

TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN DEPLOYING INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA TO ACTIVATE STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN READING ACTIVITY

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Accepted date: 2 May 2017

Published date: 30 October 2017

To cite this document:

Utami, L., Nurkamto, J., Suryani, N., & Gunarhadi. (2017). Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Deploying Instructional Media to Activate Students' Background Knowledge in Reading Activity. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling*, 2(5), 271-278.

Abstract: *Students' background knowledge is believed to be able to facilitate text comprehension because it acts as a mental hook for the lodging of new information and as the basic building block of content and skill knowledge. One of the strategies to activate the background knowledge is the use of instructional media. This research explored teachers' beliefs and practices in deploying instructional media to activate students' background knowledge in reading activity. It focused primarily upon the types of the instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading and the enactment of using those media to activate students' background knowledge. To investigate these issues, document analysis, in-depth interviews, participant classroom observation, and focus group discussion were used as data collection methods in this explorative case study. Five English teachers participated in this study. The research finding shows that the teachers made use of visual media (pictures) and digital media (YouTube). Those media were used in the beginning phase of teaching (the first 10 to 15 minutes). The procedures conducted were referring to the first two steps of scientific approach, namely: observing and questioning that functioned as a warmer activity. The implementation of media in teaching reading is, in fact, not only for warming up activity, but for activating background knowledge to enhance students' text comprehension. It is, therefore, recommended that the teachers understand concept of instructional media for activating students' background knowledge in reading activity.*

Keywords: *Media, Background Knowledge, Reading Comprehension*

Introduction

Students' background knowledge is believed to be able to facilitate text comprehension. It acts as a mental hook for the lodging of new information and as the basic building block of content and skill knowledge (McKeown et. al, 2009; Kostons & Werf, 2015). It refers to all experience in students' mind that can help them connect new information with what they already know. It includes life experiences, educational experiences, knowledge of how texts can be organized theoretically, knowledge of how one's L1 works, knowledge of how L2 works, and cultural background and knowledge that the students bring to a text (Dionne & Anderson, 2013; Kostons & Errf, 2015). By tapping into what students already know, teachers can assist students in understanding the new information.

One of the most effective strategies that can activate students to think about what they already know about a topic in reading comprehension is by deploying instructional media (Aini, 2013; Coffindaffer, 2010; Taiwo, 2009). The deployment of instructional media can (1) help to gain attention and maintain students' interest in the theories and concepts under discussion, (2) hone their analytical skills by analyzing media using the theories and concepts they are studying, (3) enable students to see concepts and new examples, and (4) facilitate the students experience worlds beyond their own, especially if the media is sharply different from their local environment, and (5) enhance students' independence and autonomy to build their knowledge and skills in life (Taiwo, 2009).

The research, therefore, needs to be conducted to identify the types of instructional media the teachers deployed in the teaching of reading and the enactment of using those media to activate students' background knowledge to enhance students' text comprehension. This is due to the limitation of research focusing on the practice of those media in the classroom. There have been some researches focusing on the use of different types of instructional media in teaching reading, however, they do not examine the enactment of those media to activate students' background knowledge enhancing text comprehension. They focus on the general usage and role of different types of instructional media in language learning such as pictures, graphic organizers, computers, video, and other types of instructional media (Aini, 2013; DeWitt et.al. , 2013; DiGiulio, 2012; Liu & Breslin, 2013; Lin, 2014; Omar and Bidin, 2015; and Taiwo, 2009; Zakas et. al, 2013).

Based on the issues above, this study intends to explore the teachers' beliefs and practices in deploying instructional media to activate students' background knowledge in reading activity. It emphasizes primarily on the types of the instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading and the enactment of the use of those media to activate students' background knowledge to enhance students' text comprehension.

Research Method

This research is a case study focusing primarily upon the types of the instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading and the enactment of the use of those media to activate students' background knowledge to enhance students' text comprehension.

The research was conducted at Islamic Senior High Schools in Solo Raya, Indonesia. The participants of the case study consisted of five English teachers. They have specific qualifications, namely: (1) they have at least four years formal education at a university level (strata 1), (2) they have been teaching at least for five years, (3) they have been certified as

professional teacher, (4) they teach at public school in regencies, and (5) they will cooperate with the researcher to have participant classroom observation.

There are three data sources in this research, namely: informants, events, and artifacts. In this context, informants refer to the English teachers who are considered to have enough knowledge, beliefs, and practice on the use of instructional media. Events refer to the process of teaching reading done by the teachers in the classrooms. Artifacts refer to the document the teachers use in teaching, such as teaching lesson plan, teaching materials, and instructional media.

In collecting the data, the researcher first analyzed the teachers' documents in teaching reading comprehension comprising of teaching lesson plan, teaching materials, and instructional media. Then, the participants were interviewed orally and individually based on the interview protocol. The whole interview guide was first read by the participants since knowing the questions in advance helped them to answer what was asked more accurately. Both document analysis and in-depth-interviews were intended to identify the types of instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading. Next, participant classroom observation was conducted. It was to observe the enactment of the use of instructional media the teachers deployed to activate students' background knowledge to enhance students' text comprehension. Using observation sheet, the researcher observed, identified, analyzed, evaluated, and jotted down how the process of teaching was performed. The researchers also took photograph and recorded the teachers' practice in the classroom. Finally, focus group discussion (FGD) was done together with all participants. The researchers re-interviewed some of the participants to confirm some key information to avoid the inaccuracy of data.

To validate the collected data, the data source and method triangulation was applied to make the final results more reliable (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The process of triangulation took several and constant revisions in order to end with meaningful and accurate information for this research (Mackey & Gass, 2012; Richards, Steven & Seedhouse, 2012)

In analyzing the collected data, the researcher applied interactive model. The component of data analysis of the interactive model includes for stages, namely (1) collecting the data, (2) reducing the data, (3) displaying the data, and (4) drawing conclusion

Research Findings and Discussion

Research findings

The research findings and discussion focuses on two aspects, namely (1) the types of the instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading and (2) the enactment of the use of those media to activate students' background knowledge to enhance students' text comprehension. They are described in the following sections.

The types of instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading

The result of document analysis, in-depth interview and FGD showed that the teachers applied instructional media to activate background knowledge in teaching reading. The types of instructional media the teachers used can be seen at table 1.

Table 1. The Types of Instructional Media Used in Teaching Reading

No	Teachers	Standard Competence	Grade	Topic	Media
1	BWK	3.9	X	Song	YouTube
2	UM	3.4	X	Fable	YouTube
3	JH	3.5	XII	Caption	Picture

4	Z	3.4	XII	Job Application	Picture
5	K	3.5	XI	Fairytale	YouTube

The table shows that the teachers used two types of instructional media, namely: (1) YouTube and (2) pictures. It also shows that the teachers preferred using YouTube to picture for some reasons. JH explained that,

YouTube is easy to find in the internet. My students can look for it by themselves. When I use YouTube for teaching the students, they are motivated and happy. They find it easy to understand the text in the video and get vocabulary from it. They like studying English then because they get something interesting and new.

BWK added that,

In teaching reading, I use not only YouTube video but also pictures. I just think some social classes, that not all students have laptop and internet access. When I give them a task to download a YouTube video for discussion, it is not always successful. In that situation, the pictures taken from the book is more beneficial. It is very cheap.

The enactment of using instructional media to activate background knowledge and enhance students' text comprehension.

The enactment of the use of those media is through the first two steps of scientific approach, namely: (1) observing and (2) questioning. The implementation can be seen at table 2.

Table 2. The Enactment of Using Instructional Media in Teaching Reading

No	Teachers	Steps in Scientific Approach	
		Observing	Questioning
1	BWK	- Ask the students to observe and listen the song entitled "I have a dream"	- Ask the students what they have seen in the video - Give opportunity to ask questions related to the song
2	UM	- Ask the students to observe a fable entitled "The Lions and the Mice"	- Ask the students what they have seen in the video - Give opportunity to ask questions related to the fable.
3	JH	- Ask the students to observe the caption entitled "Let's visit Seattles"	- Ask the students what they have seen in the caption - Give opportunity to ask questions related to the caption.
4	Z	- Ask the students to observe the caption of job vacancy of "Hotel chef"	- Ask the students what they have seen in the caption of job vacancy - Give opportunity to ask questions related to the caption of job vacancy.
5	K	- Ask the students to observe a fairytale entitled "Cinderella"	- Ask the students what they have seen in the video about Cinderella - Give opportunity to ask questions related to the video about Cinderella.

Discussion

The types of instructional media teachers deployed in the teaching of reading

All interviewees (English teachers) are aware that all types of instructional media should be deployed in the teaching of reading. However, they only use two types of instructional media, namely: visual (picture) media and digital media (YouTube).

The first type of instructional media the teachers deploy in teaching reading is visual media in the form of pictures. They refer to non-photographic and two dimensional materials which is utilized by the teachers to convey messages to the students. This kind of material basically not only includes pictures but also drawings, charts, and graphs. The teachers only use pictures because they are easy to find and practical. They like using pictures because they can help students learn better and get several benefits, namely: (1) the use of pictures enables the students to learn and memorize the materials easily, (2) the use of pictures can improve the students' interest and motivation, (3) the use of pictures can improve the students' participation, (4) the use of picture can improve the students' self-confidence, (5) the use of picture can improve the students' personal relationship, and (6) the use of picture can improve the students' attitude and behaviour.

The teachers' reason for deploying the pictures is that that they offer several benefits to the teaching of reading comprehension (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; DiGiulio, 2012). They have can help students understand various aspects of foreign language. They have motivated the students and made the subjects they are dealing clearer. They also can illustrate the general idea and forms of an object or action which are particular to a culture. Accordingly, the teachers are advised to consider the following principle when using those media. First, picture is easy to prepare. It is very easy for the teacher to prepare a picture as teaching media. It only takes a little time to prepare the picture but teacher can use it many times with different classes and even different topics. Once teacher has built up a picture library it is usually not difficult to prepare the activities suggested in the book. Second, picture is easy to organize. It is easy to organize in the classroom. Activity using a picture does not require much organizational time and energy. Third, picture is interesting. Picture is usually interesting to the students and the teachers. In this way, the teacher should be wise to consider the activity which is worth doing by using pictures. Fourth, picture is meaningful and authentic. The language and the way the teacher wants the students to use the picture is authentic and intrinsic to the activity. Fifth, picture provides sufficient amount of language. The activity by using picture will give rise to a sufficient amount of language in order to justify its inclusion in the language lesson.

The second type of instructional media the teacher uses in teaching reading is digital instructional media in the form of YouTube. It refers to video that can be transmitted over internet or computer network. The teachers utilize it for teaching narratives, exposition, and explanation texts (Ambard & Ambard, 2012). There are some digital media but the teachers like using YouTube best, because it can get students energized and engaged in the hands-on learning process. Using sight and sound, YouTube is the perfect medium for students who are auditory or visual learners. YouTube stimulates and engages students creating interest and maintaining that interest for longer periods of time, and it provides an innovative and effective means for educators to address and deliver the required curriculum content.

Besides that, YouTube can take the teachers' position as the facilitator. The use of YouTube can (1) help students in retaining the subject content learnt, (2) help to contextualize learning, (3) stimulate the cognitive aspect of learning in ESL classrooms, (4) engage ways to present ideas and concepts that will increase the interest and motivation of students to participate in a given topic; (5) increase the ability of students to view media for more than just entertainment value alone (5) serve as a strategy to create an experiential learning environment where students feel emerged in the events or situations they are learning about (Bannick, 2009; DeWitt et. al, 2012; Crook & Mauchline, 2012

The enactment of using instructional media to activate background knowledge and enhance students' text comprehension.

The results of participant classroom observation show that the teachers made use of visual instructional media in the form of pictures and digital media in the form of YouTube. The teachers used the media in the beginning phase of their teaching (the first 10 to 15 minutes). In the phase of scientific approach, the students followed the first two steps, namely (1) observing and (2) questioning. In fact, the phase refers to pre-reading activity. It does not only refer to the activity of observing and questioning. The activity could follow the procedures, namely: (1) asking the students to observe the activities in the picture or YouTube, (2) having the students answer questions related to what they observed, (3) guiding the students to predict what they would learn, (4) guiding the students to jot down new and unfamiliar words taken from pictures and YouTube, (5) confirming whether the students get ready to learn new texts. These procedures seem to be rigid since they teach the students classically instead of in small group which can facilitate the students to share ideas in social interaction.

The teachers' practices in activating background knowledge sometimes distort the objectives. The objective in activating and building background knowledge changes to be a warmer as ice breaker. This is caused by the lack of teachers' skill in planning the activities using those media. Accordingly, the teachers should consider some principles in the enactment of instructional media to activate students' background knowledge (Bannick, 2009; DeWitt et. al, 2012). The principles include the following description. First, **before learning the concept, show the media** in the discussion and it will give students an image to which they can compare the topics under discussion. Second, **after a brief introduction and before learning the concept is done, a brief explanation of what media is about is given.** It helps to focus attention while watching the media. Third, **after learning the concept shows the media and the description of a theory or concept that allows the instructor to use the scenes as a case study.** Fourth, **repeating the media is especially helpful when trying to develop student understanding of complex topics.** The purpose of activating the background knowledge using the media before the discussion to give students an anchor.

Conclusion

Instructional media serves as an effective strategy to activate students' background knowledge enhancing text comprehension. There are several types of instructional media but the teachers prefer deploying visual and digital instructional media in the form of pictures and YouTube. Using instructional media engages the students, aids their retention, motivates interest in the subject matter, and illustrates the relevance of many concepts. Effective instructional media builds bridges between students' knowledge and the learning objectives of the course. It is recommended that the teachers deploy some types of instructional media in activating students' background knowledge enhancing text comprehension.

Acknowledgements

My special thanks go to the headmasters of Islamic Senior High Schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*) in Solo, Indonesia, for having supported and permitted the researcher to do the research

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