

Considering Students' Reading Interest in Text- Selection to Foster Literacy in the English Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This work is a review paper. This conceptual writing focuses on how students' reading interest is essential for reading instruction. This argument is derived from some experts who suggest the teachers carry literacy in the classroom. It means that teachers should take students' interest into account. There are some benefits of considering students' interest in reading classrooms. In addition, some factors can influence reading activities in the classroom. One of those is the text. Texts serve as the input for the students in reading activities. However, not all texts are appropriate for the students. Therefore, this conceptual study presents some considerations in choosing the texts and ways to take students' interest into account in reading activities. The considerations in choosing the text are taken and analyzed from some experts who are concerned with this topic. Along the way, teachers can finally consider the students' reading interest by understanding the ways how to consider the students' interest in selecting the texts that will be used in the English reading classroom proposed by experts.

Keywords: the students' interest, reading literacy, text-selection

INTRODUCTION

Reading is the key for people to gain knowledge. In the classroom setting, the teachers use many various texts to facilitate the students in learning reading. By reading, the students can become long life learners because their knowledge is kept updated and enriched every time they read the texts. Those various texts serve an important role in reading classrooms since it is the source where the students can gain new knowledge.

The textbooks play a vital role in teaching English because they establish the language input that learners acquire in the classroom (O'Neill, 1982 cited in Ling, Tong, & Jin, 2012). To maximize this, teachers play an important role to ensure that the reading texts will generally interest most of the students, and at the same time, will not make the students bored in reading. Still, the low rate of engagement in text reading and comprehension instruction suggests that there is a need for training and emphasis on selecting the text in the classroom (Swanson et al, 2015).

Nowadays, the students are expected to be able to read in English since English is an international language. If the students do not want to lose the chance to gain much knowledge, it is essential for both EFL (English as Foreign Language) and ESL (English as Second Language) students to take reading English into account. In order to gain much knowledge, the students should be able to comprehend texts that are used in the classroom.

However, being able to comprehend the texts is not enough. Students are expected to be literate. It means reading instruction should facilitate the students to deal with literacy. Traditionally, literacy is defined as a standard of reading ability. As time goes by, many other experts give deeper definitions of literacy. UNESCO (2006) defines literacy as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills so these skills can help them to contribute to the development of their social awareness and their critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change. It means that the students do not only have to comprehend the text, but also raise their awareness and critics from the texts. If the texts tell something harmful (i.e. drugs, free sex, smoking, etc) the students are not only expected to know what they are but they also should take action to not stay close to those things. Their knowledge from the texts can help them in their personal and social development.

In reading, the students activate their thinking skill. By activating their thinking skill, the students will be able to comprehend the text. The students will get frustrated if they find so many new vocabularies so they cannot recall their background knowledge. This can hinder the students to comprehend the text. The schema theory or thinking skill highlights that a text does not carry meanings, but the reader brings the information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture to the texts (Brown, 2001 in Nordin&Eng, 2017). Therefore, when teachers select reading texts to teach based on the students' interest, the teachers use students' prior knowledge and experience to make students stay connected.

The students will not be literate and critical if they cannot comprehend the texts. Teachers cannot expect the students to comprehend the texts that the students do not like to read. As mentioned before, the students can activate their thinking skill when they read the texts that contain familiar vocabularies and

topics. Therefore, the choice of the texts is essential to facilitate the learners to activate their thinking skill.

Another problem is that the students have low interest in reading. It can be seen from our environment. It is a rare thing to see the school students read some books (both printed and digital) in their spare time. It shows us that they have low interest in reading. The students will not be eager to read the texts that are not interesting to them. If we want our students to be literate, then, the choice of texts is important.

Being literate students is the main goal of reading in the classroom. Therefore, making the students comprehend the texts is essential. The students will find their reading meaningful if they know it is important and relevant to their life. They will know whether or not their reading is important and relevant by reading it first. To facilitate the students in comprehending the text, the chosen text is important. The students are the subjects that will do the reading. Therefore, the students have to be the main consideration for the teachers in selecting the texts.

Choosing the texts that are interesting for the students can help the students in comprehending the texts. In those interesting texts, the students will be able to recognize the vocabularies and recall their knowledge about it. Moreover, the students will find their reading as a meaningful activity. Therefore, this literature study portrays that considering students' interest in text-selection in reading classrooms will be beneficial for the students. By reading this article, classroom teachers can get some enlightenment how to consider the students' interest so reading activities can be much more effective and meaningful.

1. Reading Interest

As has been mentioned before, texts serve an important role in EFL classroom. The text selected in the classroom cannot be chosen randomly. The selected textbooks should meet their needs as learners of English in order to fulfill the curriculum requirement of English language communication skill (Byrd, 2001 in Ling, Tong, & Jin, 2012). According to Nuttall (2000) in Ling, Tong, and Jin (2012), the most important criterion in selecting a reading textbook for our students is the suitability to the content, i.e. the reading texts "should interest the readers – preferably fascinate and delight them". It is hoped that the students' attention can last longer from the beginning until the end.

Hidi and Renninger (2006) in Nordin and Eng (2017) sum up that interest is an important condition for learning, and educators can help learners to develop the interest. In fact, educators could make a significant contribution to the development of students' academic interest. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) argue that when we think of motivation, it is quite related to interest. When the students are motivated in reading books, they enjoy the book, excite about the

author, or being amused by new information. Researchers refer interest as an intrinsic motivation meaning that something we do for its own sake. The readers do not only need to have some familiarity with the contents, but they also need to have interest by the author (Adams & Bruce, 1982 in Tabatabaei&Bagheri, 2013).

2. The Ideal Condition of Literacy in the Classroom

Traditionally, literacy is defined as a standard of reading performance. The OECD (2000) in Cambridge Assessment (2013) defines literacy as how well people use literacy to be used in society and the economy. This requires people's ability to understand printed or digital information to achieve their goals. UNESCO (2006) defines literacy as a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills so these skills can contribute to the development of their social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change.

Literacy First (2010) as cited in Cambridge Assessment (2013) suggests the teachers give opportunities for the students to filter, evaluate, and think critically about the texts given. To facilitate literacy to the students, it is the teachers' job to find out the students' needs and interests so the students will find it easier to criticize the text and reflect on those texts given. Shor (1992) in Ko (2013) adds that ideal reading materials for a critical literacy-based classroom should be related to the students' lives and experiences, but they should attend to the levels of students' language proficiency. It means the teachers should know the students' language proficiency so the reading literacy activities in the classroom will run effectively.

In the EFL classroom, Sander (2016) states that students should do more than understand and answer the questions from the text. He suggests the teacher involve the students in a meaning-making process of reading. It is supported by Ko (2013), she states that some scholars also support literacy instructions where teachers do not only teach students basic language skills or train their communicative ability, but the teachers also need to develop a critical consciousness in students whereby they can question rather than passively accept the information they read.

The National Center for Family Literacy and The National Center for ESL Literacy Education (2004) suggest some ways for the students to acquire second or foreign language literacy:

a. Motivation

The teachers may help the students to find out their motivation by making them aware of their both short- and long-term goals. The reflection of their progress and achievement in learning English is recommended as well.

b. Opportunities for Interaction

By being involved in an interaction, the students will gain some input knowledge from their friends or teachers. In addition, the feedback that the students get from the interaction will help them to improve their reading literacy.

c. Vocabulary Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge includes both the number of words and someone's knowledge about those words. A depth of knowledge refers to the pronunciation, spelling, and various meanings of the word. In the reading activities in an EFL classroom, it is the teachers' job to guide the students in enriching their vocabulary knowledge.

In a previous study on reading interest, it claims that there is a positive relationship between reading interests and reading comprehension. When the interest is high, learners read the texts beyond their proficiency levels. But, when the interest is low, learners often consider books as too hard even when they are below their reading levels (Spache&Shnayer, 1967 as cited in Arias, 2007).

METHOD

This work is a review paper. Therefore, the writer studied some related articles and theories in writing this paper. There were some steps the writer had done. The first thing that the writer did was compiling and studying the theories of the keywords in this paper namely, reading interest and literacy in the classroom. In this session, the writer presented the definition of both reading interest and literacy. Afterward, the writer summed up the ideal condition of literacy in the classroom.

The second step was the writer presented the importance of considering students' interest was also shown in this paper. Although considering the students' interest in the reading classroom is recommended, there are some considerations how the teachers accommodate the students' interest. At the end of this paper, the writer summarized some ways on how to consider students' reading interest to foster literacy in the classroom. Those ways were derived from the articles the writer studies.

DISCUSSION

1. The Importance of Considering Students' Interest in the Classroom

Some experts have stated why students' interest is important to be taken into account in the classroom setting. One of which is Hidi and Anderson (1992) as cited in Fitzpatrick and McConnell (2008) noting that generating students' interest is the key to trigger the learning process. That research has shown that adults who are interested in a topic or an activity pay more attention, persist for

longer periods of time, and acquire more knowledge than those who do not have any interest.

2. Teachers' Role in Classroom Literacy

A research conducted by Phillip and Phillips (2007) in Fitzpatrick and McConnell (2008) shows that instructors have an important role in the promotion of text reading. The students are not motivated to read the text. This finding can probably be an alarm for the instructors. The study shows that before going further to the reading activities, students already fear the textbook. In their study, students were not motivated by their anxiety to adopt better reading strategies. From this finding, it is suggested for the teachers in the classroom engage the students by taking their reading interest into account. By doing so, the teachers can lower the students' anxiety in reading activities. Instructors can also suggest the most effective ways for students in reading the text. Early on, instructors can explicitly mention the sinking in versus skimming reading strategies and remind students that they may not have time to return to the text if they adopt a skimming approach. Phillips and Phillips (2007) in Fitzpatrick and McConnell (2008) suggest the instructors promote desired behavior by using deeper analysis of the text to confront confusion and anxiety.

Stairs and Burgos (2010) believe that students must be allowed to choose what they read in school. To read to learn what real reading is the kind of reading that encourages students to become lifelong readers. When teachers know their students' interests, they can put the "just right" books in their hands.

3. Considerations in Choosing the Texts

Due to the importance of text selection in reading activities in the classroom, some experts realize that selecting the appropriate texts for the students is not an easy thing to do. Arias (2007) proposes some criteria to select the texts to be used in the classroom into two. They are both related to the students and to the text. Aspects that are related to the students are the students' interest, level, needs, and background knowledge. Meanwhile, the aspects related to the text are content, relevance, and authenticity.

Both teachers and students play important roles in the classroom. The roles of the teachers have been portrayed in the previous part of this writing. In the classroom, the students must be actively involved in every process if teachers want to adopt or adapt appropriate reading materials for the class. Students are those who feel the benefits of reading activities in the classroom. Therefore, the teachers have to be sure that reading activities give benefits to the students. The categories that the teachers should take into account in selecting the texts related to the students are firstly portrayed.

The students' level is an important aspect the teachers need to take into account in selecting the texts for the students. The texts chosen in the classroom should be suitable for the students' level so the students can follow the reading activities easily. Arias (2007) later suggests the teachers prevent selecting the texts that are much more difficult for the students' level.

The teachers should always discover the students' needs before making any decisions about the course content. In addition, students' background knowledge is another important aspect in selecting the texts. Background knowledge that the students have will help them in grasp the information from the text.

Actually, both aspects related to the students and the texts are interrelated each other. The first aspect related to the texts is relevance. Students must find that the reading material used in the course is relevant to their lives. For this reason, Arias (2007) finds it necessary to involve the learners to contribute to the reading selection process. Ragone (2015) argues that when the students are exposed to relevant texts, they will have opportunities to discuss what they are reading with their teachers and with their peers. Then, it has been found that sharing their reading with their family or friends promote a greater interest in reading (Leisure Reading Task Force, 2014). Krashen (2011) in Leisure Reading Task Force (2014) believes that readers, in this case is students, should choose their own reading materials.

Another aspect proposed by Arias (2007) is authenticity. Authenticity is another important criterion for the selection of readings in the classroom. Authentic texts are quite related to the relevance of the texts. The students will regard their reading as an important activity when they are aware that English is truly used in their daily life.

Nordin and Eng (2017) highlight some aspects every teacher should consider in choosing the texts for the students. The first thing they highlight is the genre of the texts. They believe that teachers in the classroom can select from various genre to lure the learners to love reading.

The next thing teachers need to consider is the content of the texts. Nordin and Eng (2017) argue that the essential criterion in selecting reading materials for the students is the suitability of the content. Further, they mention that the texts used in the classroom should interest the students. It is in line with what Arias (2007) writes in his journal. Arias (2007) agrees that the most important criterion for selecting reading material for the ESL class is content. He believes that once the content is interesting for the students, the students will be successful in the reading process, no matter how difficult the text might be.

4. Ways to Consider Students' Reading Interest to Foster Literacy in the EFL Classroom

After studying some considerations in choosing the texts for the students in a reading classroom, the writer summarized it in some ways that the teachers can do to consider the students' reading interest in the classroom. The following ways are summarized from Leisure Reading Task Force (2014); Nordin and Eng (2017); Stairs and Burgos (2010); and Fitzpatrick and McConnell (2008).

- a. Stairs and Burgos (2010) suggest the teachers at the beginning of the semester or year investigate the students' interest in classroom interactions.
- b. Gardiner (2005) in Leisure Reading Task Force (2014) give a recommendation for the teachers to provide a wide range of genres and topics that will be challenging and interesting for the students. In doing so, it is better for the teachers to match the reading texts to the outcomes of the curriculum. Besides, the teachers may not forget to adapt or adopt the texts that fit the learners' proficiency (Nordin and Eng, 2017).
- c. Leisure Reading Task Force (2014) advises the teachers to give the students opportunities to talk to peers about the texts that they read.
- d. McConnell and Hoover (2008) as cited in Fitzpatrick and McConnell (2008) evoke the teachers to assign the students to exercises or problems and have students publicly share responses.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that students' reading interest is worth taking into account in the EFL classroom. Involving the students' reading interest in selecting the texts can probably facilitate the students to comprehend the texts given because their attention in reading lasts longer. Since teachers and student play important roles in reading activities in the classroom, they are expected to work hand in hand so reading instructions in the classroom will be meaningful and effective for them.

The aspects that the teachers need to consider in choosing the texts which have been discussed in the previous section can possibly help the teachers to decide which texts are appropriate for their students. Students as the subjects of reading activities become the basis for the teachers in selecting the texts. The ways to consider the students' reading interest in selecting the texts can facilitate the teachers to transform the students' reading interest to reading classroom. By doing so, it is hoped that the students can get many benefits from their reading.

However, this study is still limited because this study did not portray some actual experience in a certain place that requires the researcher to do a quantitative or qualitative analysis. Therefore, further research is worth conducting to see the practical influence of those ways proposed by the experts to the students' actual performance in reading activities. In addition, other researchers can see how much it can affect the literacy in English classroom.

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