

การใช้ข่าวเป็นสื่อการเรียนการสอนแบบเอกสารจริงสำหรับ ผู้ที่ศึกษาภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

Using news articles as authentic materials for EFL students

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บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่มีความสำคัญต่อการติดต่อสื่อสารกับผู้คนทั่วโลก เช่นเดียวกับสื่อที่เกี่ยวกับข่าวสารต่าง ๆ ที่เป็นเครื่องมือสำคัญในการติดตามข้อมูลและเหตุการณ์สำคัญที่เกิดขึ้นในโลก การนำข่าวมาใช้ในการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษได้รับการยอมรับว่าสามารถพัฒนาทักษะทางภาษาของผู้เรียน อีกทั้งยังเสริมสร้างความรู้รอบตัวเกี่ยวกับโลกภายนอก ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งสำคัญสำหรับนักศึกษาที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ เนื่องจากผู้เรียนเหล่านี้มีโอกาสอย่างจำกัดในการฝึกฝนการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษนอกห้องเรียน หรือเรียนรู้เกี่ยวกับวัฒนธรรมต่างชาติและเหตุการณ์ต่าง ๆ ที่เกิดขึ้นรอบโลก การใช้ข่าวหนังสือพิมพ์ในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษทำให้บทเรียนน่าสนใจ และกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนอยากเรียนรู้ภาษามากขึ้น เนื่องจากสื่อประเภทนี้มักมีเนื้อหาและรูปแบบการใช้ภาษาที่หลากหลาย อย่างไรก็ตาม การศึกษาทางภาษาศาสตร์บางส่วนชี้ให้เห็นว่า สื่อการเรียนการสอนแบบเอกสารจริงรวมถึงข่าวหนังสือพิมพ์นั้น อาจใช้คำศัพท์ยาก และรูปแบบไวยากรณ์ที่ซับซ้อน ทำให้ยากต่อการทำความเข้าใจ โดยเฉพาะในผู้เรียนที่มีระดับความรู้ทางภาษาอังกฤษในระดับต่ำ ในบทความวิชาการนี้ผู้เขียนได้อภิปรายข้อดีและความท้าทายของการนำข่าวมาใช้ในชั้นเรียนที่มีการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ อีกทั้งเสนอแนะแนวทางการนำสื่อที่เกี่ยวกับข่าวสารมาใช้ในการเรียนการสอน เพื่อให้เกิดประโยชน์สูงสุด

คำสำคัญ: ข่าว สื่อการเรียนการสอนแบบเอกสารจริง การเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

Abstract

English language is considered as an essential part of worldwide communication. In the same regard, news media are accepted as an essential tool for global citizens to keep pace with current situations and worldwide issues. Integrating news articles into English classrooms is widely suggested as these journalistic items can develop students' linguistic competence and expand their knowledge

about the real world, which is important for EFL students who have limited opportunities to practice the target language or experience foreign cultures outside classrooms. By using news items in classrooms, the language learning will become more interesting and motivating because these materials include a wide variety of content and text types. However, authentic materials including news articles are claimed by some linguistic studies to contain difficult vocabulary and complicated grammatical structures which may confuse and discourage students from learning the language, especially those with low linguistic proficiency. To shed light on this issue, this paper will demonstrate benefits and challenges of using news articles in EFL context as well as discuss how to use these journalistic materials in classrooms for the highest achievement of language learning.

Keywords: news articles, authentic materials, EFL

Introduction

In the 21st century, information comes from everywhere. Knowledge of every field is served through various types of media in a few seconds. Learning is not limited to only from textbooks or classrooms. Traditional lecture-based instruction has, consequently, become less interesting. In the current world of globalization, preparing learners for the real world outside classrooms is what teachers have to take into consideration. Life skills such as critical thinking or problem-solving skills are as important as learning skills. Teachers in this era should focus on not only theories and knowledge contents, but also how to live life wisely by exposing learners to real world experiences in order to make them knowledgeable and updated with current situations.

In order to show students what the world is like outside the classroom, especially in the countries where English is taught as a foreign language, authentic materials seem to be one of the best tools as they are considered to be a bridge linking classroom lessons to the real world. EFL students, with limited opportunities to use English outside classrooms, will be able to see how the language is used in real life situations. This idea is in line with Akdemir, Barin, and Demiroz (2012) who pointed out that enhancing teaching with authentic materials is the easiest and best way to overcome the difficulties of teaching English in a country where it is not the primary language for communication.

Ahellal (1990) defined authentic teaching materials as any materials produced by native speakers with an aim to communicate among themselves by using real language for real-life situations. This type of materials is designed for communication among speakers of the language, not for teaching

and learning purposes. Several studies (AbdulHussein, 2014; Kiliç & Ilter, 2015) suggested the use of authentic teaching materials in English classes by claiming that such real-life materials are not only interesting, but also can motivate learners to learn the language and bring them closer to the real world and target language cultures.

When asking many EFL instructors what comes to mind as an authentic reading activity for their learners, according to Clanfield and Foord (2011), one of the first things they will say is “using a newspaper.” English newspapers are easily accessible in countries around the world and are considered as a very productive tool in the hands of EFL learners. Moreover, most foreign newspapers have web-based versions; therefore, these materials are inexpensively, quickly and readily served from the comfort of the desks of language teachers.

Newspapers have been a part of people’s lives since the early 17th century as an affordable and accessible source of information. With a wide variety of writing styles and a great range of subjects featured in these journalistic texts, they have become a valuable resource for English language teaching. In America, newspapers, being considered as “living textbooks,” have been used in classrooms for many years. The term “Newspaper in Education (NIE)” has widely been recognized since 1930 as the collaboration among educational institutions, local newspapers, and community sponsors, and the program has been extended to other countries (Abu-Al-Sha’r, 2009; Alina & Lavinia, 2018). Radhika and Rajeswari (2012) explained the goals of NIE as to encourage the reading habit among students and increase the awareness of citizenship responsibilities.

As for the EFL context, reading newspapers, either in print or online versions, has undoubtedly become necessary, because they provide relevant information about what is happening in the world, and, as a consequence, broadening and deepening the outlook of students. By reading news, students can enhance their awareness of current events, enrich their cultural competence, and develop themselves to become knowledgeable citizens of the world (Pan, 2014).

Though providing a lot of benefits for the teaching and learning of English, on the other hand news articles as authentic materials were claimed by many scholars and research findings to contain difficult vocabulary and complicated linguistic features (Kilickaya, 2004; Tanasavate & Chinwonno, 2013; Thomas, 2014). In addition, the journalistic style of writing is so different from other genres that learners may have never seen in language classrooms. These aforementioned newspaper features may cause learners, especially those with low linguistic proficiency, to be frustrated and demotivated, or even discourage them from learning the language.

Benefits of using news articles in classrooms

News articles are accepted by scholars (Farmer, 2008; Tafida & Dalhatu, 2014; Vavla, 2009) as interesting and motivating materials which can make learning fun and more interactive. With news-based learning, students are engaged in enjoyable activities and encouraged to further reading. News articles report real-life events that are of actual significance and emotional value to the students, and this arouses their curiosity.

Teaching students to read news stimulates their interest to foreign language learning and promotes the development of language skills. As mentioned by several scholars (Pan, 2014; Brown, 1999), journalistic texts help advance students' linguistic abilities and improve their performance of language skills. Besides, most news media are linguistically updated and offer valuable linguistic data. They reflect language changes, and in doing so, help students and teachers keep pace with such changes.

In the studies conducted by Abu-Al-Sha'r (2009), reading online newspaper headlines helped improve EFL students' reading skills. This result is supported by Rahmasari (2013) who stated that reading newspapers can improve students' reading skills and those who use newspapers as a principal learning material have better achievement scores in reading than their matched counterparts, who rely only on textbooks.

Using news articles in language teaching also presents a broad spectrum of vocabulary and sentence structures which will develop students' vocabulary skills (Manasrah & Al-Khawaldeh, 2014; Tafida & Dalhatu, 2014). In Brown (1999)'s article about using online newspapers, he explained that internet reading activity builds on students' reading skills, helps them to enlarge vocabulary and forces them to infer unknown words from the context. This confirmed Manasrah and Al-Khawaldeh (2014)'s claim that students who are interested in news of certain issues written in English newspapers find out that they unintentionally get and efficiently use a limitless amount of new vocabulary they did not know before.

Other than developing linguistic and vocabulary skills, news contents also provide students with an opportunity to learn about the world and keep updated with current events. Reading news creates an avenue through which students can enlarge their knowledge, and newspapers are one of the most powerful sources of knowledge bank and information sharing. With news-based instruction, students develop a keen awareness of the world and their local communities, as well as gain a positive effect on attitudes toward their communities. Moreover, news articles pave many new ways

of classroom discussion which gives a lot of knowledge and exposure to students.

At the same time as providing world knowledge, the use of news media in EFL class enriches students' cultural awareness and competence by reflecting the culture of a certain community through the language they contain (Abu-Al-Sha'r, 2009). Besides, critical thinking skills and collaborative abilities are also developed. Incorporating news media into English language teaching can encourage students to examine global issues and controversial topics as well as give them an opportunity to practice thinking critically and discussing sensitive topics.

Newspapers, as affordable and easily available materials, can also create a sense of pride and achievement at being able to read English newspapers among students who will continue reading them throughout their lives. Tafida and Dalhatu (2014) advocated this point by saying that newspapers are an adult medium that students of all proficiency levels can be proud to be seen reading. They provide self-instruction and learner centeredness as well as build good reading habits that will last a lifetime. In the same regard, Rahmasari (2013) stated that using news articles encourages students to read outside the classroom and give them the tools and the confidence to follow the news in class and in the future.

When compared to course books, news articles are much more current and offer a wider range of information. A huge variety of journalistic texts offers a great amount of information on different spheres of life including local, national and international affairs. Moreover, there are various kinds of texts and language styles in news publications which are not always found altogether in textbooks. This makes students familiar with a variety of genres, like advertisements, editorials, reviews, reports, and statistics as well as everyday usage of language patterns (Akdemir, Barin, & Demiroz, 2012; Rahmasari, 2013). With news-based learning, students are exposed to different grammatical structures, idioms, or many new innovative constructions that will help them develop reading and writing skills. This is in concord with Tafida and Dalhatu (2014) who suggested news articles as learning materials by saying that they help students to see realistic examples of the practical applications of grammar that can be used in reading and writing experiences in and outside the classroom.

Another advantage of news articles is that they are flexible and adaptable to all educational fields and proficiency levels. The size of journalistic texts also ranges from a short paragraph to a whole page which enables a teacher to select the most suitable text for his/her class by considering its linguistic complexity, the amount of new information, and the level of students' competency.

There are numerous activities that can be conducted with news publications for an innovative way of learning as these journalistic texts change topics and contents daily.

In sum, news articles are productive and helpful authentic materials for EFL students as they can bridge the gap between classrooms and the real world. These journalistic texts help students develop linguistic and logical thinking skills as well as enhance their world knowledge and cultural competency. Using news articles in classrooms also provides activity-based teaching, and learner centeredness which will become a rewarding experience for teachers and language learners.

The use of news articles for English language teaching in Thailand

In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language. Teachers are encouraged to bring authentic materials into classrooms in order to show students how the language is used in the real world. News articles are accepted as another choice of frequently-used authentic reading materials for the purpose of English language teaching. Two widely-circulated English newspapers in Thailand are “Bangkok Post” and “The Nation”, both of which have their web-based versions. Though “The Nation” decided to stop its print edition and went fully online in 2019, its website is still one of the most visited online news sites in the country. The following are research studies conducted by some scholars about the use of news media for English language teaching in Thailand.

Tanasavate and Chinwonno (2013) studied the use of authentic materials among EFL teachers in Thailand and the perceptions of teachers and learners towards the materials. The findings indicated that printed texts, newspapers included, were among the most frequent used authentic materials as the third rank following songs and photographs. With respect to perceptions towards the use of authentic materials, both teachers and students agreed that such materials were beneficial not only by providing opportunities to use the language in real contexts, but also developing students’ vocabulary knowledge.

In the same vein, Noowong and Sukseemuang (2017) explored the students’ English vocabulary retention after being taught using news media including “Bangkok Post” newspaper and online news sites such as *www.bangkokpost.com*, *www.bbc.com* and *www.nydailynews*. Results proved that using news articles can develop the students’ English vocabulary and vocabulary retention.

Another common purpose of using news articles in classrooms is to enhance students’ reading competency. In this respect, Pairin (2011) investigated the use of excerpts from English newspapers in

Thailand such as “Bangkok Post” and “The Nation” as well as online news websites to develop grade 11 students’ reading skills. Findings revealed that the students’ English reading ability significantly increased after studying through the use of journalistic articles. This result is in line with Ghoummeddin and Sanpatchayapong (2013)’s which explored the use of English newspapers (“Bangkok Post”, “The Nation”, and “Student Weekly”) on the development of grade 11 students’ reading ability. Based on questionnaires and interviews, the students believed that English newspapers can enhance their reading ability at a moderate level. They also found it entertaining to read contents included in news articles and most of them (90%) agreed that they learned new vocabularies, idioms and syntactic structures as well as gained knowledge about the world.

From all of the research findings above, it is demonstrated that Thai teachers and learners have positive feedbacks towards the use of news materials in classrooms. Not only do they motivate students to learn the language, but these journalistic texts also help develop their vocabulary and language skills as well as global knowledge. However, the print version of news media is becoming obsolete or even the least popular medium of news checking, language teachers should then shift from the print to online version or social media news site instead.

Challenges of using news articles in classrooms

News publications are considered as one of the most common forms of print media widely seen in daily lives. However, when it comes to using news articles within the classroom environment, the situation may become a bit challenging. This could be attributed to the amount of time teachers need to prepare news articles into their classrooms.

One factor causing the amount of time teachers need to prepare news items for their classrooms is that these journalistic texts may contain difficult linguistic elements (including lexis and structures) that may prevent low-proficiency students from developing the understanding of the materials. As shown in the studies by Pho-Klang (2018) and Tanasavate and Chinwonno (2013), many EFL students agreed that authentic materials, news articles included, contain difficult vocabulary and complicated grammatical structures. Thomas (2014) and Kilickaya (2004) also advocated this claim by stating that authentic materials contain complex linguistic features that require too much time for teachers to prepare. Moreover, it will become a burden for instructors to explain or simplify difficult contexts in these journalistic items in order to make them appropriate for students.

In this regard, Abu-Al-Sha'r (2009) elaborated that the English of news items has its own characteristics on the lexical, syntactic and rhetorical levels which may cause difficulties among foreign learners. Since the journalistic genre is not the style that people use in their daily normal speech, it becomes difficult for students to understand.

In terms of lexical difficulties, Alina and Lavinia (2018) noted that the complexity of news articles may come with the concise titles, abbreviations and specific terms used. This claim is supported by Bermejo (2000)'s article advising how to read "Time" and "Newsweek" and revealed that the first area where both native and non-native readers need help when reading "Time" and "Newsweek" stories is vocabulary. Stories in "Time" and "Newsweek" often mix all types of register together. There coexist technical terms, recent coinages, informal language, colloquialisms, buzz words, slang, or even words the journalists have made up by themselves. And it is common to see literary terms or foreign borrowings in their stories.

Regarding the grammatical structures used in journalistic texts, most grammar textbooks teach each structure in isolation, while sentences from news articles use a variety of tenses, aspects, and tones in a way that all patterns are piled up on one another. As the news is written in this sophisticated manner, its grammatical construction would unavoidably confuse the students.

Akdemir, Barin, and Demiroz (2012) classified restrictions that teachers need to take into account before using news articles in classrooms as follows:

- Infinitive headlines refer to future events.
(‘PM to visit Japan’ – PM is going to visit Japan.)
- Auxiliary is omitted in passive voice statements.
(‘Seven killed in explosion’ – Seven people have been killed.)
- Many headlines are not full sentences and some are used without verbs.
(‘Hong Kong on the march again’ – Hong Kong is on the march again.)
- A colon is used for attributing the source of the content.
(‘Suu Kyi : Burma on track for democracy’ – Aung San Suu Kyi said Burma is on track for democracy.)
- The meaning of some words are not similar to their ordinary usages.
(‘World edges towards war’ – “Edge” means moving gradually.)

Another difficult part of news-related texts is the density of the information. Journalistic stories not only report news events, but also include quotations, background, and consequences of the stories.

Bermejo (2000) pointed out that journalists are likely to compress a lot of information together in a way that it can be difficult to understand. Words and phrases are very often woven together to give a lot of details in the shortest possible space. This kind of journalistic pattern has become one of the most important factors that increases the complexity of texts and is probably the most difficult aspect of the style of news items.

With its difficult vocabulary, complicated grammatical structures, and density of information, some scholars believed that authentic news materials should be applied with learners of intermediate or higher language proficiency (Kilickaya, 2004; Pan, 2014). Having enough lexical and grammatical knowledge to understand contexts in the news stories, these learners would be capable of acquiring the knowledge and have positive attitudes toward the teaching materials.

How to use news articles in language teaching and learning

The use of news articles in English classes is an interesting and effective teaching method which grabs students' attention and provides teachers with numerous possibilities of designing motivating activities. However, Alina and Lavinia (2018) noted that when using authentic materials including news articles in classrooms, teachers should take into account the advantages and disadvantages of employing such materials and plan lessons carefully so that the disadvantages will not outweigh the advantages. Not being designed for pedagogical purposes, these news items may differ in the degree of difficulty and accessibility and that is why they require a careful selection of materials to suit the purpose of each English lesson.

Regarding the selection of news media for language classrooms, teachers should take many factors into consideration such as the length of news articles, the complexity of the language, the news content, the time available as well as the level of the students.

Farmer (2008) suggested selection criteria when selecting news articles as follows:

- Appropriateness: Does it suit the age group and class level of students?
- Length: Is it too long for students? (The text should contain around 200-300 words.)
- Interest: Will students be interested in the content of the news article?
- Language: Is there some useful vocabulary and grammatical structures? Does it contain too much unknown vocabulary?
- Generative Potential: Does the article lead to productive class activities to follow like a class discussion, a presentation, or a role play?

After selecting appropriate news articles for students, teachers should then carefully design how to use them in classes. Some scholars proposed Do's and Don'ts of using news articles in language teaching and learning as follows (Clanfield & Foord, 2011; Radhika & Rajeswari, 2012);

Do's

- Be clear on the class objective and which skill to practice.

The class objectives involve two aspects: language and message. Language refers to linguistic features, which can be grammar, lexis and/or discourses while message refers to the attitude, moral, value, culture, etc. that teachers want to convey through the content (Pan, 2014).

- Use English newspapers in the local community. Locally-relevant topics are likely to have more impacts on the learners.
- Make class assignments or activities as authentic as the materials. Tasks like “underline some certain form of verbs” are of limited value and should not be used very often. Think about what people really do when they read news articles in their own languages.

Don'ts

- Assume learners to be interested in British, American, Canadian or Australian cultures all the time, particularly in tabloid gossips. Tabloids in foreign newspapers are not universal and may not be interesting for students.
- Assume that what teachers find interesting in news media will interest students.
- Assign simple tasks for low level learners by using a very difficult piece of text, e.g. find two names of countries in an article about international politics.

The students' English proficiency level is another factor to consider when designing lesson plans using news articles. Akdemir, Barin, and Demiroz (2012) admitted that news articles, as all other authentic materials, may have a disadvantage of being 'too original to be understood' especially for beginning-level students. In this case, the best way is to review the material before using it in the classroom. Though it has been advised by some scholars (Farmer, 2008; Kilickaya, 2004) that newspapers should be used with intermediate and advance students, classrooms with lower-level students can be made enjoyable by the use of news media either through ESL/EFL news sites or increased scaffolding.

Moreover, Pan (2014) remarked that authentic materials can be revised and simplified if needed before using them in the classrooms which advocated the ideas of Akdemir, Barin, and Demiroz (2010) as well as Abu-Al-Sha'r (2009) who suggested adjusting or even simplifying the materials to suit students' levels and help low proficiency learners overcome the difficulty in reading. However, "keeping the authenticity of materials" should always be emphasized. Adapting newspaper articles means to simplify the text language without distorting or diluting the text's content. The main goal is to make news articles more accessible by eliminating a few linguistic features that hinder comprehension. In this way, the content can provide reinforcement for students of the relationship between languages in the classroom and the outside world. At the same time, the simpler vocabulary and patterns maintain their interests in reading.

Conclusion

News articles are important authentic materials for the teaching and learning of English, especially in the 21st century when learners should be exposed to class materials that reflect the world outside classrooms and provided not only with learning skills, but also life skills. Learning English through news articles encourages students to keep updated with current situations, acquire world knowledge, and become knowledgeable citizens of the world. In terms of linguistic features, the journalistic style of writing provides students with a variety of vocabulary and linguistic patterns which on one side are beneficial for the learning of language but on the other side can be difficult for low level students. Careful selection of journalistic texts to suit students' proficiency levels and well-designed class activities are highly recommended to make the best use of news articles.

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