Conference Paper

Online News As Learning Resource in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Newspaper has been acknowledged as one useful learning resource in EFL classrooms. In this digital era teachers as well as learners can access unlimited resources on the internet; one of the resources available for free and at all times is online news. However, nowadays some students are not really keen on reading news and reading it in English is even more challenging. For this reason this study aims to bridge this gap. This research tries to find out in what way reading news on the same topics in both the Indonesian and English versions benefits EFL learners in terms of content and vocabulary. There were 98 Indonesian freshmen from three Reading classes taking part in this study. They read both the Indonesian and English news on the same topics as their reading assignment during the semester. At the end of the semester an online survey was conducted to find out the benefits of the assignment. A focused group interview was conducted to gain more information on the subjects' responses in the survey. The findings show that reading both the Indonesian and English news on the same topics enhance the subjects' understanding of the content of the English news as well as help them better guess the meaning of unknown English words and increase their vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: online news, learning resource, EFL classrooms

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1. Introduction

Reading is one of the most important skills for academic study; through reading students acquire the knowledge necessary for learning. For Indonesian university students, even though the medium of instruction is not in English, they are still required to read some English textbooks related to their major. Therefore, to be able to read fluently in English, students need to improve their reading skills as well as to have sufficient vocabulary for comprehending a text.

This study focuses on one way to improve students' reading comprehension and at the same time increase their vocabulary through online news. In the studies of the Academic Word List Coxhead (2000) stated that newspaper writing is characterized by

the use of formal language which is also used in academic texts. Therefore, reading news can provide the exposure on formal words which students may encounter in academic texts. Moreover, being free and accessible at any time online news, compared to hard copy newspaper, can become cheap and convenient resources for both teachers and learners for teaching and learning purposes. Berardo (2006) stated that online news offers abundant authentic reading materials compared to the artificial language used in textbooks or classrooms. Young adult learners, according to Reddy and Nazneen (2018), can relate more to reading English newspaper than technical texts. Moreover, "newspapers are linguistically rich and varied" (529); therefore, they can be employed to improve language skills and increase vocabulary. Nikam (2018) proposed using newspapers for language learning in classrooms to supplement the course because newspaper offers interesting and updated information; establishes reading habits; contains other forms of texts such as pictures, photographs, and cartoons; shows the use of persuasive language in advertisements; and offers news in the mother tongue to facilitate learning English with familiar content. Reading news in mother tongue with familiar content may help students feel comfortable to learn. For this reason this study attempted to make use of online news in Indonesian and English on similar topics and events which were familiar to the subjects. Reading the Indonesian news first, was expected to bridge the subjects to understand the content better when reading the English news on the same topic. At the same time their understanding of the content and context could also help them infer the meaning of new vocabulary in the news.

2. Method

This study involved 97 freshmen from three (3) Reading classes. These subjects did the online news reading as their assignment counted as part of their grades. In a group of three or four they had to read twenty-four (24) news articles along the semester; they were free to choose the topics as long as they could find both versions in English and Indonesian. Even though the articles were not direct translation, the content was more or less similar. The subjects were instructed to read the Indonesian news prior to the English one. Based on their reading, the subjects submitted a report consisting of a short summary and new vocabulary in a word-web format for each news article. The copies of the articles were also attached in the report to document the source and dates of publication.

At the end of the semester an online survey was conducted to elicit the subjects' responses regarding this assignment. The survey responses employed a combination

format between a multiple choice and Likert Scale. Subsequent to the survey, focus-group interviews were conducted to probe more information to confirm the survey data. Afterward the collected data was categorized and presented in descriptive statistics. The analysis discussed the trend as well as well as the significant findings in this study.

3. Findings

The followings are the results from the online survey and focus-group interview conducted at the end of the semester.

TABLE 1: Frequency of reading news

Items	Percentage
EVERY DAY	19.5
3-4 TIMES/WEEK	18.5
1-2 TIMES/WEEK	57.2
NEVER	4.8

Table 1 shows that more than half of the subjects read news 1-2 times per week. Less than 20% of the subjects read it every day or 3-4 times per week and very few subjects admitted they never read news.

TABLE 2: Reasons for choosing the news

Items	Percentage
EASY TO READ	10.5
INTERESTING	44.9
HOT ISSUE	25.2
NO REASONS	19.4

Table 2 indicates that the subjects tended to choose the news that interested them more (44.9%) than the news which were popular (25.2%). Some reported no particular reasons (19.4%) in choosing the news whereas the rest (10.5%) chose the easy articles to read.

TABLE 3: Order of reading the news

Items	Percentage
INDONESIAN NEWS FIRST	46.6
ENGLISH NEWS FIRST	26.9
MIXED/RANDOM	26.5

Table 3 shows that almost half of the subjects read the Indonesian news first before the English articles; 26.9 % read the English news first and the rest employed the random order. The interview indicates that some subjects read the English news first when they the topics were familiar so that it was not too difficult for them to understand the content. However, some respondents who studied in the schools whose medium of instruction was English preferred to read the English one first since they were used to reading in English.

TABLE 4: Reading the Indonesian news first helps the respondents understand the content of the English version better

Items	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	23.1
AGREE	56.5
NEUTRAL	17
DISAGREE	3.4
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0

Table 4 shows that reading the Indonesian news first helped the respondents understand the English one. Half of the respondents agreed and 23.1% were very positive that this order of reading affected their comprehension. The interview also confirmed that reading the news in their native language really helped them understand the content better, especially those whose vocabulary was not sufficient to understand English news.

TABLE 5: Reading the Indonesian news first helps the respondents guess the meaning of new words in the English versions

Items	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	32.1
AGREE	41.6
NEUTRAL	21.2
DISAGREE	3
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2.1

Table 5 also indicates that reading the Indonesian news first helped the subjects better guessed the meaning of the new English words (32,1% & 41.6%). The interview indicates that the subjects used their understanding of the Indonesian news to guess the meaning of the unknown English words.

Table 6 shows the assignment of making a word web helped more than half of the subjects learn the new words more deeply. In the interview several subjects who took

TABLE 6: Making a word web to learn new words in the news

Items	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	15.5
AGREE	43.6
NEUTRAL	38.1
DISAGREE	2.8
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0

this assignment seriously admitted that by using this format they expanded the different aspects of the new words than merely the dictionary definition. They could learn about their synonyms, word association, collocation, idiomatic expressions, and how to use the new words in their own sentences.

TABLE 7: Making summaries to express understanding of the news

Items	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	21
AGREE	56
NEUTRAL	21
DISAGREE	2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0

Table 7 shows that most subjects agree that making summaries helped them understand the news content. In the interview some respondents admitted that had they not asked to write the summary for each article, they wouldn't have seriously read the news to understand it.

TABLE 8: Continue reading English news

Items	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	20.5
AGREE	37.8
NEUTRAL	36.8
DISAGREE	4.9
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0

Table 8 indicates that more than half of subjects would keep reading news after completing this assignment; however, 36.8% seems undecided.

4. Discussion

Judging from the responses in Table1 most subjects did not have the habit of reading news daily in their native language, not mentioning reading it in English, which is much more challenging. However, the subjects admitted that reading the news in their native language first could help them understand the news of the same topics in English (Table 4). This finding indicates that reading news in the native language first before reading it in the target language could serve as a bridge for the respondents whose vocabulary is insufficient to comprehend English texts. According to Nation (2006), to comprehend a written text one needs to cover 98% of the running words in a text; to do that having 8,000 to 9,000 word families is required. Furthermore, understanding the content of the news in their native language could facilitate the subjects to guess the meaning of the unknown English words better (Table 5). Nassaji (2003) found that 71% of the respondents in his study employed world knowledge as their strategy to infer meaning in texts in comparison to 33 % of those who used discourse knowledge. Top down processing using world knowledge or the content of a text could be used as an effective strategy to guess unknown words better. As for learning new words more deeply, most subjects seemed to be in favour of the word web format (Table 6). In this way they could learn different aspects of a new word beyond its definition which is what Nation (2001) described as the components of vocabulary knowledge.

5. Conclusion

The study indicates that reading online news in the native and English version of the same topic can be used as a bridge to facilitate reading comprehension especially for students whose vocabulary is still insufficient. At the same time students can develop their inference skills of unknown words as well as learn the other aspects of the word more comprehensively. Even though there is a tendency that students nowadays are not really into reading news on daily basis, news articles are still valuable to use as a resource for language learning purpose.

6. Suggestion

For a further research instead of making this reading procedure as an assignment, a test mode can be applied so that the subjects' comprehension of the content and the accuracy of their guessing new words in the target language can be measured.

Moreover, instead of letting the subjects choose the articles, the researcher should select the news articles in the Indonesian and English versions so that the content in both versions is close to being identical and more varied in terms of topics.

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