

## THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING INTEREST

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**Abstract:** This study is aimed at finding out the impacts of the use of authentic materials in improving the reading interest of VIII C students of SMPN 4 Metro in the academic year of 2015/2016. The data were collected by doing observation during the English teaching and learning process in the classroom, giving a questionnaire to the students, and selecting the authentic texts based on certain criteria. The data of the students' reading interest were analysed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. The findings reveal three important results. First, there are three kinds of materials that fulfill the criteria of authenticity. They are an advertisement, announcement, and descriptive text in the form of an article taken from a *High End Teen* magazine. Second, there are four types of students' positive attitudes towards the implementation of authentic materials. Those are the students' willingness to own the materials, the students' willingness to use the authentic materials in the next meetings, the students' preferences to use the original form of authentic materials instead of the copied materials, and the students' willingness to comment about the topics and the pictures of the authentic materials. Third, there are quantitative and qualitative data related to the improvement of the students' reading interest. The two kinds of data show that there are some significant improvements of the students' reading interest after the authentic materials are used in the classroom.

**Key words:** *reading, authentic, material, interest.*

Being one of the four language skills, reading has an important objective. Based on the School Based Curriculum (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2006), English reading in the junior high school in Indonesia is

aimed at making students to comprehend the meaning of short functional texts and essays they find in their daily life. The students are expected to be able to gain

information and knowledge from such texts.

In order to reach that objective, the most important motivational factors in learning and development is interest (Hidi, *et al.*, 2004, p. 91). It is for this reason that the improvement of reading interest is very important for the students to develop and maintain their motivation to read. Reading has different purposes to different people, for some it is done for learning, while for others it is only a pleasure (Nunan, 1999, p. 249).

However, there are two main specific purposes of reading (Harmer, 1998). Firstly, reading can be an exposure to English for language students. At the very least, some of the language functions (vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and the way to construct sentences, paragraphs and texts) stick in the students' minds by a reading text as part of the process of language acquisition. For example, students obtain instructions on how to perform some tasks for daily life by reading an English text related to the topic. Besides, reading activities show good models of English writing so that the students know what they are encouraged to do. For example, when students are expected to understand business letters or to write a personal letter, they have to read the letter first (Harmer, 1998).

Secondly, good reading texts can attract students' interest to stimulate discussion and excite imaginative responses, and fascinating lessons. Students can gain enjoyment and excitement by reading English texts. For example, when they need to play a game, act in a play, or do a puzzle, they have to read the instructions first. Besides, students can find some information about what is happening or what has happened. For example,

students can read a newspaper or magazine and then report to when or where something will take place or what is available (Harmer, 1998).

However, there are many problems that occur in improving students' reading interest in State Junior High School 4 Metro. The first problem is related to the students' interests in some activities such as listening to the teacher's explanation. The teacher says that it is difficult to make the students focus on the lesson. The second problem is related to students' opinion about English. Some of them think that English is a difficult lesson. They say that they do not recognize most of the words presented in English passages. The third problem is related to the reading materials. The teacher says that sometimes she has some difficulties in creating and finding written materials which attracted the students' interest. As a result, the teacher uses similar kinds of textbooks from one meeting to another.

Among educational fields, interest has many different meanings (Hidi, *et al.*, 2004, p. 94). For example, interest relates to a general curiosity and love of learning (Ainley, 1993, and Renninger, 2004, cited in Hidi *et al.*, 2004, p. 94). Interest has also been studied as a habitual preference (or attitude), a motivational belief, and as a characteristic of the developing self or personality (Krapp, Renninger, and Hoffmann, 1998, as cited in Hidi *et al.*, 2004, p. 94).

From the definition above, it can be stated that interest in reading is desire or love of reading or learning more about a fascinated topic (Fink, 2008, p. 27). Interest is the most important factor in reading. It consists of the students' motivation to read to

enhance their reading levels (Hidi et al., 2004, p. 91; Fink, 2008, p. 20).

Focusing on reading materials, the researchers feel certain that some efforts need to be done in order to develop interesting reading materials. The development of the interesting reading materials is aimed at improving students' interest in reading. For this purpose, the researchers conduct action research involving the eight grade students of SMP N 4 Metro in the academic year of 2014/2015. This study applied of authentic materials. The researchers hope that the improvement of students' interest in reading English texts can support the development of the students' reading ability and other language skills.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is grouped into action research since it deals with a practice in a natural situation (Madya, 2007: 9). The major focus of this study is on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to a particular social group (Burns, 1999, p. 24). This action research is contextual, small-scale and localized, and it identifies and investigates problems within a specific situation (Burns, 1999, p. 30).

The research is conducted in SMPN 4 Metro. This school conducts the English subject from the seventh grade up to the ninth grade. The research involves the researchers, the English teacher, and the eight grade students in the academic year of 2015/2016.

In this study, the instruments used are questionnaires and observation. So, the data are in the form of questionnaire results, field notes, and checklists (Blaxter et al., 2001, p. 154). In addition, the researchers use an authenticity measurement table as

the instrument to measure the authenticity of the materials used in the research.

This research is action research. The purpose of the research is to find out that the use of authentic materials can improve the reading interest of the seventh grade students of SMPN 4 Metro. The researchers focus on using authentic materials to improve students' reading interest. In order to carry out the action research.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Students' Attitudes toward Authentic Materials**

The findings about students' attitudes toward authentic materials were attained by doing observation during the action of the authentic materials implementation. It was done by the teacher while the researchers observed the process. The students' positive attitudes toward the authentic materials can be seen in these following seven situations which are divided into four categories.

### **Students' Willingness to Own the Materials**

In this following situation, the student asked the teacher whether or not she could own the materials. The teacher said that they could if they had finished discussing it. The situation can be seen in this following quotation.

Teacher : *Masih berhubungan dengan advertisement ini ya.*

(It still relates with this advertisement)

Student : *Ini dibawa pulang Bu?*

(May we bring this home, Ma'am?)

Teacher : *Iya.*

(Yes)

Student : *Nanti boleh diminta?*

(May we keep it?)

Teacher : *Later, in the end of the lesson ya.*

*Kalau sudah selesai kita bahas boleh kalian bawa.*

*(If we have finished discussing it, you may keep it for you)*

*Student : Yess...*

***(Field note 5)***

In the quotation above, the student firstly asked whether or not she could bring home the text. Then, she asked to keep the text for them. This means that the students want to own the authentic materials. They want to keep a copy of the material for themselves.

### ***Students' Willingness to Use the Materials in the Next Meeting***

There were two situations found in the field notes that represented the students' willingness to use the materials in the next meetings. The first one happened in the first meeting of the implementation of the authentic materials while the second one happened in the last meeting. In the first situation, the student asked the teacher to use a similar kind of materials in the next meetings and the teacher agreed to do so. It is quoted below.

*Teacher : PR yang pertama dipresentasikan besok Sabtu ya, PR yang ini minggu depan. Ada pertanyaan?*

*(The first homework is presented in the next meeting, on*

*Saturday. The other one is submitted next week. Any question?)*

*Student : Besok pakai yang kaya gini lagi ya Bu?*

*(May we use such kind of material in the next meeting?)*

*Teacher : Ok. Tapi PRnya dikerjakan ya.*

*(Ok, but you have to finished your homework)*

***(Field note 5)***

In the above conversation, although the students needed to finish the homework first, they still asked the teacher to use a similar kind of texts in

the next meeting. It can be assumed that the students have a willingness to use authentic materials in the next meetings. This shows that the students have a special attention to the materials.

In the second situation, the student recommended to discuss the other articles in the magazine for the next meeting. The teacher answered that the other articles would be discussed later.

### ***Students' Preferences to Use the Original Form of Authentic Materials Instead of the Copied Form***

The students' preferences to use the original form of authentic materials were indicated in two situations. Those were found in the second meeting and the third meeting of the implementation of the authentic materials. In the first situation, the teacher recommended the students to copy the materials in the form of uncolored copied in order to ease the students in finishing the homework. The students did not copy the materials. The situation is presented below.

*Teacher : Banyak yang belum mengerjakan? Kenapa ngga difotocopy?*

*(Are there many of you who had not finished the task? Why did*

*not you copy the banner?*

*Student : Ah ngga asyik kalau difotocopy Bu, jelek, susah dipelajarinya.*

*(It will not good, it will be more difficult to study)*

***(Field note 6)***

In the above exchange, the students said that the uncolored copies of the materials were not good. They commented that the uncolored copies of the materials were difficult to study. Concerning the field note above, it can be said that the students are not

attracted to the uncolored copied materials. They are more interested in the colored copied of materials which are similar to the original form of the authentic materials. Therefore, it can be assumed that the students choose the original form of the authentic materials instead of the copied form. In the second situation, the student assumed the teacher to keep the original form of the authentic materials in the magazine. The teacher then said that they might keep the copied materials since they were quite similar with the original form in the magazine.

***Students' Willingness to Comment about the Topic and the Picture of the Authentic Material***

The students' willingness to comment about the topic and the picture of the authentic materials were found in the fourth meeting and in the fifth meeting of the implementation of the authentic materials. The first situation presented the students' comments about the topic of the material discussed and other similar kinds of materials while the second situation showed the students' comments about the picture cited on the material.

The findings of the students' attitudes toward authentic materials seem to agree with a related theory proposed by Shu-Chin (2009, pp. 171-188) who explored the attitudes of students and instructors toward authentic materials in selected adult TESL programs in Kentucky and Indiana, USA. In this study, the researchers investigated the ESL students' perceived importance of authentic materials. The ESL students' perceptions included: the Internet, the talks/discussions, the newspapers, the magazines, the telephones, the

computer programs, the street signs, the radio weather reports, the money, the maps, and the TV programs.

Analysis of the data indicated that ESL students are motivated to learn how to speak, how to listen, how to read, and how to research information through the materials. In other words, ESL students like to learn with different types of authentic materials.

**The Improvement of Students' Reading Interest by Using Authentic Materials**

The improvement of students' reading interest is analyzed in the reflection step of the study. It is done by analyzing quantitatively the questionnaire responses of students' reading interest and discussing the observation results in the form of field notes. The questionnaire analysis is done by the researchers while the discussion is done by the researchers and the teacher.

Concerning the two steps of reflection above, there are two findings related to the measurements of students' reading interest. First, there are questionnaire data analyzed quantitatively before and after the implementation of the authentic materials. Second, there is observation data in the form of field notes analyzed qualitatively. The two sets of results are presented below.

***Questionnaire Analysis of Students' Reading Interest***

The questionnaire of students' reading interest was developed from some theories about reading interest stated by some experts (Elliot, 2000, p. 348 and Alderson, 2000, p. 52). The questionnaire was given to the students two times. It was given before the action and after the action of the

authentic material implementation. The analysis of the result was done after the action. It was done quantitatively by the researchers.

The findings of the quantitative measurements are in the form of descriptive analysis of the data from the two questionnaires. The researchers use the *Mode* of the students' scores of the two questionnaires. The *Mode* in the first questionnaire is 2. It can be categorized as a low score. In the second questionnaire, the *Mode* score is 3. It can be considered high. From those data, it can be seen that the *Mode* of the students' scores increased since the *Mode* of the second questionnaire is higher than the *Mode* of the first questionnaire.

To know whether or not the improvement of the *Mode* of the students' score is significant, the quantitative analysis is continued by the analysis of significance by using the *Chi Square* statistic. The results of the analysis show that the improvement score is significant.

From the analysis, it is found that the score of the *Chi Square* ( $\chi^2$ ) measured is 10.48. Meanwhile, with the four groups of class and significance level of 5% (0.05), the *Chi Square* of the table is 7.815. Since the measured score is higher than the table score ( $10.48 > 7.815$ ), it means that the increase of the *Mode* is significant. This significant finding suggests that the differences are not by change but they reflect the real condition or differences in the population.

The results of the descriptive analysis and the *Chi Square* analysis lead to the main result of the discussion. It can be assumed that the students' reading interest significantly improved after the authentic materials

were implemented in the classroom. This finding seems to agree with a related study done by Fei and Yu-Feng (2008) concerning the relationship between learning motivation and authentic materials carried out in an Extensive Reading program in a Chinese University. In this study, the researchers firstly defined learning motivation as the interest and enthusiasm for the materials used in class.

Therefore, it can be said that interest is one aspect of the motivation. It is followed by an important result of the study. As regard to motivation to take the training of extensive reading when using authentic reading materials in class, 100% of the students report that they are motivated more highly now than they were when using textbooks in the past. Moreover, more than 60% of the students state that they would like to practice extensive reading after class if they are provided with authentic reading materials. In short, for Chinese university students, authentic materials in extensive reading class are motivating.

The result of the related study above supports the result of this study that students of reading classes are highly motivated by the using of authentic materials. Since motivation includes interest as one of its aspects, it results in the finding that the using of authentic materials appropriately improves students' reading interest.

### ***Observation Data Analysis of Students' Reading Interest***

The second finding of the improvement of students' interest is analyzed qualitatively from the observation results. The analysis is done by having discussion among the researchers and the teacher. The data

of the observation is in the form of field notes developed from an observation guide of students' reading interest. The observation guide is designed from some theories about reading interest stated by some experts (Elliot, 2000, p. 348 and Alderson, 2000, p. 53).

The observation guide was answered two times; those were before and after the implementation of the authentic materials. There were twenty questions in the observation guide developed from nine indicators of reading interest. There were nineteen questions that were answered and one question could not be answered. The five answers of the observation guide show that the condition of the two observations was stable but fourteen answers show that the condition improved from the first to the second observation.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the actions conducted are successful. It can be seen from the results of the questionnaire and the observation of students' reading interest. During the study, the researchers use the questionnaire and the observation before and after the actions are implemented. The results of the two kinds of measurement are compared to analyze whether or not the condition improves.

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