Students' Responses to the Use of Authentic Material in a General English Class

Eka Rahmat Fauzy

Balai Bahasa, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Indonesia
ekarahmat2@gmail.com

Keywords: Authentic Materials, Integrated Skills.

Abstract: This research is aimed to identify how students respond to the use of authentic materials in a General English class. This research is based on qualitative case study design employing observation and focused group interview to obtain the data. The results of data analysis suggest that students perceived both benefits and challenges from the use of authentic materials in integrated skill based teaching. Therefore, it can be concluded that the proper use authentic materials will be responded positively in an integrated skill based class. Nonetheless, it is strongly recommended that the employment and implementation authentic materials in teaching and learning process have to be prepared well since careless selection of authentic materials may demotivate students, instead of encouraging them to understand the lesson.

1 INTRODUCTION

The use of authentic materials in language classrooms has become a prominent topic over a couple of decades, and with the rapid development of technology, especially internet and multimedia, the access to such materials has never been easier (Erbaggio *et al.*, 2012; Huessien, 2012; Mudra, 2014). Studies and practices in college English teaching in recent decades have underlined the importance of integrated skills involved in language learning, and the design of the course itself and related classroom activities have begun to receive a lot attention in language teaching (Lin, 2004). To support that purpose, the use of authentic materials can be considered as a useful strategy in developing a unit of material to implement the integration of language skills in the classroom (Nunan, 1991; Harmer, 2007), including in General English class. Although some practitioners argued the idea, many language teachers (Shrum and Glisan, 2000; Kilickaya, 2004; Khaniya, 2006) believe that authenticity has proved its beneficial role in language teaching and the popularity of the use of authentic materials in diverse settings, learning objectives, or tasks has increased since the last decade.

Considering the significance of facts mentioned above, a research on such real-life materials integrated in all language skills has value to enhance the richness and flexibility of college English or other language courses and to provide useful examples or guidance for other practitioners or researchers in selecting and employing authentic materials in integrated skill based activities because careless use of authentic materials, rather than encouraging students to understand the content, may demotivate students (Lin, 2004; Harmer, 2007).

Some of selected studies related to the use of authentic materials in language skill teaching suggest that authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form and learners positively respond and feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom (Khaniya, 2006; Baghban and Ambigapathy, 2011; Tra, 2011; Nasta, Machmoed and Manda, 2013; Alijani, Maghsoudi and Madani, 2014). Moreover, authentic materials are claimed substantial to motivate learners because they are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials, and they can provide students with up-to-date knowledge, expose them to the world of authentic target language, and bring the real world into the classroom (Peacock, 1997; Gilmore, 2007; Tra, 2011; Al Azri and Al-rashdi, 2014). Even though, those previous studies have been able to present a significant contribution from the use of authentic materials in language learning, many of them were grounded on general or conceptual context of the topic, or on a particular area

of language skills, such as on speaking skill (Tra, 2011) and listening skill (Nasta, Machmoed and Manda, 2013). Therefore, this research was conducted in a class of a general English program which usually covers, centres, and gives equal attention to the four main language skills, as reflected in actual English communication (The University of Western Australia, no date; Far, 2008; Lamri, 2016).

Basically, authentic material can be considered as normal and natural language used by native or competent speakers of a language (Harmer, 2007). In academic context, authentic materials can be anything, including song, English movie, English radio program, and many other videos of native speakers speaking English which can be found easily in students' daily lives, that is available to the language teacher, but was not produced for language-teaching purposes since there could be differences to textbook materials in aspects of linguistic competence, pragmalinguistic competence, discourse competence, and implications for materials design (Gilmore, 2007; Robinson, cited in Tra, 2011; Nasta, Machmoed and Manda, 2013; Al Azri and Al-rashdi, 2014). Table 1 below shows a comparison between authentic and non-authentic materials, showing that the characteristics of authentic materials reflect a true nature of language use in real-life communication (Miller, cited in Firdaus, 2014).

Table 1: The comparison of authentic and non-authentic materials.

Authentic Materials	Non-Authentic Materials
They are produced for real life communication purposes.	They are specially designed for learning purposes.
They may contain false starts, and incomplete sentences.	The language used in them is artificial. They contain well-formed sentences all the time.
They are useful for improving the communicative aspects of the language.	They are useful for teaching grammar.

In line with those points, the use of authentic materials in integrated-skills approach is relevant as both prepare students for real-life situations, making connections between life and learning (Lin, 2004). Thus, it is obvious that any of the four skills can be developed best in association with other language skills. At first, in the real practices, listening is not simply a one-way process of receiving audible symbols, but it is usually an interactive process involving meaning negotiation, turn taking,

discussion, as note-taking and writing in response to what is listened. Similarly, reading is commonly interactive and includes higher-level thinking skills, self-reflection, and inference. Further, from a communicative and pragmatic view of the language teaching, oral production occurs in a variety of contexts or genres, such as conveying or exchanging specific information, engaging in small talks, or maintaining social relationships. The last skill, writing, can be a process involving the writer, written or oral texts, and other writers or readers. Thus, it is obvious that any of the four skills can be developed best in association with other language skills. Tajzad and Ostovar-Namaghi (2014) suggested that segregating language skills in learning activity may help learners to comprehend language as knowledge well, but it will not enable them to use their knowledge in actual communication. They further asserted that the integrated-skills approach can trigger simultaneous use of skills, enhance learners' motivation and self-confidence, save class time, and provide reflection time.

In ELT, the more students see and listen to comprehensible input, the more English they acquire, notice, or learn (Harmer, 2007). This input takes many forms; teachers' utterances, audio materials, textbooks, podcasts, video, etc., and moves in a circle in which one's output will return to be an input after exposed by some processes of evaluation, modification, and feedback from teachers, other students, and the student himself or herself. Further, this cycle is incorporated in Harmer's basic methodological models for teaching receptive and productive skills.
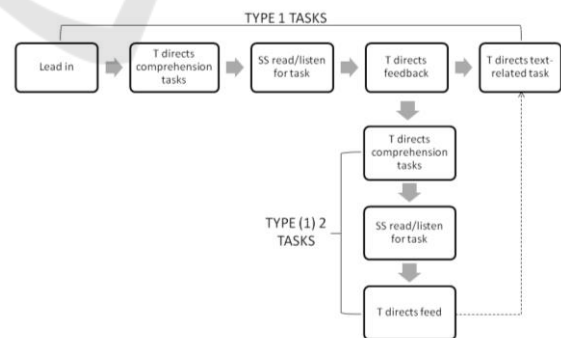

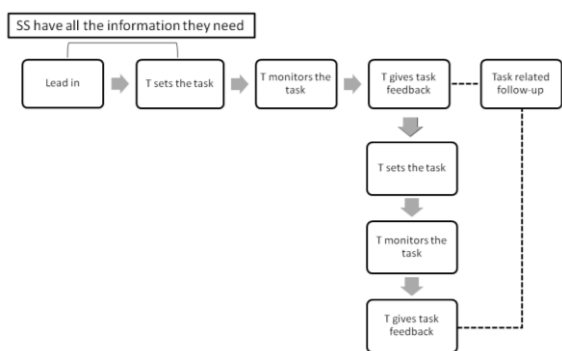Figure 1: A basic methodological model for teaching receptive skills.

Figure 2: A basic methodological model for teaching productive skills.

Figure 1, on the one hand, shows that teaching receptive skills starts with a lead in where students are engaged in the topic and their schema or pre-existent knowledge is activated. When students are ready, teacher sets some kind of comprehension task, and then directs feedback, and gives follow-up activity. The comprehension cycle is repeated and then teacher involves students in text-related tasks. On the other hand, it can be seen from Figure 2 that the success of Harmer's model for teaching productive skills generally relies on the way teacher organizes the tasks and how to respond the students' work.

Generally, to develop a unit of material to practice the integration of language skills in the classroom, consideration is necessary on the principles of authenticity provided in the material for the students, continuity that reflects the chain activities people do in the real-life situation, real-world focus to stimulate applicable sense of the lesson in their daily life, and students' language focus exposed to the language as a system and asserting them to be encouraged to have self-monitoring-and-evaluation skill (Nunan, 1991). To support integrated skill based teaching, the use of authentic materials can be considered appropriate at post-intermediate level attributed to the fact that at this level, most students master a wide range of vocabulary in the target language and all of the structures (Guariento and Morley, cited in Kilickaya, 2004; Khaniya, 2006). Nonetheless, authentic materials can be used by lower level students if the tasks given are well-designed to help students understand it better (Guariento and Morley, cited in Kilickaya, 2004; Khaniya, 2006; Harmer, 2007).

According to McGrath (cited in Al Azri and Al-rashdi, 2014) there are eight criteria to be considered when choosing appropriate authentic texts; relevance to course book and learners' needs, topic interest, cultural fitness, logistical considerations, cognitive demands, linguistic demands, quality, and exploitability. Further, to prevent demotivating effect on students from careless use of authentic materials (Harmer, 2007), the selection process should meet learners' age, level, interests, needs, goals, and expectations (Oguz and Bahar, cited in Baghban and Ambigapathy, 2011). In addition, some other criteria should be taken into account, including the relevance to syllabus and learners' needs, intrinsic interest of topic/theme, cultural appropriateness, linguistic demands, cognitive demands, logistical considerations, and exploitability (McGrath, cited in Alijani, Maghsoudi and Madani, 2014). By this way, authentic materials can motivate students and give them more stimulation in learning a language.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative case study that involves an in-depth examination of a few people in the natural setting with multiple interactive and humanistic methods. Furthermore, this study is not only able to disclose explicit behaviour, but also unveil tacit behaviour of the respondent, but it was limited by time and activity, and researcher collected detailed information using a diversity of data collection procedures during a maintained period of time (Berg, 2001; Alwasilah, 2002; Stake, cited in Creswell, 2003).

The target population was 14 students from two intermediate General English classes. To obtain the data, there were two types of instruments employed in this research; classroom observation to develop an understanding of how students responded over the course and focused group interview eliciting the main information for the study. The observation particularly focused on students' responses to the materials, such as students' eagerness or reluctance to take part in class activities. In this study the researcher contributed as the teacher and acted as participant observer of the study. Engagement in the setting permits the researcher to hear, see, and experience reality in natural setting. Further, by means of focused group interview, a large amount of information can be released in a comparatively short period of time and it also allows the researcher to observe interactions among participants, which are not observable in individual interviews (Anglea, 2009). Besides, the questioning process in the interview enables the researcher to explore into the minds of the population and coherently gauge their perspectives on issues being raised throughout the interviewing process.

The data collected from the classroom observation were documented into observation and interview sheets, classified, and interpreted (Alwasilah, 2002). The whole data was then categorized and analysed using coding method as code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data, including interview transcripts, participant observation field notes (Saldana, 2008). In the coding process, the responses are based on four aspects; the integration of reading, listening, speaking, and writing activities, the use of culinary program video, the use of materials from English course book, and the use of materials from Non-English course book. A range of score; 1 is bad, 2 is fair, 3 is good, 4 is very good, and 5 is excellent, is used to categorize the quality of students' responses during the observation and interview.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of data analysis from the observation and focused group interviews demonstrated that students overall perceived both benefits and challenges from the use of authentic materials in integrated skill based teaching. The data of students' responses on the use of authentic materials were collected and combined in a table encoded with four aspects responded as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of students' responses.

Category/ response	Language skill and skills-integrating activities	Authentic video	English course book	Non- English course book
Excellent	21%	36%	29%	36%
Very Good	36%	28%	29%	30%
Good	29%	29%	21%	29%
Fair	14%	7%	21%	5%
Bad	0%	0%	0%	0%

In general, Table 2 presents high percentages of positive responses, referring to *good, very good,* and *excellent* criteria indicated from scores 3-5 given by the students. Further, the positive responses were granted by more than 85% of the respondents to three aspects; language skill and skills-integrating activities, the use of pictures from the internet and the culinary program video, and the use of non-English-

course-book materials. Though there were, still, a few participants considering those four aspects tedious (indicated from *fair* criteria), with the highest ratio on the use of materials from the course book, there is no indication on Table 2 above that participants expressed dissatisfaction (represented by *bad* criteria) on all aspects surveyed.

Further, the interview gives additional information related to the use of authentic materials and the integration of skills during the class and as expected, the students took turn and supplement each other responses during the interview; something that may not appear in individual interview (Anglea, 2009). Most of the students agreed that they enjoyed the activities since they were able to use English in the practically actual communication context. The video was taken from a culinary program on the internet which is certainly intended for real-life communication, not for language-teaching activities (Robinson, cited in Tra, 2011; Nasta, Machmoed and Manda, 2013; Miller, cited in Firdaus, 2014).

In fact, the integration of skill-based activities was not very obvious for the students as they seemed to set their whole focus on the activities. For example, when observing the pictures given, some students did not notice that they integrate speaking and listening skills as they took turns giving opinions. Moreover, the activity actually involves writing skill as some of them took notes on what they were discussing. The discussion was also enjoyable for most of the students as they could share their ideas, make interactions with each other, and compare the results of their discussion with the reading text in the course book. Certainly, the comparison integrated the result of students' discussion involving speaking, listening, and writing skills and their reading skill. It can be noticed that the integration of both the main and the accessorial skills, such as grammar and pronunciation, prompted by the use of authentic materials reflects a form of communication comparable to the actual one (Tajzad and Ostovar-Namaghi, 2014).

In addition, the use of culinary program video retrieved from the internet is also considered effective as it could attract students' attention and could motivate them to be more active during the activity. This condition supports the perception that authentic materials can be a motivating force for learners and can encourage them to learn better (Peacock, 1997; Gilmore, 2007; Tra, 2011; Al Azri and Al-rashdi, 2014; Tajzad and Ostovar-Namaghi, 2014). Such notion can be seen from students' facial and verbal expressions as they were watching the video and their lively participation during discussion by giving opinion, implication, and prediction related to

the content of the video. Several students also responded that the video stimulated them to try the foods reviewed in the video, while others mentioned that the video provided remarkable information that they have not acquired before. Overall, all students responded that from the video they could learn about how English is used in the 'real world', which in this case is dealing with food review, vocabularies related to food ingredients, tastes, and cooking procedures.

However, some problems are still found either in the activities integrating the language skills or in the use of the video as an authentic material. This condition can be implied from the lower percentages existing in the table. It can be explored further from the observation and interview that due to different pace of language development and proficiency of students, some of them tended to be more active than others during the integrated skill activities. Besides, even though most students understood general information given in the culinary program video, they still found difficulties dealing with the details. Some students mentioned that it was due to vocabularies considered unfamiliar for the students or the noise produced in the video background, or simply because the talking speed of the host or the narrator of the program is above what students can comprehend. Such conditions are truly among some common concerns related to the use of authentic materials in the classroom (Harmer, 2007; Al Azri and Al-rashdi, 2014), and therefore, instructor's prompts and guidance were still necessary to assist the students and encourage their motivation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

There are many situations in which we use more than one language skill, and for this reason alone, it is valuable to use authentic materials to support the integration of the language skills. Moreover, this study demonstrates that students will give positive responses as the authentic materials are selected properly based on their needs. Above all, integrating the skills means that teacher is working at the level of realistic communication, not just at the level of vocabulary and sentence patterns. Realistic communication is the aim of the communicative approach and it can be actualized by the use of authentic materials.

Aside from the benefits verified in this research, it is strongly recommended that practitioners employing and implementing authentic materials in integrated skill based activities make appropriate preparation for the use of authentic materials in ELT

as careless selection of authentic materials may discourage students, instead of encouraging them to understand the lesson. It is suggested that the materials selected is reviewed to ensure that they are suitable for the students need and potential problems that may arise can be altered through some strategies during the instruction. Additionally, the result also implied a need of development steps for the course book; one of which by adopting authentic materials considered more attractive for the learning process and genuine to real-life practices.

REFERENCES

Alijani, S., Maghsoudi, M., Madani, D. 2014. 'The Effect of Authentic vs. Non-authentic Materials on Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Ability', *IJALEL*, 3(3), pp. 151–156.

Alwasilah, A.C. 2002. *Pokoknya Kualitatif*. Bandung: Pustaka Jaya.

Anglea, K.A. 2009. *Rediscovering Purpose: The Power of Reflective Inquiry as Professional Development*. Cardinal Stritch University.

Al Azri, R.H.,Al-rashdi, M.H. 2014. 'The Effect Of Using Authentic Materials In Teaching', *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 3(10), pp. 249–254.

Baghban, Z.Z.V., Ambigapathy, P. 2011. 'A Review on the Effectiveness of Using Authentic Materials in ESP Courses', *English for Specific Purposes World*, 10(31).

Berg, B.L. 2001. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 4th edn. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Creswell, J.W. 2003. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd edn. California: SAGE Publications.

Erbaggio, P. *et al.* 2012. 'Enhancing Student Engagement Through Online Authentic Materials', *The IALLT Journal*, 42(2), pp. 27–51. Available at: http://www.iallt.org/iallt_journal/enhancing_

Far, M.M. 2008. 'On the Relationship between ESP and EGP: A General Perspective', *English for Specific Purposes World*, 7(1(17)), pp. 1–11.

Firdaus, M. 2014. *The Use of Authentic Materials in Promoting Vocabulary in ESL Classroom*. Universiti Teknologi Mara.

Gilmore, A. 2007. 'Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning', *Language Teaching*, 40(2), p. 97.

Harmer, J. 2007. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. 4th edn. London: Longman ELT.

Huessien, A.A.A. 2012. 'Difficulties Faced by Iraqi Teachers of English in Using Authentic Materials in the Foreign Language Classrooms', *Al-Fatih Journal*, (50), pp. 22–39.

Khaniya, T.R. 2006. 'Use of Authentic Materials in EFL Classrooms', *Journal of NELTA*, 11(1–2), pp. 17–23.

Kilickaya, F. 2004. 'Authentic Materials and Cultural

Content in EFL Classrooms', *The Internet TESL Journal*, X(7).

Lamri, C.E. 2016. '*An Introduction to English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*'. Abou Bekr Belkaid University.

Lin, H. 2004. 'An Integrated-skill Approach and Response to L2 Writing in College English Course', *College English: Issues and Trends*, 1, pp. 71–88.

Mudra, H. 2014. 'The Utilization of Authentic Materials in Indonesian EFL Contexts : An Exploratory Study on Learners ` Perceptions', *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 2(2), pp. 197–210.

Nasta, M., Machmoed, H.A. and Manda, M.L. 2013. 'The Effect Of The Use Of Authentic Materials On Students ' Perception And Achievement In Teaching Listening Comprehension'. Available at: http://pasca.unhas.ac.id/jurnal/files/a3514d1e4e90bcac d086e7c4a759da41.pdf.

Nunan, D. 1991. *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Peacock, M. 1997. 'The effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners', *ELT Journal*, 51(April), pp. 144–156.

Saldana, J. 2008. 'An Introduction to Codes and Coding'. Available at: https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/24614_01_Saldana_Ch_01.pdf.

Shrum, J.L., Glisan, E.W. 2000. *Teacher's handbook: contextualized language instruction*. 2nd edn. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Tajzad, M., Ostovar-Namaghi, S.A. 2014. 'Exploring EFL learners' perceptions of integrated skills approach: A grounded theory', *English Language Teaching*, 7(11), pp. 92–98.

The University of Western Australia (no date) *What is the difference between General English and English for Academic Purposes?* Available at: https://ipoint.uwa.edu.au/app/answers/detail/a_id/1530 /~/difference-between-general-english-and-english-for-academic-purposes (Accessed: 3 February 2018).

Tra, D.T.T. 2011. 'Using authentic materials to motivate second year English major students at Tay Bac University during speaking lessons'. Available at: https://www2.gsid.nagoya-u.ac.jp/blog/anda/files/2011/08/55-do-thanh-tra-viet-nam.pdf.