners' reading skills. Furthermore, by using authentic reading materials students are exposed to the real situation in which English is used, therefore, the students are able to perform communication using English in the real situations. It is seen in the excerpt below:

.....When teaching about argumentative text, I searched news articles from the internet. I know, it is not so easy to find English written version newspaper in Samarinda. Students need to have a real example of what argumentative is...I mean..in which context argumentative text is being written. After that, I cut up and jumbled them. I asked my students to put them back together in correct order. After they had made correct orders, I started to discuss the content of the text...such as the characteristics of the texts. I also demanded them to pay attention to the way of the writers provide their argument in the text. Then, for homework, I assigned them to write an argumentative paragraph.....(Mira, Ln203, AUTMat, use)

It is noted that teachers provided argumentative texts taken from the internet so that students are exposed to real uses. Especially nowadays, students live in a world dominated by visual and electronic gadget. It is necessary to provide materials that can reflect to what has happened in the world as textbooks are fail to do so. Relating to this point, teachers have some reasons the necessary of using authentic reading materials in their classroom, they are preparing students for real life, motivating students to communicate, encouraging teachers to develop their teaching skills, providing information of cultural understanding (Richards, 2001). In other hand, authentic reading materials are expected to provide students the mental image of language used in the classroom as part of teaching instruction and communication with the language used by the native speakers in real world situations.

Related to that point, it is believed that authentic reading materials are able to represent the language used in real world contexts. They contextualize the real uses of English to be brought and learnt in the classroom. It is concluded that authentic reading materials contribute to the filling the gap between the English being taught in the classroom and English used by real people in real situations in the real world (Genhard, 1996). In spite of teaching literacy by using authentic reading materials can be beneficial for preparing students to be ready for reading the real texts, they cannot be used for teaching structures. Therefore, in this study teachers admitted that they found difficulties in finding authentic materials for teaching literacy that focus both on real issue and structures of the language as well. It is revealed from the excerpts below:

.....quite often I used the texts provided in the text book. They are useful for teaching structures. They were there. The focus of structures is also there. It makes my job easier. It saves my times rather than just wandering around the internet to get a suitable materials for my students...(Rasdi, Ln 143, AUTMat, use).

From the excerpt, it is interpreted that a text book helps teachers to manage the class. It is less time consuming. Textbooks also provided sufficient direction lessons. There is also guidance to create students' discussion forum. Without any difficulties to prepare learning activities, textbooks are also completed with various exercises that can be used as classroom and homework exercises. In addition, nowadays, many textbooks are visualized interestingly completed with pictures and many learning activities. Therefore, teachers are easier to organize the learning activities. Teachers feel confidence and secured. However, this believed has been rejected by one of teachers. She said

“....even textbook have provided grammar box, I cannot asked my students to memorize them. It seems working when I asked them to understand the text. I also asked them to see the pattern of grammar while reading and analyzing texts. It seems help them a lot to understands when and which context use certain grammar...(Hilda, Ln 212 AUTMat, 212).

Indeed, the content of textbooks refer to artificial nature of the language. It makes students do not familiar with the real uses of English. It is also believed that textbook do not reflect on how the language is really used. It means that textbook is not sufficient to improve students' reading skills. It is because students will read unnaturally the text in the textbooks. In addition, textbooks are fail to provide students with materials that close to students real life. Therefore, students are difficult to see the realization of using English in real context. On contrary, textbooks are believed to be useful to teach grammar for students as the content of the textbooks are made based on the level of students. Most of teachers agree that they use texts taken from the textbooks to practice students' pronunciation rather than stimulate their thinking to discuss the content of the texts. Teachers admitted that they use reading texts taken from textbooks to teach the text features.

CONCLUSION

In this study, there are three themes of teachers' beliefs in using authentic reading materials emerged: the role of authentic reading materials, the types of authentic materials, and the use of authentic materials in classroom practices. The result of this study shown most teachers believe that authentic materials have the role to bring the world to the students. The students will be interesting to learn which reflect to something real. It led students to push their limit. They do not only learn what have been provided in the textbooks but they can explore many things in the real context. They can make connection between what have been learnt in the textbook with the real application in the real context. It can make teaching-learning process becomes effective when it only use textbooks. In addition, teachers believed that students become interested and enjoyed learning texts by using authentic materials, for example newspaper, flyer, brochure, songs, movie, and etc. Teachers use print and auditory authentic materials. The printed material is gained from searching the internet and travelling abroad. They used the printed materials to teach the genre of text, the characteristics, the sentence structure, the content/information, and the vocabularies whereas for auditory materials, they use to teach pronunciation, and listening comprehension.

Apart from its effectiveness in using authentic reading materials to teach text, teachers also face difficulties in preparing them for their students. As authentic reading materials are not so-ready found in the community, teachers have to spend extra time to search it in the internet. Authentic reading materials need longer time to locate and to prepare. In addition, sometimes the cultural aspects in authentic reading materials have biased proportion. Therefore, it makes students have

difficulties to understand and use the language taught in the classroom to the real communities. Furthermore, choosing appropriate authentic materials to their students' level is also the issue in this study. Teachers have to select and analyze whether the content and the vocabularies in the authentic materials suited to the syllabus. Sometimes the vocabulary level presented in authentic reading materials is beyond students' needs. To this point, authentic reading materials contained mixed structure in which the lower level students might find difficulties to decode the text. In short, there are challenges faced by teacher in utilizing authentic reading materials, i.e. time consuming to locate, select, compile, and choose appropriate materials, teaching strategies to present the materials interestingly, assessing students based on the authentic reading materials.

In summary, by utilizing authentic reading material in classroom, teachers provide opportunities for students to have sufficient exposure to the use of English in real context. In addition, students are provided opportunities to practice the language knowledge they had from authentic reading materials in the classroom based. Teachers are aware the importance on using them in classroom practices. However, the challenges of using authentic materials face by teachers can be solved by spending more times on searching and selecting authentic materials so that they will be suited to the students' levels and needs.

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