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Exploring the Use of Authentic Materials for Reading Activity at A

Vocational School

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Abstract

This research explores teacher strategies in adapting authentic materials for reading instruction at vocational schools, identifying challenges faced by teachers and students. The study aims to investigate these strategies and challenges among tenth-grade AKL students at SMK Sangatta Utara during the 2023/2024 academic year. This qualitative case study examines the use of authentic materials in reading instruction at a vocational school. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and field notes with one English teacher and six tenth-grade students. Techniques included purposive sampling and Creswell's (2014) data analysis method for organizing, coding, and interpreting findings. The study found that teachers employed strategies for selecting and adapting authentic materials for reading instruction, such as advertisements and articles, that were relevant to students' interests. Challenges included limited internet access, insufficient learning media, and students' difficulties with vocabulary and engagement. Teachers mitigated these challenges through personal hotspots, group activities, and additional support. This study reveals effective strategies for using authentic materials in teaching reading, highlighting the benefits of relevance and collaboration. However, challenges like limited internet access and multimedia resources persist. Recommendations include improving technological infrastructure, providing teacher training, and fostering local collaborations to enhance the use of authentic materials and support student engagement and learning outcome.

Keywords: Authentic materials; Reading instruction; Teacher strategies.

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1. Introduction

Teaching reading skills in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has long been acknowledged as critical to building learners' language competency and cultural competence (Dashkina & Dashkina, 2018). Reading is an important doorway for language learners to expand their vocabulary, comprehend grammatical structures, and become more culturally aware. Regardless of its accepted benefits, the selection of instructional materials has a considerable impact on the success of EFL education. Pedagogic materials, which are



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

frequently developed for educational clarity and simplicity of comprehension, have long dominated classroom instruction (Sheldon, 2018). Authentic resources, on the other hand, provide realistic and culturally rich language input that replicates learners' real-world experiences (Tomlinson, 2012).

However, incorporating actual resources into EFL teaching approaches brings potential as well as obstacles. Critics contend that real texts can present linguistic and cognitive problems, especially for learners with lower skill levels (McGrath, 2013). Despite these limitations, advocates emphasize the motivational and linguistic benefits of authentic materials, which not only improve language competency but also promote cultural knowledge and participation (Badri & Salehi, 2017; Kim, 2015).

Recent research highlights the beneficial effects of authentic content on EFL learners. Namaziandost et al. (2022) found that exposure to real materials greatly enhances reading comprehension and reduces anxiety among Iranian EFL students. Similarly, Al-Dersi (2020) discovered that authentic materials improve reading comprehension when compared to non-authentic materials in Omani EFL schools.

Given the ongoing controversy and possible benefits, there is an increased need to investigate effective techniques for incorporating real materials into EFL reading instruction. This study intends to contribute to this conversation by looking into the tactics used and issues faced by teachers when employing real resources for reading activities in vocational schools. Specifically, focusing on SMK Sangatta Utara enables an analysis of best practices that promote both educational and occupational goals.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of authentic material usage in EFL instruction, with a focus on the consequences for improving reading abilities and preparing students for real-world language use in occupational settings. The findings aim to inform educational practices by providing practical recommendations for improving the inclusion of real resources into EFL reading instruction.

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Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In this study, a case study research approach was used to investigate how teachers use real materials when teaching reading at a vocational school in Sangatta Utara. The case study design was chosen based on the school's specific characteristics and the phenomenon under inquiry, with an emphasis on understanding instructional methodologies and the obstacles that both teachers and students encounter while employing real resources. This study focuses on collecting more detailed data from the object under study in order to address existing issues. the researcher only takes the data without changes.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. The goal is a holistic picture and depth of understanding rather than a numeric analysis of data (Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen, 2018). In short, this study collected the data in the form of words rather than numbers. The researcher collects, analyzes and describes the data from in-depth interview with the EFL teacher-students.

2.2. Research Subject

In this study, the research subject was selected through purposive samplings. According to Etikan (2016) the technique of purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, is the deliberate selection of a participant based on the informant's personal characteristics. It is a non-random technique that requires neither underlying theory not a fixed number of participants. Purposive sampling is where a researcher selects a sample based on the needs about the study. In line with Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) purposive sampling is the use of researcher judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on preceding information was provide the data they need. The subjects of this study are an English teacher and six students of grade tenth at a Vocational School in Sangatta Utara, East Kalimantan.



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

2.3. Research Instruments

Several instruments were utilized in this study to collect and analyze data effectively:

2.3.1 Observation Checklist

An observation checklist was created to systematically document teacher behaviors, student interactions, and instructional procedures when reading real texts. Observations were carried on four times starting March 25 and April 1, 2024 to capture differences in teaching methods and student responses. The observations were conducted during the learning activities. By monitoring the participants in their reading classes, the researcher can learn about how the instructor employs real materials to teach reading and how students react to these materials. The observation guide can also assist the researcher in identifying any potential obstacles or hurdles encountered by both the teacher and the students while employing real materials. This information can help to shape future teaching tactics and improve the utilization of real materials. Additionally, the data collected through the observation guide, along with semi-structured interviews, can provide a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

2.3.2 Interview Protocol

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument by the researchers. A semi-structured interview is a meeting where the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. The interviews were conducted on April 1, 2024, after the researchers had completed their classroom observations. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain insights into the use of authentic teaching materials in reading activity. The interview questions focused on the teacher's teaching strategies, the selection and adaptation of authentic teaching materials, classroom implementation, personal experiences in using authentic teaching materials, and the challenges faced along with strategies to overcome them. The interview questions were adapted from designed by Ramadhani (2023) to collect data about teacher-students' demographic data, the current classes, use of authentic materials in reading activity. However, some items are delected because they are unrelated to the present study and some others are added to suit the need of the data in this study.



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

2.4. Techniques of Collecting Data

In this research, data collection was carried out through observations and interviews. Classroom observations took place over four meetings on March 25, 26, 29, and April 1, 2024, focusing on the teachers' use of authentic materials in reading instruction. The researcher observed teaching strategies, noting how teachers selected and adapted materials to meet students' needs and adjusted them based on language skills and comprehension levels. Additionally, observations included monitoring student responses and interactions, as well as identifying challenges encountered by teachers, such as technical teaching difficulties or student reactions (Woodside, 2010). Interviews were conducted using purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell., p. 206). These interviews explored teaching strategies, personal experiences with authentic materials, challenges faced, and strategies used to support student understanding. Interviews were conducted separately, with the teacher interviewed in a private setting and students interviewed in class, facilitating in-depth discussions in Indonesian to ensure clarity and depth of information. Field notes were also taken during observations, interviews, and discussions to capture contextual details and insights crucial for comprehensive data analysis.

2.5. Techniques of Data Analysis

To analyze the data involving observation and interviews the researcher applies Creswell's (2014) theory. This includes preparing and organizing the collected data, exploring and coding it, generating descriptions and themes through coding, presenting and reporting qualitative findings, interpreting these findings, and validating their accuracy.

In order to prepare and organize the data, the researcher categorized interview results and then transcribed audio recordings. The researcher then studied the data and labeled it using codes from a coding system. After that, the researcher thoroughly reviewed the data to establish descriptive themes. Moving on to representing and reporting qualitative findings, the researcher presented and reported the findings, interpreting them, reflecting on them, comparing them to



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

existing literature, and making limitations and recommendations. Finally, to ensure the accuracy of the findings, the researcher conducted interviews and documentation.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings Based on observation Results

The findings from direct observations of reading class activities are given. The observations were designed to determine how the teacher employed practical authentic materials in reading instruction and how students responded. The observations revealed several key findings, including:

a.) Teacher's Teaching Strategies

Based on the observation, the teacher used two strategies, including in selecting and adapting authentic materials taught in class activity.

1. Selection of Authentic Materials

Based on observations, the teacher used strategies to select authentic materials that were relevant to the student's interests and appropriate for their comprehension levels. Advertisements were chosen because they are common and relatable, containing well-known products such as snacks, drinks, shampoo, and electronic gadgets that piqued students' interest. Furthermore, an article regarding the future role of solar energy was used to provide insights into a worldwide issue while also teaching about technology's impact on society and the environment. The teacher made certain that the topic was relevant and that the language was straightforward and clear, making the material interesting accessible, and effective for learning.

2. Adaptation of Authentic Materials

In addition to careful selection, the teacher also adapted the authentic materials to fit the students' language skills and needs. The materials were modified to align with the students' language proficiency and to support their understanding of the content. While these adaptations were effective in ensuring that students could comprehend the materials, they also had limitations. For instance, simplifying language in advertisements may have removed some of the authentic linguistic features that are crucial for developing higher-level language skills.



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN: 2655-9323 Section: Research Article

Section: Research A Page: 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

Additionally, while providing explanations for unfamiliar terms helped students understand the content, it may have reduced opportunities for students to develop their inferencing skills. Therefore, while these adaptations made the materials more accessible, they may have also limited the depth of students' language learning

b.) Implementation of Teaching Materials

During the research session, researchers observed teachers using authentic teaching materials in class, adjusting them to students' needs and comprehension levels. While these adjustments were generally effective, they had varying impacts on student engagement. For example, the use of real-life advertisements stimulated lively discussions among students, indicating high engagement. However, some students found the materials less engaging when the content was too familiar or lacked novelty. This suggests that while authentic materials can enhance engagement, their effectiveness depends on their relevance to students' interests and prior knowledge. Future implementations could explore more varied and culturally diverse materials to maintain and even increase engagement.

c) Students Responses

In this observation, the researchers looked at how students responded to authentic educational materials. This involved observing teacher-student interactions and finding additional tactics used to improve student understanding.

1. Student Responses to Authentic Teaching Materials

Students are involved with the materials by analyzing advertising pictures and identifying product names and purposes, as well as participating enthusiastically and actively in discussions about the advertisements. However, it is important to consider that these observations were based on a purposive sample, which may not represent the broader student population. This could introduce potential bias in interpreting the overall effectiveness of authentic materials. A more randomized approach in future studies could provide a clearer picture of how different types of students engage with these materials. Despite this limitation, the current findings suggest that authentic materials can significantly enhance student



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

participation, though this might vary depending on individual student characteristics and

learning contexts.

2. Interactions Between Teachers and Students.

Teachers communicated effectively with students throughout their lessons, giving clear explanations and encouraging them to ask questions. For example, in the solar energy, the teacher answered students' questions about technical vocabulary and provided clear explanations to ensure that all students understood the material. Additionally, teachers provided students with helpful feedback on their assessments of advertisements or articles, reinforcing learning objectives and encouraging additional inquiry. For example, following group presentations on advertisement analyses, the teacher provided feedback on students' interpretations and pushed them to have a better grasp of advertising strategies.

3.2 Findings Based on Interview Results

Based on the interviews, the researcher identified several strategies utilized by teachers, as well as the obstacles that both teachers and students experience when using real resources for teaching reading.

a) Teacher strategies for using authentic materials in teaching reading

1. Source of Authentic Materials

Based on the interview data provided, the following statements regarding authentic material sources are presented, teachers reported, "I usually get authentic materials from the internet" Participants showed a preference for using authentic materials such as advertisements and articles to enhance student involvement and relevance in reading tasks. Supporting this statement, a teacher stated, "Authentic materials like advertisements bring real-life contexts into the classroom, making reading activities more meaningful for students"

It showed that teachers utilized a variety of authentic materials sourced from the internet, emphasizing the importance of relevance and real-life context in engaging students and enhancing the learning experience.



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

2. Adaptation to Students' Needs

Based on the results of the interview, the teacher highlighted the importance of adapting authentic material to students' level of understanding. The teacher notes that, "I modify the complexity of authentic materials to suit different learner abilities, ensuring all students can participate actively in reading tasks"

Strategies such as using small groups for analysis and discussion, as well as focusing on developing new vocabulary, serve as evidence that teachers strive to ensure that the selected materials can accommodate individual students' needs in learning English the teacher stated ", 'I used a group-based teaching method to analyze advertisement images and articles, which included discussions, finding new vocabulary, and presenting the discussion results in the next session." This statement highlights teachers' commitment to adapting their teaching approach to be more effective and relevant according to students' abilities and needs.

b) Implementation in Learning

Based on the interview about how teachers implemented authentic materials in reading instruction, the following findings were revealed.

1. Selection of Authentic Materials

In the context of implementing authentic materials in the classroom, teachers expressed, "I chose learning content that was relevant to the students' interests and language level to enhance their motivation to learn". This strategy aimed not only to maintain students' interest but also to strengthen the connection between language learning and their everyday lives.

2. Small Group Organizing

The teacher also highlighted the importance of dividing students into groups during lessons so that they could interact and collaborate with each other. This approach greatly supported students in actively engaging with and easily understanding the presented material. The teacher stated,



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

"I used small group strategies to analyze and discuss authentic materials. Each group had specific tasks such as summarizing the content or identifying key vocabulary, allowing students to collaborate and gain a deeper understanding".

This approach promoted more intensive social interaction among students, improve their comprehension of the authentic materials used.

Group work emerges as a favored method for utilizing authentic materials. Teacher highlighted, "Group discussions on article interpretations help students to understand different perspectives and strengthen their reading comprehension skills"

3. Vocabulary Development

The teacher also highlighted the importance of vocabulary development, stating, " I focused on developing new vocabulary encountered in authentic materials, providing contextual exercises so that students could understand and apply this vocabulary in relevant contexts." This demonstrated the teacher's commitment to expanding students' vocabulary in a practical and meaningful manner.

5. Evaluation and Feedback

Finally, the teacher provided systematic feedback, teacher explained, "Afterwards, I gave feedback to students on their progress, evaluating through group discussions, written assignments, and reflection sessions, to ensure that they not only understood but could also apply the authentic materials effectively." This approach emphasized the importance of ongoing evaluation to ensure that learning from authentic materials not only improved understanding but also students' ability to apply it in real-life contexts.

c) Challenges Faced by Teachers in Using Authentic Materials

Based on the interview results, here were some challenges or difficulties faced by teachers when using authentic materials in teaching reading.

1. Limited Internet Access

Limited internet access poses a significant barrier to accessing diverse and current authentic materials. there was not internet network available, so teachers only used print media.



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

This limited the variety of materials that could be used by teachers and affected the richness of students' learning experiences when learning took place in the classroom. The teacher stated,

"Limited internet access affects our ability to include current materials such as online news

articles in the lessons."

Based on the explanation above, schools needed to meet teachers' needs in implementing authentic materials, such as providing internet access. This way, teachers could develop their teaching materials to make the learning environment more interesting and adjusted to students' needs.

2. Limitations of learning media

The limited of learning media was also noted in this study. Insufficient educational media could reduce students' chances to interact and actively participate in the learning process. Moreover, without adequate media, teachers may have difficulty conveying content effectively and interestingly, potentially affecting student understanding. The teacher stated, "Facilities such as projectors were limited when we wanted to use learning videos"

Based on the explanation above, limited equipment such as projectors and computers as media can influence the variety of teaching methods applied by teachers. Without access to visual aids or interactive tools, teachers may struggle to keep students engaged and motivated during learning, resulting in passive learning experiences and reduced understanding. The integration of multimedia in language teaching can significantly increase student engagement and understanding, but this depends on the availability of the necessary technological resources.

3. Overcoming Technological Constraints

Based on the results of the interview, the researcher explored how a teacher overcame obstacles such as limited internet networks in the learning process.

To overcome the challenges posed by limited internet resources in the classroom, teachers occasionally utilized personal hotspots to ensure uninterrupted access to online materials, as explained by the teacher." *Internet limitations make it difficult to use authentic*



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

materials in class and access extensive references. I sometimes rely on my own mobile hotspot, and equipment like projectors is often limited when educational videos are needed."

d) Challenges Faced by Students in Learning Authentic Materials

Based on interview results, students faced specific challenges when using authentic reading materials. Here are some statements from students.

1. Limited Vocabulary Comprehension

Five of 6 students reported difficulties in understanding new vocabulary present in authentic materials. These materials often contain complex and unfamiliar words, making it challenging for students to grasp the overall meaning of the text. As expressed by student (MB), "I find it difficult to understand vocabulary, unlike regular textbooks." (Student 2).

Understanding vocabulary is crucial for comprehension and engagement with authentic materials. As noted by the student (IN), "the difference in vocabulary complexity compared to traditional textbook materials requires additional support mechanisms like dictionaries" (Student 4).

In summary, the difficulty in understanding new vocabulary in authentic materials is a well-documented challenge in the field of language education. This issue underscores the importance of providing adequate support to help students navigate these complex texts and improve their reading comprehension and fluency.

2. Dependence on Additional Resources

Based on the interview result, students frequently rely on dictionaries or teachers for help understanding foreign language. This reliance suggests that real materials are good, but they require additional support mechanisms. One student (MS) stated, "I usually use a dictionary to find the meaning of difficult words." (Student 3).

Furthermore, it is explained that (IN) "and I use translation tools such as a dictionary on an Android phone" (Student 4). Additionally, (SZ) stated, "I ask the teacher or open a dictionary to find the meaning of vocabulary" (Student 5). Moreover, (MW) expressed the



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

same sentiment, saying, "So I have to ask the teacher and sometimes also open a dictionary" (Student 6).

Some of the statements above indicated different strategies students utilized to overcome vocabulary issues when working with authentic materials. These examples show how students used resources, such as dictionaries, or sought help from teachers, to improve their understanding of unfamiliar vocabulary in authentic contexts.

3. Engagement and Motivation

While many students find authentic materials engaging, sustaining this engagement can be a challenge. A significant factor is the relevance and connection of materials to students' interests or experiences. One student (MB) expressed, "*These authentic materials are very interesting and challenging*," (Student 2).

Based on the statement above that indicating that appropriate material selection can improve motivation. However, when the content of authentic materials does not align with students' interests or experiences, they may lose motivation to engage in learning.

4. Understanding and Interpretation

Students also face difficulties in interpreting meanings and contexts from authentic materials. They often need additional guidance from teachers to understand content effectively. This challenge arises because authentic materials often contain cultural nuances and references that may not be immediately clear to learners. As expressed by one student (MW) "I understand the material better when the teacher explains it in detail (Student 6).

This underlines the value of teacher support in explaining complex material. Teachers play an important role in guiding learners through challenging topics, assuring comprehension, and fostering deeper study. Their instruction not only improves comprehension but also fosters critical thinking and the application of knowledge in situations from the real world.

5. Group Collaboration

During group activities involving authentic materials, some students noted a lack of cooperation among their peers. This issue can affect the overall learning experience and the



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

effectiveness of using authentic materials in a collaborative setting. One student (MS) stated,

"It's harder when my classmates aren't cooperative during group work." (Student 3).

Based on the explanation above, it shows the lack of cooperation in group activities was challenge that needed to be overcome in using authentic materials. This highlights that teachers can play an important role in facilitating productive collaboration among students, thereby maximizing the learning benefits of authentic material in a collaborative setting.

Additionally, alternative solutions to students' specific challenges when using authentic reading materials. While these challenges, such as limited vocabulary comprehension and dependence on additional resources, are well-documented in language education, it is crucial to propose innovative solutions to address them. For instance, integrating interactive tools like digital glossaries or vocabulary apps could support students in navigating difficult words more independently. Additionally, incorporating multimedia elements, such as videos or interactive simulations, could provide context and visual support, making the materials more accessible and engaging. These strategies would not only help students overcome the challenges they face but also enhance their overall learning experience by making the content more dynamic and contextually rich.

3.3 Discussion

The findings show that teachers at Vocational School Sangatta Utara employ a variety of ways to select and adapt authentic materials, with an emphasis on relevance and student comprehension, which is consistent with contextualized learning concepts (Nunan, 2015). Students actively participate in learning activities, critically analyzing advertisements and articles to improve their comprehension and critical thinking skills, supporting Kilickaya et al.'s (2006) claim that authentic materials foster deeper understanding. However, technological issues, such as limited internet connectivity and lack of multimedia devices, hinder the use of online resources and interactive content. Teachers have tried to create more engaging learning media, such as visual aids, YouTube videos, and films containing authentic material, but the absence of a stable internet network in the classroom forces them to rely on personal hotspots,



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

which is not always optimal. Consequently, an alternative solution has been to deliver authentic

materials primarily through printed media, with students relying on dictionaries and teacher

assistance to understand unfamiliar and complex vocabulary.

These results provide only a snapshot of the immediate impact of using authentic materials. A more longitudinal perspective would be valuable to understand the long-term effects of these practices on students' reading proficiency and overall language development. Future research could track student progress over a longer period to assess how continued exposure to authentic materials influences language acquisition and retention. Additionally, exploring how these materials affect different aspects of language learning, such as critical thinking and cultural competence, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of their educational value.

The use of authentic materials can indeed improve language understanding, but it is important to consider the cultural context contained in them because unfamiliar cultural elements can be a challenge for students' understanding. For example, references to Western customs or idioms may cause misunderstandings for students from different cultural backgrounds. Because language is closely linked to culture, cultural nuances in authentic materials influence not only understanding, but also student engagement. Additionally, students tend to be more engaged when the material presented is relevant to their culture or delivered in a way they can understand. Conversely, if the content feels unrelated to their experiences, motivation and learning effectiveness can be reduced. To overcome these challenges, teachers need to use early teaching strategies that provide cultural background knowledge, discuss cultural differences, and adapt materials to suit the cultural diversity of the classroom, so that all students can access and benefit from learning content. Furthermore, technological limitations can exacerbate challenges associated with cultural differences. Adequate access to multimedia resources and culturally responsive teaching practices are critical to helping students understand the complexity of authentic materials. Therefore, it is



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

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important to address both technological and cultural issues to maximize the effectiveness of authentic materials in teaching reading. By ensuring the materials used are accessible and culturally relevant, teachers can create a more inclusive learning environment that increases student understanding and engagement.

3.3.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged, which may affect the generalizability and comprehensiveness of the findings.

First, the sample size and scope are limited to only one vocational school, involving one teacher and six students. This limitation restricts the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research should aim to include multiple schools and a larger number of participants to enhance the external validity of the results.

Second, the researcher realized that the limitations of this research were its small scope, because the data was collected from a specific group of teachers and students at one vocational school. The limited diversity of this sample may not fully represent the broader population of EFL learners or teachers in different contexts. To address this issue in future research, more random sampling methods should be used, to ensure that participants are selected from a wide range of schools and educational settings. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how authentic materials impact student learning across contexts and demographics.

Third, although this research identifies technological challenges such as limited internet access and lack of learning media, the weakness of this research is that it does not provide strong alternative solutions other than the use of personal hotspots and print media that teachers use as learning media in the classroom. Therefore, further research should explore comprehensive technological solutions, including offline resources or collaboration with schools and the private sector to provide adequate school infrastructure facilities to improve internet access, which could offer a more sustainable solution to these challenges.



Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN : 2655-9323

Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

Fourth, this research relies entirely on qualitative data, which may not fully capture the effectiveness or impact of using authentic materials compared to other methods. Including quantitative or mixed methods data in future research may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of authentic materials, allowing for better comparisons with other teaching methods.

4. Conclusion

Based on these findings, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the use of authentic materials in reading activity at Vocational School Sangatta Utara, especially in Class X AKL. This study highlights the effective strategies implemented by teachers, the active involvement of students, and various challenges. Teachers successfully select and adapt actual resources, such as product advertisements and current articles, to match students' interests and comprehension levels, increasing engagement and understanding. They also devised strategies for overcoming technical obstacles, such as employing personal hotspots for internet access. Students actively participate by evaluating advertisements and discussing difficult materials. This supports deeper understanding and critical thinking. However, teachers confront challenges such as limited internet connection and multimedia devices, while pupils struggle with new language and reading original materials, relying on dictionaries or teacher support. The study's unique sample size and focus may limit generalizability, implying that future research should use larger, more diverse samples and mixed-methods approaches. Therefore, continuous teacher training, enhanced technology infrastructure, and incorporating authentic materials into the curriculum are critical for increasing student engagement and learning results. Future research and comparison studies can improve teaching methods and fix technical issues, resulting in a more effective educational environment.

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Volume 6, Issues 2, August, 2024

EISSN: 2655-9323 Section: Research Article

Page : 302-319

DOI : 10.24903/bej.v6i2.1785

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