
THE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract

This qualitative research aimed to find out the teachers' perception toward the use of authentic materials in teaching English to young learners at the Islamic elementary schools in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The participants of this research were English teachers from several Islamic elementary schools in Palembang. They were selected through the implementation of a purposeful sampling technique. The research data were obtained through one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions. This research utilized thematic analysis procedures to analyze the interview data and member checking to validate the accuracy of the findings. The results indicated that the teachers had a positive perception toward the use of authentic materials in their English classroom activities and tasks. Using authentic materials helped improve the students' language ability and their enthusiasm for learning English. However, the teachers still faced several difficulties in selecting the appropriate existing authentic materials for their students. It implied that teachers need to make some adaptations to using existing authentic materials to attain greater appropriateness from the materials to suit their students' specific needs and characteristics to facilitate effective English learning.

Keywords: authentic materials, teachers' difficulty, teachers' perception, young learners

Introduction

Teaching English in primary schools relates to an attempt to provide students between the age of 6-12 years with adequate exposure to basic skills in the English language (Anggraini et al., 2021; Hidayat et al., 2022; Holandyah et al., 2022; Marzulina et al., 2021; Oktavia et al., 2022).

Gordon (2007) stated that elementary school students have a period called the golden age, and they have a critical period, the period when children can learn anything easily. During this period, the brains are still flexible so they can learn everything, including languages. Moreover, Nunan and Linse (2005) argue that students in elementary school have large memory to memorize everything they learn. Thus, this period is believed as the best moment to gain knowledge for foreign language development. They have a great opportunity to develop their vocabulary and have native-like pronunciation. However, teaching young learners require teachers to recognize their learners' needs. By identifying their needs the teachers can adapt various factors in the classroom to have the greatest impact on young learner learning

In English language teaching and learning program, instructional materials serve as a key component and the basis of the language input and practice for students (Richards, 2005). Good instruction is supported by good materials, so before starting the teaching process, teachers prepare appropriate materials to deliver lessons and motivate students in learning (Erlina et al., 2021; Erlina et al., 2019; Erlina et al., 2018; Marzulina et al., 2019; Mukminin et al., 2021). As a facilitator between students and learning materials, teachers need to recognize the learners' needs and consider various factors in the classroom in selecting materials to have the greatest impact on young learner learning. Before starting the teaching program, teachers prepare appropriate materials to deliver lessons and motivate students in learning. It could help teachers deliver lessons to their students successfully (Chanda, Phiri, & Nkocha, 2000). In other words, the quality of learning is highly dependent on student motivation and teacher creativity in preparing and delivering the materials (Goria, Speicher, & Stollhans, 2016).

Several studies acknowledge that the use of authentic materials brings positive impacts on students' English learning. They help students to understand more about English in a real language context as the materials are directly designed for native speakers. Authentic materials can be used in a classroom for the same function as they have been designed for. They are used to contextualize language learning, and the use of authentic teaching materials makes the learners more easily achieve the learning targets. They help students to be more effective in increasing their communication ability in the target language and be more motivated in learning English (Amor, 2002, Gebhard, 1996; Mishan, 2005; Nandrag & Buzarna-Tihenea, 2017). In addition, authentic materials and media can reinforce students in the direct relationship between the language classroom and the outside. Using authentic materials helps students understand more about English in a real language context. Besides those benefits, authentic materials also make challenges for teachers and students as they often contained difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items, and complex language structures, which caused a burden for the teacher in lower-level classes. Considering the benefits and limitedness of utilizing authentic materials in language teaching and learning program, the researchers were interested in investigating the use of English authentic materials for young learners according to the teachers' perspective.

A preliminary study conducted at four Islamic elementary schools in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia, showed that the teachers used authentic materials in teaching English, like English storybooks, songs, comics, birthday cards, invitation letters, videos, and realia. They found that authentic materials were fascinating for their students. They also mentioned that they could easily get authentic materials for teaching English on the Internet and YouTube. It relates to several studies that reported that authentic materials like realia, printing, and songs that students often used make students fun and more motivated in learning (Akbari & Razavi, 2016; Anam, Munir, & Anam, 2019; Primadonna & Prastiyowati (2018; Sari, 2016; Silvani, 2018). They indicated that using

authentic material could provide authentic language inputs and give positive effects on teachers and students. All in all, the use of authentic materials is interesting for the students to study and easy for the teachers to access. Therefore, the researchers were interested in digging deeper into teachers' perceptions of the use of authentic materials in teaching English to young learners at the Islamic elementary schools in Palembang.

Literature Review

Teaching English to young learners

Teaching English to young learners involves more than merely teaching language skills. The students need to develop a series of characteristics to enable them to fit into the environment in the classroom. Young learners learn from their environment by developing what they have and will interact with what they meet around them (Suyanto, 2007). Therefore, English teachers should create active learning conditions and develop techniques to facilitate learning more effectively. In addition, Harmer (2007) argued that teachers of young learners need to spend time on how their students think and operate. The teachers need to be able to pick their students' current interests to motivate them to learn English.

A teacher can make the teaching and learning process more interesting by using authentic materials to stimulate students to learn the materials. According to Scott and Ytreberg (1990), there are definite characteristics of young learners which are relevant to language teaching and learning and should be considered by teachers. They love physical activities in learning and learn best when they enjoy themselves. They are enthusiastic and positive about learning, but have short attention and concentration span and are easily distracted by the stimuli around them. Considering these points, teachers should present their language teaching in an enjoyable learning atmosphere to make the teaching English process more stimulating and enjoyable for young learners. The activities should be simple enough for them to understand what is expected from them, and the tasks should be within their abilities. It needs to be achievable but at the same time, sufficiently stimulating for them to feel satisfied with their work. The activity should be orally based indeed, with young learners listening activities will take up a large proportion of the class time. In conclusion, teachers should prepare and present appropriate instructional materials in teaching English to young learners to achieve their learning objectives optimally.

Authentic materials in English teaching and learning

Authentic materials are not purposely created for educational language purposes. The materials contain the real situation for real-life purposes and communication of native speakers that refers to spoken and written materials. They are not created specifically to be used in the classroom, but they make excellent learning tools for students precisely because they are authentic, such as printed materials, video, and audio materials students encounter in their daily lives, such as change-of-address forms, job applications, menus, voice mail messages, radio programs, and videos (Mishan, 2005). In addition, authentic materials can make students improve their communication abilities. Amor (2002) stated that applying authentic materials can improve communication ability and help students more effectively improve their communication skills in the target language. Martinez (2002)

suggested that teachers may use authentic materials for the learners to listen for the gist of the information presented to provide the opportunity and encourage students to read for pleasure, especially definite topics of their interest.

Several classifications of authentic materials for teaching and learning programs as described by Gebhard (1996). First, authentic watch-listening materials, such as quiz shows, comedy shows, cartoons, TV commercials, news clips, soap operas, songs, radio commercials, songs, sales pitches, documentaries, and audio-recorded professional short stories and novels. Second, original visual materials, like paintings, pictures from magazines, photographs, children's artwork, inkblots, silhouettes, wordless road signs, wordless picture books, slides, X-rays, stamps, stick figures, and pictures of postcards. Third, authentic printed materials, for example, astrology columns, obituary columns, advice columns, bus timetables, road signs, sports reports, song lyrics, cereal boxes, restaurant menus, candy wrappers, maps, comic books, TV guides, sports reports, greeting cards, pins with messages, phone books, university catalogs, tourist information brochures, newspaper articles, film advertisements. Then, realia ("real world" objects), such as telephones, clocks, dolls, telephones, folded paper, coins, and currency.

Selecting authentic materials should be considered properly by the teachers. The selection should be in line with the needs and the aims that should be attained from the teaching and learning process. To choose appropriate authentic materials for teaching, teachers can follow some criteria. Nuttal (1996) defined three main criteria for choosing authentic materials in the language classroom. First, the suitability of the content. This criterion means that the materials should interest the students, suit their needs, and motivate them to learn. Second, exploitability, this criterion refers to how the materials can be used to develop the student's competence as learners. A text which cannot be exploited for teaching purposes cannot be used in the classroom. Only because it is in English does not mean it can be beneficial. Next, the readability. This criterion refers to the difficulty and complexity of the material. The materials should not contain too difficult or demanding words and structures. It must suit the learners' level. Otherwise, it might demotivate the learners learning. Furthermore, the use of authentic materials provides many advantages for students in the learning process. McGrath (2002) stated that students benefit from exposure to real language being used in a real context. They would be highly motivated to learn and get a sense of achievement.

Methodology

Research design and approach of the study

This research used a qualitative method with descriptive analysis as a research design. Qualitative research attempts to explain a phenomenon of what the research participant experiences, such as behavior, motivation, opinion, reaction, and others (Creswell, 2012). In qualitative analysis, data is gathered and analyzed using words or images rather than numbers. This research was carried out in the form of a case study. A case study is a problem to be studied, which will reveal an in-depth understanding of a case or bounded system, which involves understanding an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2012). The researchers applied a qualitative case study design as the purpose of this research was to find out the perception of English teachers in using authentic materials in teaching English to young learners.

Site and Participants

The participants of this research were four selected English teachers from four Islamic elementary schools in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. A purposeful sampling with a convenience case strategy was applied in this research. Convenience sampling involves selecting easy access and inexpensive cases to study (Dornyei, 2007). In this research, the researchers selected the teachers based on some criteria of having at least two years of English teaching experience in elementary school or English for young learners and having experience in using authentic materials in teaching English, and being willing to participate in this research. Finally, the researchers had four English teachers as the participants in this research to find out their perception of using authentic materials in teaching English to their elementary school students.

Data collection and analysis

The researchers used one-on-one interviews to obtain data about the perception of English teachers in using authentic materials for young learners. In the interview process, the researchers used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The interview consists of twelve questions related to the teacher's perception of using authentic material for young learners. The researchers asked each participant the questions and recorded the answers, and then transcribed them in English.

Then, the obtained data of teachers' perception of using authentic materials for teaching English to young learners were analyzed by using thematic analysis through six steps of data analysis, namely compiling and preparing the data, reading the data as a whole, analyzing in detail with the coding process, creating a data description, explaining the information that has been analyzed, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2012). In analyzing the teachers' perception of using authentic materials in teaching English to young learners, first, the researchers prepared information from the interview and took notes on the interview material. Second, the researchers read the data to find out relevant information. Third, the researchers analyzed the data in detail with the coding process and made some code based on the data gained from the interview. Fourth, the researchers created a data description by using code that was divided into themes, and the researchers tried to look for themes that were appropriate for the codes. Fifth, the researchers described the information that has been analyzed. Finally, the researchers interpreted the perception of teachers in using authentic materials in teaching English to young learners.

In this research, the researchers used member checking to validate the accuracy of the research findings, in which the researchers provided opportunities for our research participants to check the accuracy of the data. The researchers gave them the final report from the interviews to get feedback from them about the accuracy of the results. In short, member checking was utilized to double-check the credibility of data in this research.

Findings

The data gained from the interviews were analyzed through the implementation of thematic analysis to figure out teachers' perceptions of using authentic materials for teaching English to young learners. The descriptions of data analysis results are as follows:

Table 1. *The themes and codes acquired from the result of the interview data analysis*

Themes	Codes
Improving students' language ability	The use of authentic materials helped improve students' pronunciation. The use of authentic materials was beneficial for developing students' vocabulary. The use of authentic materials helped develop students' listening skills. The use of authentic materials helped develop students' reading skills.
Increasing students' learning enthusiasm	The teachers felt that their students were more enthusiastic about learning English. The teachers felt that their students were enthusiastically doing classroom activities and tasks.
Facing difficulty in selecting appropriate materials	The teachers felt hard to choose appropriate materials that matched the student's specific needs and language levels.

The themes and codes collected from the qualitative data, as listed in the table above were described below to provide more explanation on teachers' perception of the use of authentic materials for young learners at the Islamic elementary school in Palembang. The teachers perceived authentic materials helped improve the students' language ability and motivation in learning, and the teachers still had some difficulties selecting appropriate materials for young learners.

The use of authentic materials helped improve students' language ability

Based on the data obtained from the interview, the students learned the correct pronunciation and accent of words after they listened to the original sound of native speakers through songs, movies, and audio. For example, the teachers played a short movie with native speaker pronunciation and asked their students to follow how the native speaker pronounced the words or phrases repeatedly. Then, the students could practice and imitate the native speaker's pronunciation. This activity also helped students in developing their English vocabulary. One teacher, H said *"I use a short movie in teaching. Watching this movie really helps students to practice listening skills because it is directly from the English people who say the words in the movie, and then students' pronunciation of the word is also correct.* In addition, another teacher, W mentioned, *"I often use English songs in teaching vocabulary, so the students can practice their listening and pronunciation. They can remember the words faster."*

Using authentic materials was also beneficial for increasing students' reading skills. Most of the teachers used English storybooks in teaching English. For instance, a teacher, D used English storybooks for students' reading activities, vocabulary, and grammar learning. After reading the storybook, students got information about the story and learned some words and grammatical items. In every meeting, the student can remember several new words from the story they read. Then, it helped improve students' reading skills. It was related to the teacher, L said *"Yes, I use an English story that I download from Internet. My students are interested in reading it because the story contains lots of pictures, not full of sentences. As they read the story, they also learn the vocabularies used in the story."*

The use of authentic materials increased students' enthusiasm for learning

The teachers felt that the use of authentic materials increased students' enthusiasm for learning English. Most teachers described that they often used authentic materials in the forms of comics and songs that contained short and easy-to-read sentences with interesting visual images and text cues to illustrate the character and context. These illustrations were also helpful for students to identify meanings and emotions through the images in the comics. The students demonstrated curiosity in learning, such as asking questions, giving responses appropriately, and having fun doing classroom activities and tasks. They were interested in the materials and not sleepy during the lesson. Before using authentic materials, students were bored easily learning. Some of them fell asleep in the classroom. The class was noisy because some of them did not pay attention to the lesson and were busy with unrelated activities. It was related to what the teacher, D mentioned *"When I use comics, my students become more enthusiastic about taking the lessons. They are having more fun in learning English"*.

Teachers' difficulty in selecting appropriate authentic materials

The teachers felt hard to match the materials with the need and language levels of their students as most of their classes consist of 25-30 students with different levels of English ability. They had many students in the class with various characters and different levels of language abilities. Some students were active and dominant in the classroom, while others kept quiet during the lesson. Some students could understand the materials, while other students could not deal with those materials and finally lost their focus on learning. They did not understand what the speakers say in the audio. As teacher H described *"During teaching and learning process, I can see that some of the students with lower level of English language ability are losing their focus in learning, so I feel that the materials are too difficult for them. It means that I have to select more appropriate materials for them. The students here are not all good in English."*

In addition, the teachers felt that the structure of authentic materials was more complex. Some sentences contained complex English language structure and vocabulary, so it was quite difficult for students to understand those sentences. As the teacher, D said *"Mostly, I see the sentences in authentic materials are more complex for students like sentences in speeches and subtitles in movies."* It indicated that choosing suitable authentic materials for teaching English to young learners was quite challenging for the teachers. Material evaluation, selection, and adaptation were needed to maximize the benefits of authentic materials for students learning.

Discussion

The findings indicated that using authentic materials for teaching English to young learners helped improve students' language ability and enthusiasm for learning English. However, the teachers also described that they still have some difficulties in selecting appropriate materials for all students in their classes.

Authentic materials improved the students' language ability, particularly in listening and reading skills. The students got the correct pronunciation, dialect, and accent of words after listening to the original sound of native speakers in English songs, movies, and audio. Moreover, the use of authentic materials also increased the reading skills of students. The students gained new knowledge

and new vocabulary after reading a comic. This finding was in line with [Giyarta, Rais, and Wahyuni \(2016\)](#), which reported that authentic materials improved the students' listening skills and classroom situation. The use of authentic materials brought some benefits to the classroom learning atmosphere, for example, the class was more active and alive. Also, [Halim, Mukminatien, and Anugerahwati \(2018\)](#) found that authentic materials would improve students' skills in listening, help them practice listening to various kinds of listening materials, improve their understanding of how a word has articulated and pronounced by native speakers of English.

The use of authentic materials increased the students' motivation to learn English. It was indicated by the increase in students' engagement in some activities. They were more enthusiastic about learning and doing their tasks. They were more curious about learning and were no longer sleepy during the learning process. Before using authentic materials, students were bored easily as the materials were only from the textbook, Authentic materials made students more interested in learning through audio and videos in practicing several expressions for having a conversation in English. This finding was in line with what [Ahmed \(2017\)](#) has reported, authentic materials played a significant role in motivating students to learn. Students can keep in touch with the original English for example they read the reading materials from native speakers, such as letters, cards, folktales, and many others. Moreover, the use of authentic materials could serve as helpful media in improving the students' participation in listening and reading activities as they were interested in the materials. In addition, research by [Sari \(2016\)](#) highlighted that the use of authentic materials in the English language classroom seemed to have a positive effect on students' motivation. Authentic materials were more interesting than artificial ones, such as course books, which were intentionally created for language learning purposes, while authentic materials might promote the real language used by native speakers of English.

Although the teachers realized the importance of using authentic materials in teaching English to young learners, they also mentioned that they still had some difficulties in preparing the appropriate materials for all students. Selecting the topic and matching the materials to the students' needs, characteristics, and language levels were quite challenging for the teachers. Moreover, the teachers felt that the vocabulary and structure used in the authentic materials are more complex than in the textbooks. Some of the vocabulary and grammatical items used in the materials might be not relevant to the student's immediate needs. They found it difficult to decode texts presented and discussed in the classroom. It was also in line with what [Anam, Munir, and Anam \(2019\)](#) reported in their research. They mentioned that teachers had to prepare their instructional materials. They need to select and filter the authentic materials to ensure they would be appropriate for their students. Moreover, the teachers have to match the student level with the authentic materials because the Indonesian students' level is different from the students' where the authentic materials are produced as when native speakers use the materials. In addition, [Erlina, Desvitasari, Marzulina, and Risfina \(2020\)](#) suggested that English teachers had to improve their instructional delivery by using various teaching methods and supporting materials, such as songs, videos, and games taken from different learning sources like YouTube, Google, and others because they can learn from YouTube how to have a good pronunciation and be confident in speaking English. In addition, [Richards \(2005\)](#) stated that authentic materials often contained difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items, and complex language structures, which caused a burden for the teacher in lower-level classes. Furthermore, [Martinez \(2002\)](#) also claimed that authentic materials may be too culturally biased and that too many structures are mixed, causing lower levels to have a hard time decoding the texts. Therefore, teachers need to do materials selection and adaptation to using authentic materials in teaching English to

young learners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this research indicated that the teachers had a positive perception toward the use of authentic materials in teaching English to young learners at Islamic elementary schools in Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. Using authentic English materials helped improve students' language ability and increase their enthusiasm for learning English. However, the teachers still faced some difficulties in selecting the appropriate existing authentic materials for their students. Related to these findings, English teachers are expected to use authentic materials more often in teaching English to young learners as a source of their instructional materials. Then, evaluation, selection, and adaptation of the existing materials were needed to maximize the benefits of using authentic materials for students' English learning. These are required to make sure they will better suit the student's needs and characteristics. Schools should provide their teachers with supporting facilities and media for enhancing the benefits of using authentic materials in language teaching and learning programs. Additionally, future researchers might explore deeper information about the use of authentic materials in English language teaching and learn in various contexts.

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