Exploring the Use of Fanfiction as Authentic Materials in English Language Teaching: A Perspective from a Reading Class

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Abstract:

This research aims to investigate students' perceptions of fanfiction as authentic materials to enhance their reading skills. The participants of this research were 30 students in a state vocational school in Banten. This case study started with the implementation of using Fanfiction in the reading class in five consecutive meetings to give students exposure to Fanfiction stories. During the implementation, reflective notes were used to describe students' responses towards the use of Fanfictions in relation to their reading skills. Questionnaires consisting of closed and open-ended items were also used to collect data regarding students' views of the use of Fanfiction in improving their reading skills. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used to analyse the quantitative data. The results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis showed that the participants showed a positive perception towards the use of fanfiction in enhancing their reading skills although some of the students stated that they had difficulties in understanding the texts due to their lack of vocabulary. The findings of the study could inform pedagogical practices in the classroom that teachers could consider the use of Fanfiction by taking into account students' needs, interests, and English proficiency.

Keywords*: Authentic Materials, Fanfiction, Students' Perception, Teaching Reading, Reading Skills.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is part of the English language skills that has become the prominent focus in English language teaching (Leu & Kinzer, 1987). However, students typically encounter some issues when it comes to reading skills such as, difficulties in understanding the content of a text, unfamiliarity with necessary reading strategies, and a lack of necessary vocabulary (Rerung, 2017). Thus, teachers should use different resources while teaching reading to provide students with a variety of texts that are suitable for specific learning contexts. The reading materials may be taken from any resources that can help motivate students in the classroom by fostering students' interests in reading.

This current study used authentic materials in the form of Fanfiction texts to investigate their impact on vocational students' reading abilities. The students were reported to have difficulties in reading comprehension due to a lack of English vocabulary. The choice of Fanfiction in this study was related to students' interests in using literature in their reading activities. It expected that students can develop reading skills through the use of authentic materials that can increase their learning motivation as well.

Fanfiction is an imaginative story based on fans. At its most fundamental level, Fanfiction composed by fans and is another work of fiction that utilizes the characters in a particular setting. As stated by Barner and Ideus (2017), instead of being written by individual fans for a larger audience, Fanfiction is created within and for a community of the specific fandom. This study aimed to examine students' perceptions of the use of Fanfiction as authentic materials in enhancing students' reading skills.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the role of authentic materials (e.g. Apsari, 2014; Assiddiq, 2019; Berardo, 2006) and Fanfiction (e.g. Surya, 2021; Wulandari, 2021) in English classrooms. Most of this study used a quasi-experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of authentic materials and Fanfiction in improving reading skills. In addition, studies tend to focus on examining this issue with students with advanced English proficiency. This study aims to address the gap by exploring students' perspectives towards the use of Fanfiction through a series of design implementation of Fanfiction in the reading class. This study also aims to focus on investigating students with beginner-intermediate levels of English competence, so that it could enrich the existing literature by providing insights from a different research point of view.

The results of this study are expected to inform current classroom practices, particularly in reading classes, where students tend to be exposed to a limited range of texts. Providing students with authentic reading texts in the form of Fanfiction could be an alternative to boost students' motivation in reading and to offer texts that are relevant to their lives. It is also hoped that the research results could provide a general overview of students' perceptions of the use of Fanfiction in enhancing their reading skills, a research area that is still unexplored, especially in the Indonesian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic Materials In English Language Teaching

The term "authentic material" has been variously defined in the literature. Authentic materials are ones that are not produced for language teaching purposes (Nunan, 1989, as cited in Adams, 1995). According to Little et al. (1988, as cited in Guariento & Morley, 2001), authentic materials are used for a range of social functions in the social and linguistic contexts in which they are produced. In addition, these materials should be made by native speakers for non-pedagogical objectives (Bacon & Finneman, 1990). In this sense, the materials are created by their very nature for communication amongst native speakers of the language rather than for students of foreign languages (Foppoli, 2006; McGrath, 2002). Badger and MacDonald (2010) also argue that authentic content is any type of text, image, carefully selected short film, or teaching resource that is not originally created with the intention of being used in educational settings.

A wide of variety of authentic materials are now available to be utilized in the classroom. The internet is one of the most helpful tools because it offers a huge variety of sources, all of which are readily available, regularly updated, and easy to access. Authentic materials have long been used in teaching and learning activities. TV shows, radio, media reports, documentaries, movies, photographs, artwork, ads, and brochures are all examples of authentic materials. Currently, the approach of using authentic materials in the teaching process is also favorable. Learners are exposed to "real" English, not made-up, through actual materials. Since they will study materials that are identical to those used by native speakers, it is assumed that the use of such materials will improve learners' motivation to learn the language (Morton, 1999). The goal of authentic material is to help students overcome any unfavorable relationships they may have with learning tasks, such as a sense of failure. The use of actual language in learning is one of the fundamental elements of communicative language instruction (Ommaggio-Hadley, 1993). In addition, students demonstrated a favorable and content attitude towards the use of authentic materials as it can enhance students' language skills (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

Authentic Material in Teaching Reading

Reading is one of the crucial English abilities that should be mastered by students (Kinasih, 2020; Rerung 2012). Reading process involves recognition, fluency, comprehension, and motivation so students should be taught to read so that they can continue to use the language they have already encountered through speaking and listening, practice using it in writing, and learn how to make sense of texts in order to extract the information they need and to finally enjoy reading. Additionally, reading is a psycholinguistic receptive process in which students extract meaning from the text that they are reading (Cekiso, 2017; Leipzig, 2001; Goodman, 1988 as cited in Cekiso, 2017). As students can read, they are able to do more than just recognizing letters and understand words. Moreover, familiarizing students with the functions of various types of written text through reading authentic materials (Pretiorius and Machet, 2004 as cited in Cekiso, 2017). Students' interest in seeking out additional information from the contents they read can be assessed by exposing them to

various types of written content (Breidnstein, et al., 2012, as cited in Holmes, 2020). The use of authentic material in English language teaching contributes in the improvement of students' reading comprehension, knowledge acquisition, ability to create study objectives, and use of revision strategies (Pinzón, 2020; Qizi, 2021). According to Ameen and Kamal (2021), the usage of authentic materials improves the students' capacity to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations. As a result, reading a variety of authentic texts with the students requires significant language activation, which requires the students to use their knowledge and seasoning skills to understand the meaning of a text or utterance (Rao, 2019; Vogel & Loudova, 2014).

The resources a teacher employs to deliver knowledge to the students are known as teaching materials. Richards (2001), who claims that teaching materials are an important part of most language programs, supports it. According to Chanda et.al (2000), instructional materials allow for effective participation from each student in a classroom setting. Since the utilization of teaching material is crucial to the teaching and learning process, this is one factor to take into account when putting them into practice to produce an efficient learning source. Since authentic material reflects real-world situations, it is seen to be a more effective teaching resource. Currently, many teachers have been using authentic teaching materials as an alternative resource to help and facilitate them in teaching reading (Keshmirshekan, 2019). As stated by Pang and Wong (2003), choosing reading materials that are informed by students' interests, lives, and experiences is a good starting point. It implies that the importance of considering teaching materials for the teaching and learning process is significant. It is believed that using authentic material is a meaningful teaching strategy. As Silberstein (1994) suggests, using texts that are genuine and realistic in light of the students' reading demands and skills is important to connect students with real-world situations. In line with this, reading passages should be realistic in the sense that they reflect the texts that students will encounter in the real world since it is argued that learning will take place when students are actively immersed in real-world circumstances. In this case, the role of authentic materials is necessary to help students be exposed to meaningful and real-world contexts. Tamo (2009) also adds that using authentic materials in the classroom can increase students' motivation as it is closely related to students' life.

Fanfiction in English Language Teaching

The role of Internet plays a significant role in in the realm of Fanfiction. It has never been simpler or more accessible to share one's work and to discover the works of others. However, prior to the development of technology, fan communities distributed their fanfiction through Fanzines. By definition, Fanfiction is a popular genre of writing in online communities, also called Fanfic as its abbreviation. The story content and settings are fictions and are created by fans. The creation of fanfiction is often based on books but can also be made from movies, cartoons, or TV shows (Black, 2007).

While fanfiction may be regarded as a traditional type of literature, it was not until the 1980s that it started to appear in academic journals (Hellekson & Busse, 2014). Fanfiction has recently been developing a role for itself in the classroom as teachers search for academic literature to support teaching. Fan studies offer an explanation for the appeal of

modern audience responses and user-generated content. In general, English teachers use academic research for creative approaches to enhance their classroom practices. There are a few examples of fanfiction being produced in a classroom setting, despite references to its use in English language instruction. Fundamentally, fanfiction is a reader response strategy that enables readers to engage with classic literature and create unique interpretations and meanings. No matter what the teacher instructs, the reader is continuously "paying attention to the image, sensations, attitudes, and associations that the words evoke in him," (Rosenblatt, 1968, p.2). Samutina (2016), a well-known academic at the Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in Humanities, claims that studying fanfiction might reveal the reading skills, approaches, and routines of this first generation of digital natives. A reader's pattern of comprehension and analysis might be altered by reading fanfiction, because "an internet user will acquire particular reading methods, which continue to guide this person's subsequent reading" (Samutina, 2016, p. 254). Fanficiton is undoubtedly an interesting literary phenomenon, despite the fact that it has not earned a lot of scholarly attention.

Numerous studies have investigated the use of authentic materials and Fanfiction in English language classrooms. Using a quasi-experimental study, Berardo's (2006) and Apsari and Yana's (2015) investigated the use of authentic materials in English classrooms using the pre-test and post-test design to compare the English proficiency scores of 66 university students and identified challenges and benefits associated with this qualitative study. The results of this study revealed that the use of authentic materials in teaching reading was associated with significant improvement in English proficiency, particularly in terms of vocabulary, reading speed, and reading comprehension. Thus, a study conducted by Wulandari (2021) aimed to examine the effectiveness of using Fanfiction in improving students' reading comprehension skills. This quasi-experimental study comparing the scores of 30 tenth-grade students through the use of pre and post-test demonstrated that the use of Fanfiction as reading material were associated with significant improvements in students' reading comprehension skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency. A more recent study by Surya's (2021) focusing on the use of Fanfiction revealed that Fanfiction can be a useful tool for language learning, particularly for advanced language fluency in reading and writing skills. The study suggests that Fanfiction can help students express and comprehend their ideas, thoughts, and feelings, invigorating their personal critical and creative thinking along with Fanfiction as the most popular reading and writing communities on the internet, it is known as an ideal practice ground for language learners.

The review of previous studies has shown that there is still little research addressing the use of Fanfiction as authentic materials in reading classes from students' perspectives. Moreover, the prior studies tend to explore this issue among students with advanced English levels. This study, thus, attempts to address this gap by focusing on the use of Fanfiction in the reading classroom consisting of students with beginner-intermediate levels of English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This case study used a qualitative approach, which aims to explore phenomena in a natural setting and examine data through the lens of participants (Creswell, 2013). It also aims to gain an understanding of the phenomenon to capture the richness and complexity of the participants' experiences and viewpoints.

As the students were unfamiliar with Fanfiction, the researchers introduced Fanfiction and taught reading skills through its use in five meetings. After each implementation of Fanfiction, the researchers wrote reflective notes regarding the students' responses during the teaching and learning activity towards the use of Fanfiction in enhancing their reading skills. In addition, the research data were collected using questionnaires to investigate the participants' perceptions towards the use of Fanfiction in enhancing their reading skills. A total of 30 students filled out the questionnaires distributed via Google Form. There were 20 close- ended questions in the form of Likert Scale and five open-ended questions. The use of both close and open-ended questions adapted from Peacock (1997) aims to seek generalizability and at the same time, in-depth responses from the participants (Gray, 2014).

The quantitative data resulted from close-ended questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researchers coded the data, searched for recurring themes, and interpreted the findings in relation to the research objectives and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis facilitates the analysis of perceptions that addresses the problems raised by the research topic.

FINDINGS

The Implementation of Fanfiction In Enhancing Students' Reading Skills

The use of Fanfiction was implemented in five consecutive meetings. The following is the data descriptions obtained from the reflective notes of the researchers:

In the first meeting, the discussions were mostly revolved around prediction and making connections from the keywords from the Fanfiction titled "You are Family". The researchers asked the participants to predict what the story was about based on the title and provided some keywords to help them spark their curiosity. Meanwhile, making connections aimed to connect between ideas that allow students to relate the story to their own experiences in real life based on the characters in the story. As a result, the participants could understand what was the story about using the step-by-step in this strategy. Based on the researchers' experiences in teaching Fanfiction in this particular meeting, it can be suggested that teachers should consider students' English proficiency and adjust the use of language choice in Fanfiction since students might face difficulties in understanding the vocabulary presented in Fanfiction.

In the second meeting, the researchers focused on the use of prediction, making connections, and questioning skills in order to allow the students to practice their reading skills. The researchers also discussed unfamiliar words in the Fanfiction titled "Dreams and

Friendship". In this session, the researcher also discussed the contextual meaning of the words so that the participants could understand the vocabulary more effectively by inferring the meaning behind the story and the underlying hidden message. It seemed that the participants were able to understand the meaning of a word better through the use of analogy.

In the third meeting, the researcher introduced Fanfiction entitled "A Date to Remember" that had a romance genre. The researchers also asked the participants to show which parts of the text that were difficult to understand. After that, the researchers proceeded to discuss some questions reflecting from the ones that were usually used in the formal test and allow the participants to guess with their questioning skills. In this meeting, the researchers found that in order to understand the skills they were currently learning, they required to understand the contextual meaning of the text. However, some of the students still faced some difficulties in comprehending such a text.

In the fourth meeting, the chosen story consisted of many unfamiliar words according to the participants. The researchers proceeded to discuss the meaning of the vocabulary with the participants. After that, the researchers asked the participants to draw a conclusion from to story to test their understanding of the text and allow them to practice their summarizing skill. Nevertheless, in summarizing, to the researcher's surprise, the participants showed sufficient comprehension and two of the participants were able to explain the main idea of the story, despite using Indonesian to re-explain it. In this meeting, it seemed that the participants could comprehend the story better if the researchers discussed the unfamiliar words first that relate to their whole understanding of the story context.

In the last meeting, the researchers discussed the participants' reflections throughout the use of Fanfiction and obtained feedback about the materials they had used in the classroom. After that, the researchers asked the participants to fill out the questionnaires to investigate their perceptions of the use of Fanfiction in enhancing their reading skills.

The Students' Perceptions of Fanfiction

This section provides findings from the questionnaires and is under the pre-determined themes guiding this study.

1. Students' Interest in Fanfictions

The statements discussing students' interests in Fanfictions such as, *"I consider the use of Fanfiction as authentic material interesting"* obtained a positive attitude among the participants. 86,7% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, while only around 6,6% strongly disagreed or agreed and 6,7% were neutral. This might imply that most of the students consider the use of Fanfiction interesting in their English learning.

Some responses were also collected from the open ended questions that supported this statements, for example:

- *"The materials being used are easy to process because it is presented through familiar stories and settings such as Harry Potter, Bocchi the rock, and etc."*

- *"In my opinion, I think the use of Fanfiction as authentic reading material in the classroom is an interesting thing to do, because the material is authentic and more like a "non-formal" text, therefore it is less boring and I myself became more interested in learning the English language."*

2. Students' Acquired Reading Skills through Fanfictions

Regarding the statement *"I enjoy using Fanfiction as authentic material to improve my English reading fluency"*, 83,3% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, meanwhile around 3,3% of them strongly disagreed or disagreed and 13,3% chose neutral. Meanwhile, the statement *"I feel that using Fanfiction as authentic materials helps me improve my vocabulary acquisition in reading English text"* also received a positive response. 93,3% of the participants were strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, and 3,3% disagreed and 3,3% chose neutral. These finding might indicate that most of the students considered the use of Fanfiction as authentic materials could enhance their reading skills.

Some of the participants also stated their positive responses in the open-ended questions, such as:

- *"In my opinion, the use of Fanfiction as authentic reading material helps me understand the English language more especially in text reading and become more comfortable with the language."*
- *"From the zoom meeting that the researcher conducted, it introduced me to Fanfiction and some learning ways that the researcher taught to find comprehending answers quickly, which is a very useful tip for the test. I quite enjoyed the learning session and it was very fun to learn about reading Fanfiction through the five meetings."*
- *"They [Fanfiction stories] broaden my vocabulary size."*

3. Students' Critical Thinking Skills through Reading Fanfiction

70% of them strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *"I feel that using Fanfiction as authentic material helps me develop my critical thinking skill in English",* while only 6,7% disagreed and 23,3% chose neutral. Meanwhile, 70% of the participants also strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *"I feel that using Fanfiction as authentic material helps me develop my ability to read critically and evaluate information in reading English texts",* while only 6,7% of them disagreed. These results show that many of the students the use of Fanfiction helped them enhance their critical thinking skills through reading English texts.

4. Students' Communicative Competence through Reading Fanfiction

With regard to this category, a statement such as, *"I feel that using Fanfiction as authentic material helps me develop communicative competence in English language learning"* received positive perceptions. 80% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, while around 6,6% strongly disagreed or disagreed and 13,3% were neutral. Moreover, 80% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *"I feel that using Fanfiction as authentic material helps me became more confident in using the language in real-life situations",* while 6,7% of them disagreed and 13,3% of them were neutral. These findings indicate that most of the students regarded the use of Fanfiction as helped them enhance their communicative competence in the classroom context and in the real life situation.

5. Students' Challenges in Using Fanfiction as Authentic Reading Materials

50% participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement *"I find it challenging to read Fanfiction as authentic material in English"*, while 46% strongly disagreed or disagreed, and around 10% were neutral. The result show that half of the students thought that the use of Fanfiction as authentic material was challenging to them. Unfortunately, none of the participants explained in the open question the reason for this response.

DISCUSSION

In terms of students' interest in Fanfiction, it was found that most of the students find Fanfiction to be interesting authentic materials in developing their reading skills. This finding could stem from the students' unfamiliarity towards the existence of Fanfiction. Thus, bringing them into classroom as a reading material sparked their curiosity and interest. This is also strengthened by one of the participants' responses in the open-ended questions, where she claimed that Fanfiction increased her motivation because the Fanfiction contained interesting stories. In line with these findings, Kienbaum et al. (1986) stated that materials should relate to or be able to awaken the students' interest. These findings are also supported by Wulandari's (2021) argument that Fanfiction can promote engagement and relevance to students' interest in addition to improving students' reading skills.

With regard to students' reading skills, especially in terms of vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, it was revealed that many of the participants agreed that Fanfiction could improve their vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. In this study, it was found out that the participants mostly agreed with how the use of Fanfiction as authentic material improved their vocabulary acquisition as they gained some new words during the learning process. This could be because of the nature of Fanfiction as authentic material itself. Authentic materials are effective for teaching and instructing students in reading classrooms since they feature a variety of texts and use vocabulary that is not common in traditional learning materials (AbdulHussein, 2014; Berardo, 2006). With relation to the findings in the open-ended questions regarding reading skills, some of the participants stated that Fanfiction helped them introduce new words that they have never heard previously, and some responses regarding to learning new vocabulary along with their

spellings were also added. These findings correspond with Hamouda's (2020) study that authentic materials, as in Fanfiction, provided students with linguistic resources relevant to the real-world context. Some students also stated that Fanfiction gave them a broader knowledge about the language use that focused more on informal contexts: "*I don't know fanfiction could give me such a clear concept about the English language itself that is more relevant to our life than the stories in formal textbooks.*"

In this study, although critical thinking skills were not the main aspect that the researchers attempted to highlight here, 84% participants strongly agreed or agreed with the use of Fanfiction in their reading to enhance their critical thinking skills. This could be because authentic materials are believed to provide learners with meaningful and relevant content, exposing them to authentic language and cultural contexts. By engaging with real-world materials, students are encouraged to analyze and evaluate information in order to make judgments and solve problems. Additionally, the findings of this study support Emilia's (2016) research, demonstrating that exposing students to reading texts, such as Fanfiction, is an effective technique to help them build their critical thinking abilities.

In relation to the students' communicative competence, as many as 74% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that reading Fanfiction helped them improve their communicative competence. This finding is in line with Castillo, Jemma, and Insuasty's (2017) study that investigated the effectiveness of authentic materials, such as Fanfiction, in promoting students' communicative competence. This could be because the content of Fanfiction covers relevant vocabulary and language expressions that are useful in real-life communication. However, the findings of this study showed that almost half of the students experienced some difficulties in reading Fanfiction as authentic materials in comprehending the text and the meaning behind meaning it. From the researcher's reflections throughout the implementation of Fanfiction, the English proficiency of the students were quite low and it seemed to affect their motivation to learn English because of irrelevant materials they learned at school. Also, some challenges seemed to be related to the students' unfamiliarity of the vocabulary they encountered in the Fanfiction stories since the word choice is often different from what is presented in the school textbook. This is supported by the participants' opinion, where they stated that the challenges in reading English fanfictions usually deal with unfamiliar words and contexts, the use of slangs, and the difficulty in memorizing the word spelling. In line with the findings in Berardo's (2006) study where the participants were also not familiar with the context given in the text, this study suggests that the use of Fanfiction as authentic materials require careful selection in order to meet students' need, interest, and proficiency levels. Berardo (2006) also recommends that teachers should provide appropriate support and guidance in order to ensure that students can use authentic materials effectively, especially outside classroom.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the findings of this study revealed that most of the students perceived the use of Fanfiction as beneficial in helping them improve their reading skills. The results

also indicate that the use of Fanfiction as authentic materials could boost students' interest and curiosity, which leads to the increased reading motivation. Despite the positive perceptions of the students towards the use of Fanfiction in enhancing their reading skills, there are several factors that should be considered before introducing Fanfiction into the classroom. Considering the principle of using authentic materials, Fanfiction stories should be adjusted to the students' needs and level of English proficiency; and teachers need to ensure the appropriate tasks in implementing Fanfiction in the classroom. This study suggests several recommendations for other researchers who would like to carry out similar research in the future. It would be interesting to use Fanfiction from a specific fandom if the focus of the study is related to students' interests, so the reading text could be more engaging to a specific group of students. In order to have a balanced viewpoint, future studies can also investigate teachers' views towards the use of Fanfiction in teaching reading skills. Finally, thorough classroom observation can be used to collect data related to students' attitudes towards the use of Fanfiction in the classroom. This study suggests that the findings of this study could inform pedagogical classroom practices, especially in the reading class. Teachers could consider the use of literary work such as Fanfiction to provide students with diverse reading texts that address the students' needs, interests, and preferences. Thus, students could be exposed to various genres of texts, vocabulary, and other linguistic resources that could help them improve their English proficiency.

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