

Authentic vs Non-Authentic Materials in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia: Which One Matters More?

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Abstract

The popularity of English around the world, including Indonesia, results to the increasing demand of learning this language as a means of communication. Unfortunately, there has been a gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language used in the real life. In fact, many university students in Indonesia are still reluctant to speak in English. Thus, it is suggested that the language taught in the classroom should reflect how it is used by the native speakers. Consequently, authentic materials become popular. Klickaya (2004) characterises authentic materials as materials which expose the real life and how it is used in the target language. Similarly, Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989) as cited in Peacock (1997) identify authentic materials as materials which are created and used for the social purpose of the native speakers. Some examples of authentic materials are a magazine, map, news, TV show, newspaper, and poster. Authentic materials are regarded as beneficial tools in teaching English in EFL countries since they reflect the naturalness of the language, trigger learners' motivation, contain cultural content and improve the communicative competence. However, the complexity of authentic materials makes the learning becomes more complicated (Guariento & Morley, 2001). Thus, it is believed that non-authentic materials are more relevant to be implemented as the materials are more simple and suitable for EFL context. Hence, using authentic materials in teaching English in tertiary level should take some considerations into account to minimise the risk and maximise their use in the classroom.

Keywords: authentic materials, non-authentic materials, teaching English, Indonesia, tertiary level

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Introduction

Language is used as a medium of communication. People utter the language to communicate either in the form of oral or written language. Rogers and Medley (1988) state that people communicate with purposes. He explains that through language, people exchange the information, express ideas and emotions which make communication meaningful. As we know, there are many languages spoken in this world, and all of them share the same function; that is for communication. As a foreign language, English has been widely used by many speakers. Unfortunately, there has been a gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language used in real life. For example, English conversation taught in the textbooks and the classroom tend to be unable to represent the actual model of how it is conducted in real life of the native speakers. Thus, some conversation activities conducted by the students seem unnatural. Moreover, it is argued that although the learners have learned English in the classroom for years, they are still unable to employ English in real life.

As a result, there has been a demand to teach English in a more communicative method. It is suggested that the language taught in the classroom should reflect how the native speakers use it. Therefore, authentic materials become popular. Some examples of authentic materials are a magazine, map, news, radio or TV show, newspaper, reality show, and poster. Meanwhile, the textbook is an example of non-authentic material, which mostly teachers use in the classroom. Many experts have agreed that the use of authentic materials in teaching English in the classroom result to many benefits. The most important component which should be the concern of the teachers is on the way the authentic materials should be delivered and used in classroom activity to get maximum learning outcome. However, teachers and scholars also argue that non-authentic materials are also effective for teaching English because those materials such as textbooks are designed for teaching purposes so that it suits the learner's ability and needs. Thus, there has been a debate on which materials are more effective for teaching English in Indonesia.

In this paper, I will explore the notion of authentic materials and non-authentic materials in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia and then I will critically discuss it. I will begin this paper by defining the concept of authentic materials and non-authentic materials and then analyse the advantages and the disadvantages. Some issues regarding their implementations will be discussed. Then, I will conclude by outlining several recommendations and solutions in delivering authentic and non-authentic materials and how teachers play a significant role in the classroom.

Definition of authentic materials and non-authentic materials

To begin with, I will discuss the concept of authentic materials. There have been several variations of definition proposed by scholars. In fact, I can infer that all definitions explained by the scholars are associated each other. Authentic materials are also known as real-life or genuine materials. Martinez (2002) as cited in Al-Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) defines authentic materials as materials which are aimed at native speakers daily

life and not for teaching purposes. Meanwhile, Klickaya (2004) characterises authentic materials as materials which expose the real world and how it is used in the target language. On the other side, Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989) as cited in Peacock (1997) identify real-life materials as materials which are created and used for a social purpose in the language community of the native speakers.

Also, Rogers and Medley (1988) characterise authentic as materials which expose the genuineness and naturalness of the language and well-contextualised in the native speakers' context. These materials can be in the form of oral and written form. Moreover, Wong, Kwok and Choi (1995) describe that authentic materials are identified by their authenticity in time, people, and location. These materials exist in the target language country, used by the people of that country and exist in the current situation. Generally, I conclude that authentic materials are real materials which exist in the real world of the target language, used in their daily life and not produced for teaching purposes.

Furthermore, Gerbhard (1996) as cited in Oura (2001) informs that authentic materials vary into several types. They can be in the form of listening materials such as radio show and songs, visual materials like the TV show and movies, printed materials such as a magazine, poster, and map, and realia or real-world objects like dolls. Many authors have examined the use of authentic materials in the classroom practice. They agree that the use of the materials is very prominent for the students. The following parts will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of authentic materials in the classroom.

On the other side, non-authentic materials are teaching materials which are made and designed for teaching purposes only. These materials are planned, designed, and produced based on the curriculum and policy in each country, in this context, Indonesia. These materials are usually in the form of textbooks. These textbooks are also built upon the learner's needs and ability.

English language teaching in tertiary level in Indonesia

English language in Indonesia is placed as a foreign language. Based on Lauder (2008), since the status of English as an international language, English becomes the most important foreign language to be taught in an educational institution in Indonesia. The use of English has been widely demanded in every sector such as economic and business, politic, media and communication, the cultural sector and many others. English subject becomes a compulsory subject in tertiary level in Indonesia, for every major or department. Thus, all university students are required to take one unit of English subject during their study at the university. Moreover, the students are not merely required to take the unit but also to show the outcome. Upon their completion of their study at the university, all students are demanded to take English proficiency test as one of the requirements to graduate (Emilia, 2005). One of the most common English proficiency tests in Indonesia is TOEFL test. Usually, every department put their own standard of TOEFL score for the students to achieve. If the students fail to accomplish the score, they need to retake the test so that they can graduate.

Since the demand to master English is really high in Indonesia especially at the tertiary level, thus, teachers are expected to be supportive and innovative in teaching English in order to help the students to achieve their target. One of the strategies is by applying appropriate teaching materials. A study conducted by Zacharias (2003) who analysed the teachers exposes that teachers in Indonesia prefer to use authentic or real-life materials from English speaking countries. This is because of several reasons. Firstly, they considered that local teaching materials are mostly incomplete and inaccurate. Secondly, they find it difficult to choose and design the materials which suit the learners' competence while authentic materials are easy to find. Thirdly, teachers believe that by exposing the students to authentic materials, it can positively improve the students cross-cultural understanding.

Advantages of authentic materials

Now, I will present the benefits of authentic materials in five aspects. Firstly, genuine materials enable learners to experience the real language and have a closer interaction with the target language (Klickaya, 2004; Al-Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014; Huang, Tindall & Nisbet, 2011). Klickaya (2004) states that the use of authentic materials gives learners genuine exposure of the target language. By using authentic materials, learners can feel directly how the language they learn is employed in the real situation. Moreover, it makes them feel closer to the target language as they use the items which exist in real world, in their classroom. This is also in line with Al-Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) who underpin that real-life materials are significantly lessen the gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language used in real life. Other scholars who support this are Huang, et al. (2011) who argue that by experiencing the real language in the classroom, it will prepare them better to employ English outside the classroom and use them to communicate effectively. Once the learners are familiar with the language during the classroom practice, it will be much easier for them to employ it in the real situation.

Secondly, real-life materials are regarded effective to motivate learners in learning English. According to Oura (2001), triggering learners willingness and interest is still a challenging task for the teachers. Oura suggests that teaching material is one of the elements which determine learners' motivation. Thus, scholars found that authentic materials can effectively improve learners' willingness in learning English. One of the scholars who uphold this idea is Peacock (1997). Peacock in 1997 conducted a study involving university students in South Korea who learn English. The aim of his study was to analyse the use of authentic materials and their implication toward students motivation. His study involved 31 university students who were divided into two experimental classes. He applied both authentic materials and artificial materials such as course books in the two classes. As a result, the study indicates that authentic materials can improve learners' motivation and participation in the classroom. The data shows that students' on-task behaviour and motivation were increased during the meeting when genuine materials were delivered. He argued that the learners are being triggered to involve in the classroom when the teachers used authentic materials. As their motivation increases, their participation in the classroom arises as well.

Also, Peacock's argument shares commonality with Hwang (2005) who affirms that real-life materials can create interactive learning. It is because real-life materials are varied in different forms and models. Materials such as a magazine, songs, and poster are more interactive for the learners instead of textbooks. Teachers can develop various classroom activities which stimulate learners' participation through the real-life materials. For example, by using western songs, it can teach students many new vocabulary and language features, while at the same time, learners can also enjoy the song. Hwang also declares that the interactive learning will result in a better English language environment, where the learners feel pleased in learning the language.

Thirdly, real-life materials can increase learners communicative competence. My argument is supported by two studies. A quasi-experimental study was conducted by Gilmore in 2011 to discover the impact of implementing authentic materials and its relation to communicative competence. Same as Peacock, the participants of his study were also university students. Both studies were conducted in EFL countries. Peacock's research was conducted in Korea while Gilmore's was in Japan. The participants were 62 of university-level students in Japan. It compared the communicative competence of both control group who use textbooks and an experimental group who use authentic text as materials. The communicative competence was analysed through eight tests: a listening test, a pronunciation test, a C-test, a grammar test, a vocabulary test, a discourse completion task, an oral interview, and a role-play. The finding indicates that the students who use authentic materials develop their communicative competence better than students who do not.

Another study was done by Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler in 2002. Although the context of the study was not in EFL countries, the finding still proves the positivity of authentic materials. The participants were 159 of adult literacy students in the United States. The result shows that authentic materials improve learners literacy development. It indicates that using authentic materials and authentic activities in the classroom give better impact on the literacy of adult learners. It is argued that the learners are getting used reading and writing more complex text outside the classroom after the teacher introduced authentic materials.

Fourthly, Rogers and Medley (1988) further add that authentic materials are resourceful materials to learn the culture of the target language. They contain cultural information which may benefit the learners to increase their awareness of different culture. Through materials such as TV shows or magazine, students can learn the culture or the habit of the people in the target language which can satisfy their curiosity. Klickaya (2004) also shares the same idea. She argues that cultural content in English language teaching materials has been widely discussed in recent years. Learning language is not only about language features but also about the culture of the target language. She believes that through assistance and appropriate materials given by the teachers, cultural content can be a useful teaching strategy.

Lastly, authentic materials do not only benefit the students. Teachers can also feel the advantage of authentic materials. Wong, et al. (1995) suggest that real-life materials

allow teachers to develop and design the teaching curriculum. These materials are considered valuable to help teachers design the curriculum and organise the classroom activity based on learners' need and interest. They claim that sometimes non-authentic materials are way too easy or too difficult for the students. In other words, not every artificial material suit the learners' ability. Besides that, Huang, et al. (2011) also believe that authentic materials are effective means for teachers in encouraging and empowering students to achieve their goal of learning the language. However, a study conducted by Lee in 2010 reveals that teachers in China are not yet aware of the benefit of authentic materials. As a matter of fact, the authentic materials are not commonly used during the teaching process. Lee (2010) suggests that teachers awareness toward the use of authentic materials can be one of the key points to insert during teachers professional development training.

Disadvantages of authentic materials

In this part of the essay, I will discuss the ideas which disfavour the use real-life materials. Besides the many benefits, scholars believe that authentic materials also result in several disadvantages. Firstly, Rogers and Medley (1988) argue that unedited authentic materials are too difficult to understand by learners. It is because authentic materials contain complex words and language features (Gilmore, 2007). The materials given in the classroom are genuine and delivered without any editing process. There will be many unfamiliar words which may be too hard for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. As a result, this will lead to frustration and confusion by the learners as claimed by Guariento and Morley (2001). The learners will feel frustrated because they do not completely understand the words while they are required to complete the classroom activity. Thus, some scholars against the claim that authentic materials are interesting. Moreover, a case study of Korean University students by Peacock (1997) shows that authentic materials are less interesting by the learners. Even though his study also reveals that real-life materials are effective in improving learners motivation and helping the learners to participate in classroom activities, ironically, the learners do not see those materials interesting and enjoyable.

Secondly, Martinez (2002) as cited in Al-Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) note that authentic materials might be culturally biased. It is because most EFL learners have different cultural background with the target language. This may lead to confusion and misunderstanding since the learners are not fully aware of the cultural differences. Both teachers and students may find cultural exposure in the materials are worrisome. There are some culture and habit in the target language which may not be appropriate and unfamiliar in other cultures. If the learners are being exposed to new cultures, the cultural change may likely to happen.

Advantages and disadvantages of non-authentic materials

Non-authentic materials are considered more suitable and appropriate for the learners. As it has been discussed earlier, real-life materials are too complex and difficult to be understood. On the other side, non-authentic materials such as textbooks are designed by

the teacher based on the learners' capability and language level. Thus, it is easier for the learner to master the lesson. In addition, cultural content in the real-life materials is also considered an issue in using them in EFL context such as Indonesia. It is believed that the use of language should suit the local context. Since real-life materials also contain some cultural difference between the target learner and the target language culture, it is considered better for the teacher to use their own materials which are non-authentic. Those non-authentic materials are argued as more culturally appropriate for the learners. Moreover, it is believed that there is no urgency in teaching English by using authentic materials since English has been considered as an international and global language. Thus, learning the target culture of English is no longer seen important. English as global language does not require the learners to internalize the local culture of the target language (Smith, 1976 as cited in Lauder, 2008).

However, as non-authentic materials are designed and simplified by teachers, it makes non-authentic materials seem unnatural. Textbooks and simplified learning materials are considered giving lack of exposure to the real English language use in daily life. Thus, it is argued that giving the learners authentic materials should be encouraged. Brosnan, Brown, and Hood (1984) as cited in Oura (2001) argue that authentic materials reflect the naturalness of a language. Learners should be exposed to the variety of language form and vocabulary. He claims that simplification of non-authentic teaching materials will increase the difficulty of the task. This statement is also supported by Guariento and Morley (2001) who clarify that the goal in using authentic materials is not to achieve a complete understanding. The focus is on the comprehensive process which takes place when the students extracting the information and knowledge from the materials and make use of them. Therefore, the complexity of the materials should not be a constraint. Also, Gilmore (2007) notes that the unedited authentic materials are suitable for learners to improve their English. As the materials expose various grammatical rules and language features, the learners will keep extracting new knowledge of the language. Gilmore then adds that learners will not be able to learn new things if they are not being exposed to it. Once they get used into the complicated world of the language features, their language proficiency will be more likely to improve.

Authentic materials or non-authentic materials?

Due to the complexity and the problem of cultural content in authentic materials, simplification of authentic materials is proposed by many scholars. Teachers may edit and adjust the authentic materials so that it will suit the context. Thus, students can still be exposed to real-life materials. However, Guariento and Morley (2011) note that there is also a problem in simplification of authentic materials. According to them, if authentic materials are edited and simplified, then they are no longer authentic. Thus, if teachers are to give the students authentic materials, they need to maintain the originality of the materials. Adjusting the English materials with Indonesian culture, for example, will affect the naturalness of English itself.

The cultural difference between Indonesia and the English speaking countries where the authentic materials originally come from has become the most significant issue which

problematizes the use of authentic materials in Indonesia. It is believed that there is some cultural content presented in the materials which are different and even inappropriate with Indonesian culture or believe. Then, this reason is the idea why teachers should adjust and simplify the materials. Lauder (2008) then concludes that Indonesian educational policy has a certain sensitivity toward target language culture. Indonesian teaching tends to believe that target language culture may give bad effect toward the local culture. As a matter of fact, the cultural difference should be learned instead of avoided. Regarding this problem, Klickaya (2004) clarifies that learning a new language is not merely about learning the grammatical rules, vocabulary, and the language features. Learning a language means getting to know the culture as well. It is because language and culture are inseparable. She also argues that learning the culture does not necessarily mean accepting and adjusting the new culture into the learners' context. The culture according to her is used to trigger learners' interest and make the learning process more relaxing and enjoyable.

McKay (2000) as cited in Klickaya (2004) also discuss the same idea. He argues that the cultural content in the materials may vary. The materials are not aimed to expose only the culture of the target language, in this context Western culture. The learners will also learn the culture from different parts of the world. This is in line with Zacharias (2003) who notifies that since English has been regarded as an international language, thus English is no longer associated with any particular culture or country. People can learn various culture from different nations through learning the English language. Moreover, learners will also be able to integrate their culture with the culture of the target language or other countries. For example, when teachers use the poster. As we know, poster usually informs particular event or information. There are various posters which promote an annual event like Halloween and New Year. While showing the materials, teachers will explain the meaning of the events and how people across the world celebrate them. Hence, I conclude that cultural content in authentic materials is efficient to build learners enthusiasm, awareness and mutual understanding across the world.

The use of both authentic and non-authentic materials in English teaching classroom in Indonesia may face challenges. For authentic materials, it is believed that although authentic materials are resourceful sources to learn authentic target language and cultural lesson, they are rather difficult to learn due to its complex language content. On the other side, non-authentic materials are more suitable for EFL learners because the content has been adjusted to the students level and context. However, they may seem unnatural and do not present how the language used in real life. Thus, it can be seen that there is an endless debate about which kind materials should be implemented in English language lesson, either to use authentic or non-authentic materials.

Solutions

To address the issues which surround authentic and non-authentic materials in English language teaching in tertiary level in Indonesia, some solutions are proposed. It is not about which materials should be taught but rather on how to maximise the use of both materials in the classroom to improve the students' language competence. Thus, it can be

inferred that both authentic and non-authentic materials play a significant role in language teaching. Although their issues may result in some problems, thus, some solutions can be taken into account.

Firstly, Lauder (2008) enhances that sensitivity toward target language culture should be minimised. As it has been mentioned before, learning different culture can also be beneficial for the students to improve their cross-cultural understanding. Moreover, Lauder also notes that learning target language culture does not necessarily mean to imitate that culture. Learning culture is also aimed to improve the students' awareness that they live in a diverse universe. Zacharias (2003) highlights the importance of teaching cultural awareness in English lesson. Moreover, teachers can still teach their local culture in English lesson. Moreover, Gupta, 2001, as cited in Zacharias (2003) believes that local culture where English is taught also needs to be presented to contextualize the teaching.

Secondly, as the content of authentic materials is too difficult for the learners, the materials should be delivered along with some pedagogical support from the teachers (Klickaya, 2004; Al-Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014). Complete understanding of the materials is not the main goal of employing authentic materials as long as the students can make improvements (Guariento and Morley, 2001). Hwang (2005) enhances that support from teacher to learner in extracting the content of the materials is also essential. Teachers are required to introduce and explain the uncommon words or grammar rules presented in the materials to avoid confusion from learners. However, this explanation should not be the main activity and only take place as a reminder for students. For example, when displaying the content of English TV show, teachers should list and define the less-frequent words which appear in the magazine beforehand.

Thirdly, teachers are expected to be able to teach language where the pressure in learning a real language can be diminished. They need to pay attention to the way of preparing, choosing and executing the authentic materials. They are required to choose appropriate materials by considering the learners' ability, interest, and cultural background. For example, when teachers use English magazine in the classroom, they need to look carefully into the content in the magazine. Once the materials are appropriate for learners, they may bring the materials to the classroom. Martinez (2002) as cited in Klickaya (2004) later adds that teacher should encourage students during the learning activity and make them feel motivated so that the students will not find authentic materials burdening and frustrating. Moreover, Guariento and Morley (2001) further add that authenticity does not only rely on the text but also on the task itself. They address the issue that teachers should also pay attention to how task activity takes place during the learning process. The materials used will be pointless if the activities are not meaningful for the students. This is also in line with Rogers and Medley (1988) idea that authentic materials cannot be considered beneficial if the classroom activities following them are not well-executed by the teacher. Furthermore, they advise that the first step teachers need to do in teaching is to encourage and to facilitate the learners to access the message in the resources. Thus, they believe that activities following the authentic materials are just as significant as the materials itself.

Therefore, teachers are advised to use both authentic and non-authentic materials to make the learners familiar with both types of materials (Al-Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014). It is because the use of both materials is significant to improve the students' language competence as well as cultural understanding. If the teachers can pay attention to the way in delivering both materials, the problems can be diminished, and the learning goals from both teachers and students can be accomplished.

Conclusion

Authentic materials have been widely known by scholars as a beneficial medium to teach English in the classroom. As discussed above, the goal of learning a foreign language is to be able to employ them in real life. Thus, real-life materials are considered as the suitable materials for language learners as they reflect the naturalness of language, improve learners' motivation, contain cultural content and positively affect the communicative competence. On the other side, although non-authentic materials such as textbooks are not as natural as authentic materials, their use in the language classroom is also prominent because non-authentic materials are more simple and appropriate with learners context and language level. Therefore, the use of both materials can be combined during the lesson as both of materials has their own role in English language classroom. Finally, after critically discussed the issue surrounding the use of authentic materials and non-authentic materials, I suggest that both materials are effective to be implemented in English language classroom as they positively support the teaching and learning process of English classroom. Some problems drawn for the use of the materials can be decreased through some recommendations and solutions which has been discussed in the previous parts.

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