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Secretarial Students' Preferences of Learning Materials: A Mix Method Approach

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ABSTRACT

Successful learning outcomes are determined by the best learning materials forging the students' profiles after graduation. To this end, it is imperative for lecturers or teachers conducting a study in accordance to the issue of learning materials. This research is not the exception. It tries to investigate the students' preferences of the learning materials used. This study is performed inside the language laboratory in one academy of secretary located in the heart of Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia. There are thirty seven students, all of them are women, from two different classes participating in this study. They are fourth semester students taking the English listening skill course which followed by them for sixteen sessions. This study uses a mix method as its approach with case study as its design. The instrument of data collection is questionnaire. The data taken from this study is analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results demonstrate that first audio-video becomes the most preferred form of learning material. By this, it brings its own implication like learning is more real, motivating and enjoyable. Second, the use of different forms of learning material would harvest various end goals. Third, for secretaries, the goal of learning English is the proficiency of using the four language skills. Finally, this research opens the way to the understanding of the preferences of students while learning English listening skill course in an academy of secretary.

Kata Kunci:

Sekretaris

Bahan ajar

Hasil pembelajaran

Suksesnya hasil pembelajaran ditentukan oleh seberapa baik materi ajar yang bisa membentuk profil pembelajar setelah lulus. Untuk mencapai tujuan ini, para dosen dan guru dituntut untuk melakukan penelitian yang berhubungan dengan masalah bahan ajar. Penelitian ini adalah salah satu wujud dari usaha tersebut. Penelitian ini mencoba untuk menelisik kesukaan para pembelajar terhadap materi ajar yang digunakan. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di dalam laboratorium bahasa di sebuah akademi sekretaris yang berlokasi di tengah Kota Bandung Provinsi Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah tiga puluh tujuh mahasiswa dari dua kelas yang berbeda. Mereka adalah mahasiswa semester empat yang sedang menjalani mata kuliah keahlian menyimak bahasa Inggris yang mereka ikuti sebanyak enam belas kali pertemuan.

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Introduction

One of the critical elements in studying is learning material (Kitao, 1997: para 3). Without it, to some extent, the process of mastering the objective of learning will not be happened. Even more, the role of learning material particularly in language learning is very determining (Seven and Engin, 2007) due to the focus of learning itself is manifested in it and it also develops the concept of learning motivation (Wachob, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to choose the suitable form of learning material that can increase the motivation of students. In most cases, the motivating aspects of learning usually based on students' needs and preferences.

Catering students' preference in the form of materials used will make the environment of learning becoming more efficient, motivating and at the end it will yield great results (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991). Moreover, Mcdonough and Nunan as cited in Sayed, Mahdun, and Nor (2014) emphasized that students' determination and participation were driven by students' want. If it is not recognized and accommodated, they will be demotivated towards learning (Sayed, Mahdun, and Nor, 2014: 109). In the same vein, students' preference may reflect their seriousness towards learning. When occurred, they can be considered as good language learners because they are aware to what they learn (Edmonson, 2009).

How to accommodate students' preferences through learning materials will need an extra thought and creativity. It is not easy, yet it is not difficult either. The lecturers or teachers just need to be sensitive towards the students' responses while learning. Their manifested conducts should be seen as the clues to update or alter the learning materials, besides the demands coming from users.

Many studies (Sun (2010); Secules, Herron, and Tomasello as cited in Hendrawan (2012); Seven and Engin (2007); Dikilitas and Duvenci (2009); Bartlett and Strough as cited in Ulbig (2010); Vi i (2011); Wachob (2011); Tevdovska, 2015) have been conducted in measuring the impacts of learning materials towards the students' preference. In this context, it should be understood as arousing motivation and joyfulness in learning. In accordance with it, Sun (2010) highlighted the close relationship between learning materials and how they affected the students' motivation. One of the findings emerged was students gained more interest in the subject matter learned and thus arousing their motivation in studying.

Secules, Herron, and Tomasello as cited in Hendrawan (2012) conducted two experiments related to video-taped instructional materials. It was found that the students' ability related to listening skills could be increased by the use of a video containing natural interaction among native speakers. Moreover, they argued that it provided students a real example of native speakers' accents, registers, and paralinguistic cues. Finally, all of these would help them improve their communication skills.

Seven and Engin (2007) suggested that students would have better concentration on the lesson if the teacher often used visual and audio materials during the learning process. In line with this, Dikilitas and Duvenci (2009) examined the effects of the use of audio and visual materials towards the students' speaking ability. The results showed that the students uttered more words when video used as the learning materials.

Bartlett and Strough as cited in Ulbig (2010) claimed that learning materials manifested in multimedia forms have several positive aspects like facilitating the presentation of material, maintaining student attention, improving student motivation, and providing more active teaching environment. These things are very crucial in an instructional process. Similarly, Vi i (2011) conducted a study measuring students' responses towards the learning material forms, the results indicated that the students acquired positive attitude towards electronic materials like live lectures, electronic material, and blended e-learning.

Wachob (2011) investigated the use of videos to motivate students and to increase their learning autonomy. It was found that video-taping and video-seeing could help learners promote autonomy and motivate them in learning. On the same page, Tevdovska (2015) concluded that the learning styles and preferences of the learners could be catered by the materials composed of a

mixture between visual and audio. In addition, the four skills of language learning like listening, speaking, reading and writing should become the major objective of the materials learned.

The studies alluded to date, to the knowledge of the researcher, have not been performed in an academy of secretary level. Mirroring on this, it is necessary to design the same research but with different context and participants. Moreover, in the academy of secretary where this study is taken place, its graduates are required to master English fluently besides mastering their basic duties as a secretary. That is why English is learned massively. It means that the students learn it in all semesters encountered.

Referring to the above facts, the present study becomes more significant in that the topics researched related to the students' preference of the materials used. Learning materials addressed in this study are the ones used in the English listening skill course and the aspects probed are intertwined with the forms of material like printed, unprinted, audio, video or audio-video. By managing this, it is expected that it can answer the problems of learning English emerged in academy secretary level. At this point, this might shed the new light to the issues scrutinized.

What is more, this study may contribute to the richness of literature in the teaching material domains and will fill the gap of the previous researches. Not only that, but also it will help lecturers, teaching English in academies of secretary, who are experiencing the similar situation that is selecting the materials to learn. To this end, it is expected that it will make the teaching of English run successfully.

Method

By and large, this study uses a mix method (Creswell and Plano, 2011) as its approach. This means that there are two form of data used and analysed. The first is quantitative data related to numerical calculation or percentage and the other is qualitative data involving statements of reason. As for the design, this study uses a case study (Alwasilah, 2006; Frankel and Wallen, 1996; Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger, 2005). This is applied because it tries to investigate a particular case related to the students' preference of material forms in English listening skill subject.

The instrument of data collection is questionnaire. It is analysed by quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative approach applied to count the percentages of participants' answers. While qualitative approach implemented to interpret and describe the percentage results of participants' answers as well as the written data of participants' responses.

This study is performed inside the language laboratory in one academy of secretary located in the heart of Bandung City. There are thirty seven students, all of them are women, from two different classes participating in this study. They are fourth semester students taking the English listening skill course. They are following it for sixteen sessions.

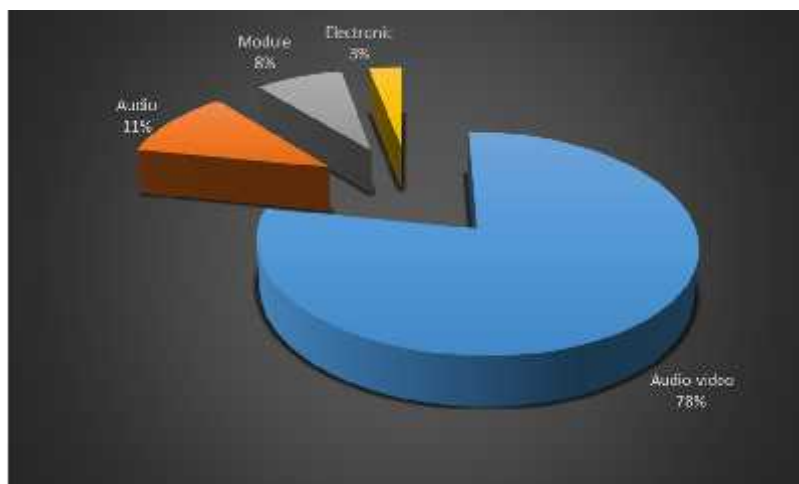
In every session of learning, the researcher operates various forms of materials which are in line with the topics discussed. The different materials are interchangeably given for instance, audio then module, after that audio-video and e-book so on and so forth. Yet, the sequences are not permanent or fixed. At the fifteenth session, the researcher distributes the questionnaires to the participants. Then, they bring and fill them at home.

In the present study, the researcher uses the concept of "good language learners" borrowed from Edmonson (2009) as the framework to justify the data collected. In this case, the concept is understood as learners' ability to be aware of themselves when learning a language (Edmonson, 2009). This awareness is further manifested in their expectations and endeavours towards the goals of their learning as well as to the learned materials accompanying them.

Results and discussions

The best form of learning material suggested

Having counted the percentage results of participants' answers, it is found that the preferences towards the material forms in English listening skill are varied. The data indicate that 78% of the participants prefer audio-video, 11% for audio, 8% for module, and 3% for e-book. If we analyse these outcomes, the most liked material is audio-video and the least favoured material is e-book. For the sake of clarity, the scores are illustrated in the pie chart below:



1.1 The percentages of various learning media forms used in ELS course

If we take a closer look at the pie chart above, the proportion of those who select the audio-video as the learning material is immense. Why audio-video gets the highest rating from the students. One of the plausible reasons is because audio-video has made the students motivated while learning (Sun, 2010; Bartlett and Strough as cited in Ulbig, 2010; Wachob, 2011). Besides that, compared to the other modes of learning, it manifests the spirit of the age that is the adoption of technology.

Moreover, the percentages above, to some degree, also reveal that the materials composed of visual and audio are suitable for the students where this study is taken place. Again, it happened because audio-video form of material can supply their needs by bringing the vivid reality into the classroom. This can be a demonstration of some lessons or cyclical procedures of events which can make learning easier to digest. Thus, at the end it will create the atmosphere of the learning dynamic and enjoyable.

Of course, the numbers of choices represented by percentages alluded above do not come from an empty space. There are reasons underline why most of the participants are fond of learning material in form of audio-video. When they are asked what the reasons are, they give diverse answers. The subsequent explanations are summaries of participants' answers in the questionnaires.

First, audio-video is easy to understand. Second, it is more interesting hence the motivation of learning is getting higher. Third, it is easy to comprehend due to its visual and auditory properties. Fourth, more pictures presented thus it is more interesting. Fifth, it helps students learn easier and at the same time it does not make them bored. Finally, it has its own subtitle so the students know what the speakers are talking about.

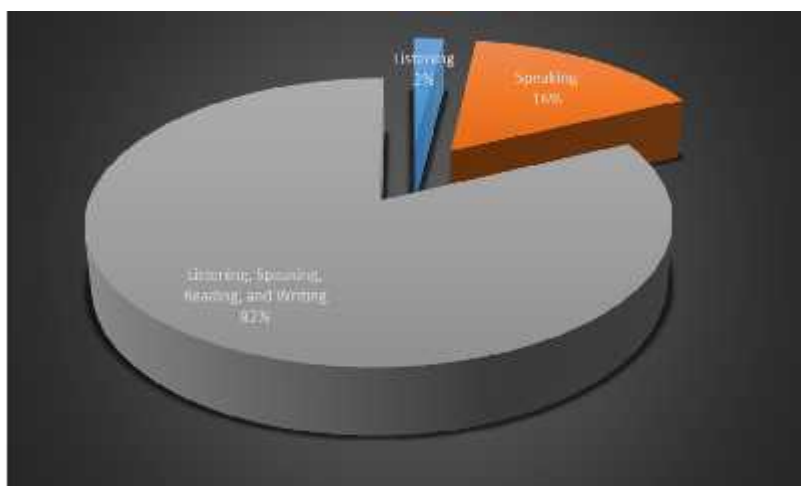
Unlike audio-video, some who prefer the audio argue that it is more effective because the sound produced can be imitated. Besides that, to some degree, it can make them more focus in listening for no images seen. Pictures, according to their confession, will ruin their concentration towards the topic being learned. For this reason, those who 'addict' to audio will avoid using a video as the primary learning material.

Contrary to audio, the participants selecting module propose some rationalities as to why they go for it. First, they admit that it is very easy to understand. Second, it is more suitable to learn due to its versatility which can be brought everywhere. On the same page, the participant who picks the e-book says that it can be read anytime and anywhere.

All in all, the use of various forms of learning materials in English listening skills have made the learning be perceived well. The most chosen form of learning material is audio-video. If used properly, it can give several advantages as named above. Even more, nowadays, this kind of material is free of charge and easy to get in the Internet. Therefore, teachers or lecturers may use it as often and as long as it is desired.

The end results acquired from learning materials studied

After studying English listening skills using several forms of learning materials, it is found that the participants expect particular skills to master. In this context, the skills are divided into three categories like sole listening skill, sole speaking skill, and the combination of four skills of language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The percentages of them consecutively are speaking 16%, listening 2% and four skills of language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing 82%. To be more luminous, the amount can be seen in the following pie chart.



1.2. The expected skills from the use of learning media forms in ELS course

The above pie chart exposes that the four skills of language learning dominate the participants' learning objectives, outnumbering the other two. This to some extent signifies that they want to master listening, speaking, reading and writing simultaneously through the use of audio-video materials. Their expectation of achieving those skills evinces that they are aware of their targets when learning a language (Edmonson, 2009).

Moreover, their awareness is embodied in their statements that English is important for a secretary. What follows is the summary of their thought after asked a question corresponding to the rationales behind the language skills mastered. First, they assume that a secretary must speak English well. In this context, speaking itself can be manifested in a task when she should replace her boss for oral presentation or other duties related to other verbal communications. Second, as the upcoming professional secretaries, they must become proficient communicators. This means that they must apply four skills of language mastery when performing their tasks.

Third, due to ASEAN Economic Community era, English is acting as its lingua franca. For this purpose, it behaves in the same way as Indonesian spoken by Indonesians. Therefore, a secretary must be able to use English as if it were her mother tongue. Fourth, the four skills of language are needed to support secretarial duties which mainly involve listening to boss instruction, reporting

verbally the ongoing working results, reading some manuscripts done and finally writing the perceived instructions.

Rather different reason given by the participants who elect speaking as the final goal. They assert that the speaking ability is very essential for a secretary in that a secretary will often communicate with many clients. This confirms the results of the study conducted by Dikilitas and Duvenci (2009) describing that the students uttered more words when video used as the learning materials. As contrasted with the participants claiming speaking is the best goal, the participant who appoints listening as the final intention states that this ability is the most important one. She argues that a secretary's duties are mainly affiliated with the oral instructions. In this case, she will relies on her listening ability most of the time.

In brief, every learning process involving some learning media will have certain objectives that must be achieved. For secretaries, the goal of learning English is the proficiency of using the four language skills. They must be able to apply them in their actual working processes if they want to be successful in enduring their profession.

Conclusion

Finally, several conclusions can be drawn related to this research. First, the findings from it reconfirmed the previous studies, hence it is empirically tested. Second, audio-video becomes the most preferred form of learning material. By this, it brings its own implication like learning is more real, motivating and enjoyable. Third, the use of different forms of learning material would harvest various end goals as demonstrated by this research. Fourth, this research opens the way to the understanding of the preferences of secretarial students while learning English listening skill course.

However, this study has its own challenges. These are first, it is done in one academy of secretary whose learners are not many thus the generalization of its results may not be strong. Second, the instrument of data collection embraces one instrument to some extent it creates a weak validity. Finally, the frequency and duration of every form of learning materials investigated are not exactly counted. Based on these, a similar study should be done but in more comprehensive ways, avoiding the negative aspects aforementioned.

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