

# USING AUTHENTIC TEACHING MATERIALS TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION OF ISLAMIC ECONOMIC LAW STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to revise teaching materials for reading comprehension for the study of Islamic Economic Law at Al-Hilal College, Sigli. During teaching English, the writer (as the lecturer) presented reading materials taken from the textbook and they were less connected to the need of students of Islamic Economic Law Department. Thus, she decided to use up to date authentic materials taken from websites and online newspapers. The subjects for this research were 37 students in their first semester in the Department of Islamic Economic Law. The instruments used were observation check-lists, a test, a questionnaire, and field notes. The data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Furthermore, there were three cycles in this research. The result of observation checklists showed that the writer reached the improvements from first to last cycle, respectively marked by 76%, 86% and 88%. Moreover, observation check-lists also exposed the students' improvements - they increased significantly from 74% to 87% and 89% after each cycle. Additionally, the students' average test results increased positively from 38% to 75%. The questionnaire result proved that the students' perceptions on significance of using authentic materials were 91%, while 97% agreed with the useful of the texts presented during teaching learning. Lastly, through the document- i.e. field notes; the writer noticed that the students' vocabulary related to Islamic Economic Law increased.

Keywords: *Authentic Materials, Islamic Economic Law, Reading Comprehension.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Reading materials are sources in the form of texts such as books, articles, magazines, newspapers, etc., which are used to teach reading comprehension. Considering reading materials before determining how to teach them is very important. Reading materials are important because they are the contents of the learning process and also the media to connect students to the knowledge they require to understand.

The process to determine and select materials is not simple. There are three criteria that should be considered carefully to select appropriate reading materials via: responsiveness, cohesion, and stability (Evans, Hartshorn, & Anderson, 2010). Additionally, authenticity is considered in selecting materials for students especially for learning reading skills. The authenticity of text reflects the authentic quality of a text itself. Meanwhile, the authenticity of a text for language learning means any sources of information which are used to provide authentic understanding for learners (Al-Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014, p. 250). The material developer can rely on online resources as they are believed to link students to real contexts (Guo, 2012, p. 197).

However, for two years when the writer was teaching in the Islamic Economic Law Department, she had to use reading materials from textbooks for Islamic Economic Law which was not up to date. Most of the titles discussed the fundamentals of Islamic teachings. In fact the students needed more specific materials; they required more recent authentic reading materials to enable them to explore new knowledge according to their major.

Furthermore, the writer analysed some previous studies on material selection. Islamic Economic Law Studies originated from English for Islamic Studies although it is not well known as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Abudhahir, Mahdun and Nor (2011, p. 108) have noted: “English for Islamic Studies or EIS is a new branch in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)”. Thus, EIS is a specialty in English (ESP) to support Islamic studies. The students need English to assist them to extend their knowledge in their discipline. Edan and Mahdi (2011, p. 3) claim: “the ultimate aim of teaching ESP is to enable learners to communicate efficiently in the fields of their specialization”. To realise it, the materials should support the students’ learning.

The Islamic Economic Law students are required to enhance their understanding about the regulations in Islam; in relation to the core subject *Fiqh Mua'malah* (Economic Law). The writer contemplated and

considered to make a shift and select more authentic, particular and detailed reading materials for the students of Islamic Economic Law of Al-Hilal College, Sigli.

Based on the above the writer formulated these research problems:

1. How will the provision of authentic materials improve the teaching of reading comprehension for Islamic Economic Law students at Al-Hilal College, Sigli?
2. How will the use of authentic materials improve the reading comprehension of Islamic Economic Law students at Al-Hilal College, Sigli?
3. How will the use of authentic materials help improve the teaching of reading comprehension by the lecturers?
4. How will the students respond to the use of authentic materials for teaching-learning reading comprehension?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Reading Skills**

Some experts define reading based on their understanding and experiences. Grellet (1981, p. 3) has said reading is: “understanding a written text [which] means extracting the required information from it as especially as possible”. Grellet has also noted that reading is meaningful as readers attempt to absorb the needed messages from the written source. Furthermore, Urquhart and Weir (1998, p. 22) have said, “reading is a process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print”. This means that the process of reading is related to the human brain receiving and deducing the meaning of the information supplied.

### **Definition of Authentic Material**

There are a wide range of notions of what authentic materials are that have the same purpose. Galloway (1998, p.133) defines authentic texts as “those written and oral communications produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language group”. This indicates that authentic materials are created by the people who speak the language, either native speakers or a cultural group whose members speak the language. Furthermore, Wallace (1998, p. 145) has also defined authentic texts as “real-life texts, not written for pedagogic processes”. He has described authentic materials briefly but clearly

saying that they are original texts found through the facts in real-life, and they are not set or prepared for a learning situation.

Harmer (2001, p. 205) further states that authentic material is real materials which are produced for native speakers and capable speakers in the language, and it is not designed deliberately for foreign learners. The material itself varies and may be derived from various sources. There are a lot of authentic materials which can be found, e.g. speeches given by politicians and public figures, song lyrics, poetry, cartoons, newspaper articles and editorials as well as material from websites, especially blogs and Wiki, are all considered authentic text materials (Anthony, 2015).

### **Advantages of Using Authentic Reading Materials**

Authentic reading materials offer significant benefits for the improvement of teaching-learning especially for learning reading skills. The practice of selecting real, natural, authentic materials for students is still given less attention. In fact, authentic materials can develop students' understanding of actual information that has occurred around the world. Authentic materials provide opportunities for language use in a more relevant and communicative way (Sanchez, Perex & Gomes, 2010, cited in Guo, 2012). Nunan (1995, p. 216) also mentions that authentic materials have a major advantage for use in teaching-learning processes. He claims that beginner classes that study using authentic materials will give the students exposure before they meet real world language used outside the classroom. Additionally, Nuttall (1996, p. 172) states that "authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real life purposes by real people".

### **Selecting Appropriate Authentic Materials to Teach Reading**

Choosing inappropriate authentic materials can be disastrous for teaching-learning. Many authentic materials are available; however, the lecturer cannot just pick any old materials carelessly as it could result in failure in learning. In other words, the teacher must bear in mind that choosing authentic materials beyond the capability of the students will cause demotivation and could discourage them from learning the target language (Al-Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014, p. 252). The teacher has to make sure that her students understand the topic or the discussion which will be covered. The teacher needs to make an effort to search for simple material to use in the lesson to be taught, yet it should be natural text (Harmer, 2001, p. 205).

Nowadays, people rely a lot on websites. This also influences the teaching-learning situation (Mishan, 2005, p. 249). Additionally, it is important to consider that the material should be in line with students' needs, the level of understanding of the students, and the stability of its content. The categories stated before are known as responsiveness, cohesion, and stability of the materials (Evans, Hartshorn & Anderson, 2010).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

As this study was intended to revise the reading materials used for the study of reading by the Islamic Economic Law students, the writer conducted a Classroom Action Research (CAR) study in order to redesign the materials to be authentic and suitable for the students.

Gall, Gall and Borg (2003, p. 579) have said that "action research in education is a form of applied research whose primary purpose is the improvement of an education professional's own practice". This statement clarifies that this type of research really involves the researcher in his or her own job. In this research the practitioner works hard to improve her work to get better results than before (Arikunto, 2010, p. 128). Moreover, Sukmadinata (2010, p. 140) has stated that action research is conducted by the practitioner of a program such as a teacher, lecturer, principal, counsellor, etc. to identify the successes and problems in their own work in order to take further actions, or make improvements or revisions.

Lewin as a pioneer of Classroom Action Research describes the process of each cycle in Classroom Action Research as: planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Ermalinda & Paizaluddin, 2013, p. 31).

Hence, the design of this study involved three cycles which consisted of three meetings for each cycle. In addition, the collaborator had a very significant role in the success of the research. In fact the writer could not do a lot of work by herself or even at the same time (Arikunto, 2010, p. 139). The writer needed someone to help her and to make observations.

### **Subject of the Research**

The subject of this research involved the writer as the English lecturer and 37 students from the Department of Islamic Economic Law at Al-Hilal College Sigli.

## **Research Instruments**

The writer used four instruments for collecting the data for this research. They were observation check-lists (for both the lecturer and for the students), a test, a questionnaire and documents (i.e. field notes).

## **Technique of Data Analysis**

The data were analysed by applying both qualitative and quantitative analysis. In fact, since the data of the observation check-list/sheet were derived from both sides – i.e. were both qualitative and quantitative, the data were analysed by using both techniques of data analysis. The qualitative data were interpreted through words with processes as explained by Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 58-59) which consisted of three steps via: data reduction, display and drawing conclusions.

With regard to the quantitative data, the writer used some formulae to analyse the data obtained. For the observation checklist, the writer measured it as follows:

$$\text{Total score} = \frac{\text{Score obtained}}{\text{Maximum score}} \times 100$$

Then, the mean from the test was found using the formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

In which:

$(\bar{x})$  = mean

$\sum x$  = the sum of the scores

N = the total number taking the test (Sudjana, 2002)

Lastly, to analyse the questionnaire data, the writer used the formula from Sudijono (2005, p. 46), as follows:

$$P = \frac{F}{n} \times 100 \%$$

In which:

P= percentage

F= frequency of answer selected

n= total number of questionnaires completed

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Through the cyclical process of planning, implementing, observing and reflecting the writer obtained the results from this study. The research began with the step to outline the systematic procedure in implementing the actions. The writer consulted her supervisors in preparing proper research instruments and other important things. After that, the writer selected the materials from various websites. The writer read and considered carefully the texts which could match the students' major requirements. Then, the writer met her collaborator and let him check the materials. Furthermore, the writer also told him about the procedures that would be done in the class. Finally, the collaborator approved and was willing to assist the writer in performing her teaching.

The writer presented and taught the students the selected website articles in every cycle. Here is the list of the titles chosen:

- Islamic Laws on Trading.
- The Concept of *Riba* and Banking in Islam was offered to the students.
- Four Ways Conventional and Islamic Commercial Banks Differ.
- The *Mudaraba* Contract in Islamic Finance.
- The *Musharaka* Contract in Islamic Finance.
- The Emergence of Islamic Banking in Indonesia.

Figuring out the whole series of research performed over four weeks gave the writer a lot of experience. Weaknesses in early meetings such as overloading the students, poorly explaining the lessons, failing to control all of the students and so on, made the writer work harder to reorganise and revise the learning methods for the next cycle.

After overcoming the problems in the first cycle, success was later achieved, not only for the students but also for the lecturer. Authentic materials obtained as articles from the internet went over well with the students learning reading comprehension as the material provided them with topics related to their own major. Some factors which connected them to the authentic materials are clarified below.

First of all, their major study was Islamic Economic Law, and the authentic materials given discussed the real practice of Islamic law and regulations in relation to the economy. Most of the students had some basic knowledge about Islamic economics although they were still in the process of learning. However, being in the Islamic Economic Law Department influenced them to welcome the authentic materials chosen for their lessons.

Secondly, the students' environment also supported them to comprehend the topics provided in the authentic materials. For illustration, speaking about *riba* (usury or interest), in fact the students recognised it, because they admitted that they saw such practices in their society. The practice of *riba* is the lending and borrowing of money where there is an extra charge or interest to be paid when the borrower returns the money.

Another reason was the prior knowledge they possessed before attending the college had an important role. What really supported the students to grasp the authentic materials given was their background education, both formal and informal. In formal education, most of the students had graduated from Islamic senior high schools, while a few were from Islamic boarding schools. Moreover, the students were also influenced by informal education called *dayah* (traditional teaching about Islamic law). This also made it easier for them to analyse and understand the texts in the authentic materials offered. So, by using their prior knowledge, the students were supported to discuss the content of the texts. As a result, their English vocabulary for Islamic Economic Law increased very much.

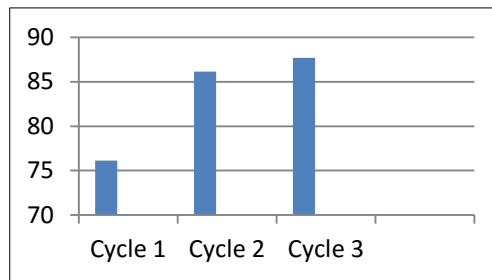
What is more, the writer also gained some benefits by doing this research. The writer found that she becomes a teacher who selected materials with precision to meet the needs of her students. The writer showed responsibility for her work when she made sure that the materials were really what was required by her students. Thus, authentic materials brought advantages for both the students and for the lecturer.

The following tables and charts illustrate the achievements from cycle one to cycle three.

**Table 1.** Lecturer's achievement in cycles 1, 2 and 3 based on results from the observation check-list.

No	Lecturer's achievements based on observation check-list	Percentage (%)
1	Cycle 1	76
2	Cycle 2	86
3	Cycle 3	88

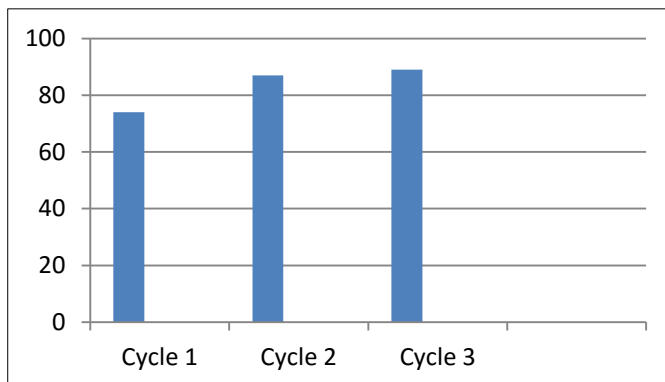




**Figure 1.** Results from lecturer’s observation check-lists.

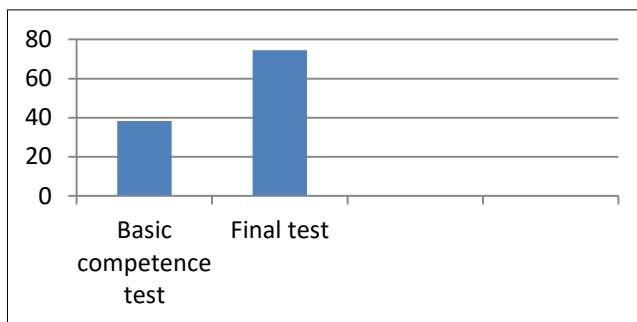
**Table 2.** The students’ achievements in cycles 1, 2 and 3 based on results from observation check-list.

No	Student’s achievements based on observation check-list	Percentage (%)
1	Cycle 1	74 %
2	Cycle 2	87 %
3	Cycle 3	89 %



**Figure 2.** The student’s observation check- lists result.

Regarding the test result, after they passed through the learning process, they made a significant change. The students were able to raise their average scores from 38 to 75.

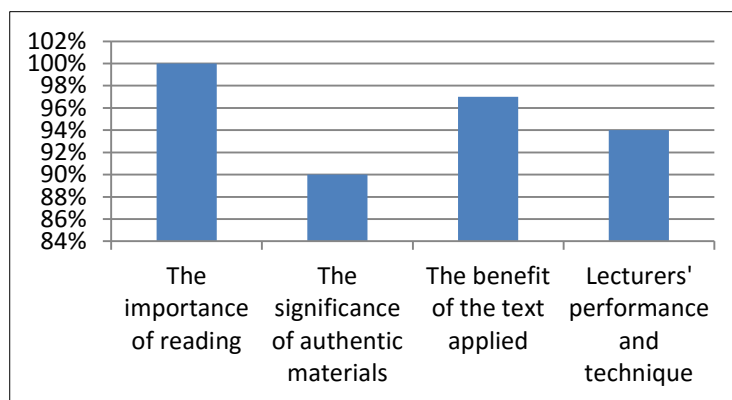


**Figure 3.** Results of students from basic competence test and final test.

Meanwhile, the results from the questionnaire were as follows:

**Table 3.** Results from questionnaire based on categories in it.

No	Category	Questions	Positive answers (percentage)
1	The importance of reading	1 and 2	100
2	The significance of authentic material	3, 4, 5, 6, 13, and 14	91
3	The benefits of the texts given	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12	97
4	The lecturer's performance and technique	15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20	94



**Figure 4.** Students' positive responses to questionnaire.

## CONCLUSIONS

The process of authentic materials implementation for teaching reading comprehension to students of Islamic Economic Law at Al-Hilal College, Sigli was performed by selecting the topics from websites and

the procedures encompassed four main stages in classroom action research namely: planning, implementing, observing and reflecting. The implementation of authentic materials improved the reading comprehension performance of the Islamic Economic Law students from Al-Hilal College, Sigli. The result from the observation check-lists from each cycle were: 74%, 87%, and 89% respectively and the average test results from the students improved from 38 in the initial basic competence test to 75 in the final test. The teaching of reading using authentic materials helped the lecturer improve her teaching competence was proved by the results from the observation check-lists in each cycle via: 76%, 86% and 88% respectively - and the result from the questionnaire where 94% of the students gave the lecture's performance a positive response. The students responded positively toward the use of authentic materials for teaching reading comprehension by stating their approval: 91% and 96% of them agreed with the significance and the benefit of the authentic materials presented to them.

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