IMPROVING MATERIALS ON READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract
The results in this research show that the use of authentic materials is effective to improve the students’ reading comprehension. The use of these materials is effective when they were used together with authentic tasks which provide communicative activities. After the actions were implemented, the students showed some improvements. They could focus on the lesson and actively participate in the teaching and learning process. They got familiar with some reading strategies and could apply them. They were able to scan the detail information of the texts, deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words and understand information when not explicitly stated. They had more interest and motivation in reading. All the various activities made the class atmosphere enjoyable.

Key Words: Reading comprehension, authentic material

1. INTRODUCTION
The ability to communicate in written English is closely related to the reading skill, as one of the four skills of English teaching and learning process. The ability to read opens up new knowledge and opportunities. It enables students to gain information, to get some pleasure, and do many things that are part of modern life, such as, reading newspapers, magazines, maps and so on. That is why reading plays important roles in teaching and learning process of English.

According to Klingner (2007:4), the students tend to have learning disabilities on their reading comprehension. The students demonstrate many problems associated with low comprehension, including poor decoding, fluency and comprehension. Wallace (2003:4) also states that one of the difficulties which young learners, especially EFL learners, may have is the incapability to understand texts. In other words, since English is a compulsory subject in Indonesia, the students have difficulties in understanding the English texts because they have a limited exposure and skills to develop their reading. That is why they tend to find difficulties in understanding sentences, also finding main idea and specific information.

Based on the preliminary observation, the researcher found some problems related to the English teaching and learning process. The first problem is the lack of materials provided by the teacher. In the teaching and learning process, she uses the same textbook to teach the four skills. She seldom gives the students different kinds of reading passages. There are two kinds of reading sources dominantly used by the teacher; the textbook which is taken from school library and students worksheet (Lembar Kerja Siswa). Besides, those reading sources contain many artificial languages and similar task. As a result, the teaching and learning process run less effective.

Those problems above also effect the students’ motivation of the reading activities. The condition makes their interest of reading activities low. They were found unfocused and bored on the teacher’s explanation. Another problem is related to the reading comprehension of the students. Because of the lack of reading materials as their exposure and the low motivation in the reading activities, they found it difficult to comprehend English passages. They commonly found difficulties in getting the information in the text. It is hard for them to deduce meaning, inferring and detect relation such as main idea, supporting idea, new and give information. Moreover, providing the appropriate reading materials for the students is important to enhance their motivation in reading activities. However, it is not enough to tell them to read a lot, Harmer (2001:210) states that the students need to be offered a program which includes appropriate materials, guidance, tasks, and facilities.

2. THEORY
a. Authentic Materials
Authentic materials had been used for language learning for several years ago due to
the rise of communicative approach. The goal of that approach is to develop communicative competence in a real life. For the purpose of the teaching and learning English, an authentic text is one whose primary intent is to communicate meaning. The relevant consideration here is not for whom it is written, but that there has been an authentic communicative objective in mind (Swaffar, 1985: 17, cited in Mishan, 2005: 12). Besides that, Wallace cited in Berardo (2006) adds that authentic materials or texts are texts used in real life communication which are not written for pedagogic purposes. In brief, a text is usually regarded as authentic if it is not written for teaching purposes but for a real-life communicative purpose, where the writer has certain message to pass on the reader.

In line with the definition above, Gilmore (2007) in Guo (2012: 197) states that authentic materials contain real language produced by a real speakers or writers for a real audience and designed to convey a real message. It means that in authentic materials, the language is not imaginary or artificial but originally used in the real world contexts.

The sources of authentic materials are infinite such as newspapers, the internet, magazines, brochures and so on. One of the most useful sources is the internet where there are wide ranges of sources provided and they are continuously updated and also easy to access. When choosing the authentic materials from the various sources, there are some criteria that should take into consideration. Nuttall (2000) cited in Berardo (2006) gives three main criteria in choosing authentic materials to be used in classroom.

1) Suitability of content
   The texts should be interested, motivated and also relevant to the students needs.

2) Exploitability
   Exploitability refers to how the text can be used and exploited in order to develop the competence of the learners in the teaching and learning process.

3) Readability
   Readability refers to the level of difficulty in the texts. It is about the amount of new vocabulary and new structure contained in the texts.

Together with those criteria, Berardo (2006) also adds two more criteria in his study. The first is variety, which are the various types of texts. It used in the classroom to avoid the students’ boredom and also presentation. It is how the texts are presented in the classroom, whether the texts look attractive and interesting or not. The presentation of the texts plays a role to grab the students’ attention. He also proposes some questions which are used to check before choosing authentic materials.

b. Reading Comprehension

According to Klingner, Vaughn and Broadman (2007: 8), reading comprehension is a process of interaction between readers and what they bring to the text, such as their prior or background knowledge and strategy use. This process also includes the variables related to the text, for example the readers’ interest of the texts and their understanding of the genres of the texts. It means that what the readers learn and how they respond and comprehend the text is individualistic. The process of constructing meaning depends on the individual competencies, such as experience and how to interpret the text. In brief, reading comprehension starts from the small unit of text which is words, then phrases, clauses, sentences until texts. The comprehension depends on the ability of the reader to draw meaning from the printed words to interpreting the information appropriately. This comprehension may include the variable of the text, such as vocabulary, syntax, and grammatical and the variable of the reader, like the background knowledge, cognitive development, strategy use, interest and purpose.

c. Using Authentic Materials in Reading Class

Bringing authentic materials into classrooms is important because they provide exposure to real-world language use. However, authentic material which has been carelessly chosen can be extremely demotivating for the students (Harmer, 2001: 205). Instead of increasing the students’ motivation, the difficult texts can decrease the level of the students’ confident and lead to failure. According to Senior (2005) in Berardo (2006), when dealing with authentic materials, one should be bear in mind is that it should be done with a purpose. It needs to have a clear pedagogic goal for what precisely the teacher wants the students to learn from the materials. The role of the teacher is needed to make the students confident when handling authentic materials. Berardo (2006) gives possible solution which is to give text related tasks. There are three basic types of reading activities:

1) Pre-reading
   This activity is used to activate existing schemata or background knowledge of the students. It also provides information of linguistic or social-
cultural inadequacy to prepare the students for reading the text.

2) While-reading
   It is used to encourage the students to be a flexible and active reader also to promote an interaction between reader and writer.

3) Post-reading
   This activity often comes as questions that follow a text. It is used to test understanding.

3. DISCUSSION

There are several problems in teaching and learning process of reading skill. One of the problems is the low reading comprehension of the students. This problem is related to the teacher, the students, the teaching and learning method and the reading materials. Since the aim of English teaching and learning is to enable students to gain the functional literacy which is the ability to communicate both in simple oral and written English to deal with the daily life context, the students need materials that can improve their reading comprehension. However, from the preliminary observation, the researcher found that the reading materials for the students were only taken from course book. There were no other reading materials outside the course book due to the aim of the teacher that oriented on the need of the students to face the final exam. Some students were found having less interest on English subject because of the reading tasks which were considered monotonous. They found that the subject was boring and less important. As a result, they found difficulties in the reading comprehension.

They felt difficult to find the main idea and specific information. In fact, there are a lot of materials which can be used as reading materials to motivate the students in teaching and learning process. One of the materials is authentic materials which can be good since authentic materials contain genuine communication. They provide students with opportunities to experience language as it is used in real-life situations. The students need to learn to communicate in English to deal with daily life context to prepare them to be ready to join the real life situation in which they will be exposed to use of English outside the classroom.

Furthermore, reading authentic texts efficiently is a way to build up the students’ confidence and also motivate them. If the teacher carefully chooses the materials, with the students’ general competence, the reading activity will be success-oriented and quite motivating. Then if the students know that they have read a difficult text but they have managed to understand it adequately, they will feel confident in their own ability to read in the foreign language and will be more willing to take charge of their own learning. Highly-motivated students will lead them to enjoy reading and it will result in acquisition of the target language. In conclusion, the researcher feels certain to use authentic materials to improve reading comprehension of the nine grade students of senior high school. Since authentic materials propose the same term with the aim of English teaching and learning process for junior high school.

a. Research Subjects
   The main subjects of this study were the grade eight students of IX in SMK SMART Medan in academic year of 2012/2013. There were 34 students (20 male students and 14 female students.) This class was chosen as the subject because based on the English teacher’s view that the students in this class experienced some problems in learning English dealing with reading skills.

b. Data Collection Techniques
   The data of the research were in forms of interview transcripts, field notes, photographs. The techniques used in the research were:

   1) a Class observation
      Class observations were done to know what happened in the classroom when the action was conducted. In doing the observation, the filed notes are needed to gain clear descriptions of the English teaching learning processes. The observation included the students’ attitudes in learning English materials, the activities were done, and the problems occurred during the action.

   2) In-depth interview
      The interviews were conducted to gain the data about the students’ behavior and the teachers’ behavior during and after the teaching and learning process. The interviewees were the grade nine students, the English teacher, the collaborator and the school principal.

   3) Documentation
      Photographs and media were used to support the data from the class observation and the interview. They were also used to ensure the authenticity of the data from the class observation and the interviews.
There are four steps in this research. The steps are presented as follows:

**a. Determining the Reconnaissance**

In this step, the researcher conducted the class observation to find practical problems of the English teaching and learning processes in general and to find the field problems related to the classroom activities in English teaching and learning processes, in particular. After observing the class, the researcher interviewed some students of the grade eight students to know the problems that they encountered when they were learning English. Besides, the researcher also had discussions with the English teacher and the school principal to identify the field problems occurred in the English teaching and learning processes.

**b. Planning**

After analyzing the field problems that were serious and feasible to be solved, the researcher and the English teacher planned possible actions to solve them. The general plans were implemented in this research as follows:

1) Giving the students question and answer activities as their pre-reading activities to help the students activate their background knowledge and maintain their readiness to join the reading activities;
2) Presenting the texts in flash cards to make the students being more interested;
3) Implementing communicative reading activities to make the students more interested and able to interact with others actively during the classroom activities.

**c. Action and observation**

After the planning had been made was agreed together, the actions were implemented in the class. The teaching and learning process were observed and recorded in the form of field notes, and identified some problems appeared during the process. The teacher gave the researcher feedback by observed the implementation of the actions. Based on the observations, notes, and records of the students’ responses in the actions, the research member discussed the implementation. Then their evaluation was used to improve the next actions.

**d. Reflection**

After implementing the actions in the first cycle, the researcher made the reflection. It was to evaluate the actions implemented before. Also, in the reflection, the researcher was able to analyze whether the actions were successful or not and to analyze the failures and obstacles during the actions. The reflection was doing by analyzing the field notes and the interviews with the students and the English teacher. Then, the result of the reflection was used to improve the next actions in the second cycle.

**4. CONCLUSIONS**

This study was aimed at improving the students’ reading comprehension through the use of authentic materials. There were two cycles in this action research. In the first cycle, the researcher implemented some accompanied actions as follows:

1) giving the students question and answer activities as their pre-reading activities;
2) presenting the texts through flash cards;
3) implementing communicative reading activities.

However, in implementing those actions, the researcher and the English teacher agreed to change several parts to make the actions work more optimally. The new things to be carried out in the second cycle were as follows:

1) giving the students question and answer activities as their pre-reading activities and paraphrasing what students said to help them in sharing their thoughts;
2) presenting the texts in power point to make the texts clear enough for the students;
3) implementing communicative reading activities.

The implementation of the action resulted in some improvements. Those improvements were related to the teaching and learning process of reading and the students as well. Improvement descriptions are presented below.

**a. The improvements of the teaching and learning process of reading**

Before the actions were implemented, the teaching and learning process of reading was conducted in the conventional ways. The teacher taught reading inspired by grammar translation approach. The activities assigned the students to translate the paragraphs. There was no communication among the students and between the students and teacher. Also, the materials used were not interesting for them to join the learning activities because the materials and activities used considered monotonous. Conversely, after the actions were implemented, the teaching and learning process of reading became more alive.

It involved more interaction among the students and the teacher. The students felt more interested and got more conducive learning environment. They showed high motivation and
enthusiasm in participation during the teaching and learning process of reading.

b. The improvements of the students

Before the actions were implemented, the students felt unmotivated to read and join the teaching and learning process. They found difficulties in comprehending texts and did not familiar with the reading strategies. However, after the actions were implemented, the students felt motivated and paid attention to the researcher. They wanted to join the teaching and learning process. The texts and activities were successful to enhance their motivation and trained the students to develop reading strategies. The students became more familiar with reading strategies. Then, they could apply those strategies and know how to predict vocabulary's meaning from the contexts and practice scanning and skimming. Also, in the communicative activities, they could use their ideas, pass and receive ideas, enlarge vocabulary, broaden knowledge, and more interested to read more and read better. As result, they showed improvements in their reading comprehension.

5. REFERENCES