LOCAL CULTURE-BASED READING MATERIALS FOR EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract
Teaching English to non-native learners is always a challenging task for any teacher in EFL contexts. One perpetual reason is the lack of exposure to the target language both orally and in writing. Debate continues about two opposing views on the utilization of authentic reading materials and the utilization of local-based reading. This paper attempts to defend the latter view by elaborating the potentials of local culture-based materials and their role in the EFL Classroom. This is a library research where the information is gathered from studies by other researchers. In EFL context, where the learners rarely have a direct acquaintance with native speakers, the benefits of making use of authentic reading book are not meaningful especially for the beginner level students due to the issues such as text readability, cultural understanding, and experiential input. Therefore, local culture-based reading materials are recommended to be developed since it suggests many benefits for the students in English as a Foreign Language context.

Keywords
Local culture, reading materials, EFL

1 INTRODUCTION
It is widely accepted that English has an international role in communication because it is not only used among people from English speaking countries. People from a lot of countries also use English to communicate when meeting each other especially between those who originate from different countries.

In the teaching and learning of English, there are two opposing views on which culture should be taught in English language teaching. One views the English language and English culture should be taught at the same time. It is shown by the utilization of authentic material in English language teaching. The other view argues that localized materials to address the non-English speaking learners are needed to be used since their experiences in their own local contexts is more realistic.

This paper will discuss on the second view of using the localized materials in English language teaching. Moreover, this paper will discuss why the use of localized materials, especially local-based reading materials, has potentials to be the best choice for the teacher of English as a Foreign Language.

Reading is known as a process of interaction among the reader, the text, and the context. Reading is an active process by which the readers interact with the text to reconstruct the message of the author. In addition, Nunan (2003) defines that reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their background knowledge to build meaning. Based on this definition, the author believes that when the readers recognize the topic of reading, it will result in students' positive attitude to reading, and the process of combining the information from the text with their background knowledge will be easier.

2 CULTURE IN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY
Culture can be defined from individual's viewpoints. Culture includes various dimensions of society. It includes the way of living, dress, food variations, local traditions, moral values, etc. Broadly speaking, culture is an environment created by humans.

Culture and language obviously cannot be separated. One always reflects the other in the form of many different aspects. Rajabi and Kertabi (2012) identify culture as systems of knowledge, such as values, beliefs, and attitudes, notions of appropriate behavior, statuses, role expectations, and worldview, shared by a group of people.

The issue of cultural integration in language pedagogy has been discussed by many researchers. One of them is the view which suggests that target language culture should be used in English language teaching to introduce language learner into the cultures of English speaking countries. Within this case, students would spend the majority of their time reading and discovering life in native-English speaking countries, for instance, the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. However, there seems to be less encouraging to promote target cultural content in teaching materials and there is a growing recognition of the importance of including the local or source culture (McKay, 2003).

To elucidate the roles of culture in language learning and teaching, it is necessary to demonstrate the functions of culture in the components of language learning and teaching, for example, listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Language is the provider of culture and vocabulary is the basic substance of language. Cultural differences will undoubtedly be exhibited on the vocabulary, and the description of vocabulary will also emulate the national or cultural difference.
In the listening aspect, the majority of English language learners have difficulties to improve their ability. Learners often complain that they have spent most of time to practice their listening skills but the progress is hardly ever satisfying. A couple of reasons are their minimal vocabulary, poor grammar, and lack of understanding in pronunciation. However, a more reasonably essential reason is that their shortage of cultural insights into the language they learned. They are not acquainted with the way of the native speaker’s speaking.

In the speaking aspect, culture also has its significance in teaching and learning. People need to recognize the cultural background knowledge of the target language for them to communicate successfully. One may be proficient in the linguistic aspect of the language, however, he may make mistake on using a certain phrase while having a talk in the target language in a certain circumstance.

In the writing aspect, the main predicament rests on the understanding of cultural background knowledge. The non-English speaking writers must have sufficient knowledge about both English language and their native language. This knowledge is required for them to be able to share their exact thought in a proper target language way. Here, we see the impact of cultural background knowledge on the writing component.

Culture also performs a more vital role in the reading process. The majority of real and serious reading obstacles are not only from the language knowledge itself but also triggered by the cultural differences between the target language and our maternal language. Sometimes we find that the students may acknowledge and understand the definition of each word in the text, but they are still not so crystal clear about the meaning of the entire sentences or paragraphs. Within this situation, most students have a shortfall of experience with the reading context which will impair them to read more.

3 AUTHENTIC MATERIALS VS LOCAL CULTURE-BASED READING MATERIALS

The last mentioned issue of the preceding section discusses the impact of cultural background knowledge on the reading aspect. The concerns of being short of experiences in the target language are mostly identified in the EFL context where English is only applied in an academic circumstance, particularly the teaching and learning process. The nature of EFL learners who are not native English speakers makes the method of teaching reading texts needs the different treatment, most especially in the text’s topic used.

The proposition of authentic material Mishan (2005) and Khaniya (2006) consider that the existence of authentic reading materials overshadow today’s foreign language teaching. Further, they also assert that synthetic text does not greatly enrich students’ English conduct. Furthermore, current study conducted by Nematollahi and Maghsoudi (2015) show that there is no significance difference between the student taught using of authentic and non authentic reading material.

For addressing the issue of authentic English acquisition in second language context, it would be very conceivable because the students have already equipped with plenty of English competence to engage with authentic reading texts. On the other hand, from the perspective of comprehensible input proposed by Krashen (1981) initiated that learners acquire language when they comprehend the message of the source language or what we called with comprehensible input. Further, he mentioned that context plays an essential role to determine the complexity of grammar. Consequently, authentic reading materials would be more challenging and difficult for EFL learners to acquire relevant comprehensible input as unfamiliar messages, lifestyle, culture and English contexts are fairly different for EFL learners to depict in their thought and feelings.

Other studies conducted by Young (1999) and Richard (2001) evaluate the difficulty level of the authentic material which might stimulate students’ burden and stress in comprehending the texts. Next, troublesome issues such as nonessential vocabulary items, complexity of language structure turn into extra shortcomings of the existence of authentic reading materials. According to them simplification would be one of the possible alternatives to penetrate the previous disputes. This paradigm states that comprehensible input is attained efficiently through language simplification.

The following concepts support the stand of schemata theory, which claims that the improvement of learners’ reading comprehension is accomplished through their personal experiences, relevant information elsewhere, and real journeys. Topics associated with students’ native/local/source culture are likely to captivate students’ interest than those of the target culture. This remains in line with what has been proposed by McKay (2003) that source/local culture can also stimulate students to gain a much deeper understanding of their own culture to ensure that they can share their knowledge of their culture when using English with friends from different countries. Numerous studies have disclosed positive effects of a cultural acquaintance on reading comprehension and vocabulary learning.

4 FAMILIARITY OF LOCAL CULTURE-BASED READING MATERIALS

Mahabadi (2013) studied the role of localized materials in learning of EFL students in Iran. The study concluded that the localization of materials would be beneficial to learners as it would make the materials more familiar and thus more entertaining for them. Erten and Razi (2009) conducted a study on the effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. The study has two conclusions, first, cultural familiarity promotes comprehension; second, although reading activities do stimulate schematic knowledge and encourage strategic reading behaviors, the influence of cultural familiarity remains unchanged.
Those findings by the researchers are supported by Byram and Morgan (1994) who state that:

learners cannot simply shake off their own culture and step into another […] their culture is a part of themselves and created them as social beings […] learners are ‘committed’ to their culture and to deny any part of it is to deny something within their own being.

A fairly different result is obtained by the study conducted by Rodliyah, Imperiani, and Amalia (2014). The result of the study also signifies that both the source culture and the target culture serve a useful purpose in Indonesian English classes. Although reading in a foreign language requires several sort of knowledge for example, knowledge of the topic, knowledge of the structure of the language, and vocabulary knowledge, students have different perception about the content of reading materials they prefer to use in the classroom. They seem to prefer target culture reading materials as a result of the consideration that they are more interesting and advantageous to read and their relative understanding of the sentence structure and vocabulary.

Regarding to learning domain, local culture is affirmed advantageous to affective as well as cognitive domain because of its familiarity to students. Affective domain associates with attitude, motivation, or anxiety in learning foreign language (Henter, 2014). Language teaching with local culture affects attitude and also motivation (Clout, 2006). In a research study done by Shahed (2013), instructors revealed that students hesitate to read any materials which are culturally unusual. The culturally unusual reading materials are contextually irrelevant, uninteresting, or confusing, even for undergraduate students. In contrast, culturally familiar materials offer a convenience zone for students (Sinhaneti, 2015). A study by Thinley & Maxwell (2013) strengthens the previous statement. Because students emotionally felt risk-free, their passion to discover English through folklore reading increased. Therefore, culturally familiar reading material made students actively took part in conversation and discussion.

5 DISCUSSION

Numerous studies pointed out in the preceding section have recommended the benefit of making use of local culture-based reading materials. However, the dispute on the authentic exposure acquired from the authentic reading texts versus meaningful local content English will still be a hot concern for the teachers in the EFL context. At one point, numerous researchers propose the use of authentic materials since they have richer real discourse, accent and style, native culture and global world information for the learners (Kilickaya, 2004). Meanwhile, a few other also argue that authentic material proposed several issues on text readability, cultural appropriateness, and comprehensible input dilemma (Nematollahi & Mghsoudi, 2015). This condition is supported by the findings from the study conducted by Khan (2016). The study is on the integration of local culture in the Foreign Language Classrooms. His study suggests that the teachers of English should incorporate local culture in an English language class in order to retain the attention of the students as well as releasing the burden of learning two foreign elements: culture and language. Teachers should learn how to integrate local material. It is far better if we have textbooks containing comparative materials: both local and foreign.

This paper is more in line with McKay’s (2009) findings that both local and target culture give substantial impact in EFL classes. Especially, learners of EFL who mostly have the restriction of practicing the use of the target language on a regular basis. This paper suggests that the use of authentic materials is necessary for learners in order to acquire real discourse. English is an international language, therefore understanding target language culture is always necessary to become successful in international communication. However, to support the teaching and learning of English, a teacher can improve the learners by interchanging the use of authentic materials and local culture-based materials. The use of local culture-based materials will offer familiarity with the materials to the learners. That familiarity will help the learners to achieve better understanding and enhance their performance in learning English.

Local culture texts can be implemented in any level of study. A teacher only needs to provide the students a text which contains a local culture. It will not modify the genre or the style of the text because local culture is only the topic which is inserted in the text. An interesting example of it is a development study of Saprahan in Malay tradition as a set of English language teaching materials (Arbaniah, Regina, & Ismiyani, 2019). Malay culture is proven as necessary local supplementary materials in Pontianak schools (Mulyaningsih & Yuliana, 2019).

There are many things related to the local culture which can be incorporated in the text. They could be traditional food, dance, custom in a region or country, legend, folklore, story tale, and so forth. By integrating those aspects, the learners’ motivation will increase while they also could make use their relationship with some of those elements in the materials to increase their level of understanding. Therefore Mahabadi (2013) concluded that Therefore, it can be said that localized materials can function as bridges to learning foreign languages with the aid of elements taken from their own native language. Thus, it is believed that local educators should be accountable for developing a pedagogy that is appropriate to the local context and can best help students learn a foreign language.

The role of local culture-based materials in the classroom is becoming more crucial since English is now considered as an international language. With the wave of globalization, English has been used in the communication between non-native speakers of English with diverse culture. By incorporating local culture into
the teaching and learning of English in EFL context, teachers can help learners understand their own culture introduced in English to ensure that they can use English to share their culture to the world. In the study conducted by Estuarso, Basthomi, and Widiati (2016), they found that the extra reading materials are expected to facilitate students’ learning with familiar content which will enable them to internalize reading strategies more easily. Furthermore, the majority of the participants admit that they need reading materials about their local culture as a learning resource of English reading activity.

6 CONCLUSION

Teaching English to EFL learners is always a daunting task since the teachers have to promote the use of interesting materials as well as providing more exposure of English to the learners. Two opposing views on which kind of materials to be used in the classroom have risen in the last decade. Some experts propose the use of authentic materials which provide the learners with real discourse and culture of the target language. The students would spend the majority of their time reading and learn about life in native-English speaking countries, for example, the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. On the other hand, this situation nourishes an issue of learning difficulties for the learners in EFL context who lack of experiences and have less cultural background knowledge of the target language.

The main goal of the current study was to defend the view that incorporating local culture-based materials in the teaching and learning of English is beneficial both for enhancing the students learning and for promoting the learners’ culture by utilizing the target language learned. This study has elaborated previous studies to support the utilization of local-culture based reading material in the teaching and learning of English. In EFL classroom the students should be taught English with the culture associated with it so that the students can acquire the target language with cultural background and correspond in real-world situations. However, the learning must be maintained by the use of local culture-based materials since it provides cultural familiarity which will facilitate reading comprehension. This study also suggests that the instructors should be responsible for developing local culture-based materials that can best help students learn English.

7 REFERENCES


