

## BOOSTING THE ADULT EFL LITERACY IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT: REVISITING THE UNIVERSALITY OF SCHEMA THEORY

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**Abstract:** This study explores the interplay of adult EFL learners' reading ability and the universality of schema theory. The conceptual relationship between the two aspects are discussed in an attempt to provide better understanding of why this study is essential for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) audience, both the practitioners and the researchers. Content-based Instruction (CBI) and Traditional Instruction (TI) materials are applied to six groups of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) adult learners comprising Agriculture, Engineering and Economic classes which accommodate 25-27 students each. Utilizing classroom observation, the study reveals detail interactions which occur during the teaching and learning processes. The activation of schemata or background knowledge during the process of learning, specifically, reading skills is clearly shown in the CBI classes while such cognitive process does not seem to occur in the implementation of Traditional Instruction (TI) material. This leaves a substantial recommendation for future researchers and practitioners of SLA to incorporate schema theory in whatever design they are pursuing in relation to developing teaching instructions for Reading skills.

**Keywords:** *Schema theory, Reading skills, Content-based Instruction, Traditional Instruction*

### INTRODUCTION

There is an overwhelming volume of research into the study of the nature of reading, with an abundance of reading theories formulated by different scholars who have been focusing on different aspects of reading. The common questions posed such as "what is 'reading', how it is acquired and taught, how reading in a second language differs from reading in a first language, how reading relates

to other cognitive and perceptual abilities, how it interfaces with memory" (Alderson, 2000:1) are all important aspects to be explored. Bringing all these aspects together into a comprehensive account of what it is we do when we read is an extremely hard, a probably impossible task.

Among the large amount of studies and theories concerning reading from all the different perspectives, significant empirical research has been

documented even though it is also confirmed that research on teacher education of reading strategy instruction still needs more attention (Sailors & Price, 2015). This gives rise to the development of different teacher program implemented on the basis of previous research recommendations. Pomerantz & Pierce (2013); Sailors & Price (2009), and others have categorized several types of reading strategies applied by more professional reading teachers (Akyol & Ulusoy, 2010). This is strengthened by others such as Klapwijk & van der Walt (2011) who give additional ideas of the importance of preparing teachers through the reinforcement of motivational factors and by boosting their self-efficacy (Varghese, Garwood, Bratsch-Hines, & Vernon-Feagans, 2016). On the other side, Kennedy (2016) also points out that we are not in the position of making every program succeed as many factors involve in the engagement and some are quite detrimental and beyond reach. Therefore, reading program should be viewed from different angles to be able to mandate which part needs more focus to be researched.

One which has attracted substantial attention is researching reading from the perspective of cognitive component and psychology. During the early development of the cognitive approach to reading, there was a strong tendency to depict information processing as a series of discrete stages. Each stage performs a specific transformation on its input and passes on the new-recorded presentation as an input to a subsequent stage (Sperling, 1967; Sternberg, 1969 in Johns & Mewhort 2003; Theios, 1973)

Later on, Grabe and Zhang (2013) postulated about the specific challenges reading tasks are designed for second language learners. Among them are said to be essential parts of requirement for success, i.e.,

limited vocabulary knowledge, grammatical knowledge, experience with various types of texts, cultural, and background knowledge. These elements are important contributing factors to reading skills which they can bring from their first language. Other strategies which in fact are challenging for students are various academic tasks such as summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing as they require the integration of reading and writing skills. In a more detail viewpoint, it is indicated that there is a set of more basic challenges the students face when reading is the main concern. These comprises the alphabetic component which includes the low ability to pronounce English letters, the low skill to pronounce the letters split from the real word, the low skill of mixing the letters to form the real word, and fluency component which includes non-fluent in reading English text. They become constraints comprehending English text (Hellystia, 2018)

What emerges as the most intriguing question revealed through the prolonged discussion on reading issues is the demand of understanding reading from the perspective of schema theory, which emphasizes the interactive relation between the text being read and the readers' prior knowledge brought to the text. Carrell (1984:332) asserts that:

Any text, either spoken or written, does not carry meaning by itself, rather, a text only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge. Such knowledge is called the reader's background knowledge, the previously required knowledge structures are called schemata.

The holistic nature of schema theory has become the greatest inspiration for the implementation of this study. The intention is to explore how adult

learners can benefit from this particular theory in respect to their specific need in EFL reading.

### THE CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHEMATA AND READING COMPREHENSION

Much of the work in the area of reading comprehension is based on the development of cognitive psychology in the 1970s and 1980s, which provided insights into the conceptual relationship between schemata (background knowledge of the readers) with the process of reading comprehension. Schema theorists suggest that the most influential factor in reading texts related to the subject matter to be learned is the learners' background knowledge (Anderson, 1984; Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979). Furthermore, Xiao (2008) highlighted the importance of schemata by arguing that schema has the characteristic of being organized, so when we learn we categorize information in hierarchical form built on our prior knowledge. This concept is reflected through the concept of psycholinguistic model of reading as presented in the following figure.

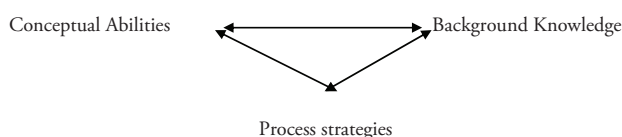


Fig. 2.3 The psycholinguistic model of ESL/EFL reading (adapted from Carrell & Eisterhold in Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988:75).

The above figure indicates the importance of background knowledge within the psycholinguistic model of ESL/EFL reading proposed by Coady (1979). He suggests that the background knowledge

of ESL/EFL readers, interact with conceptual abilities and process strategies, more or less successfully, to produce comprehension.

### Adult EFL learners

The world of adult learners with low literacy is illustrated by Quigley (1997) as a world of hope and triumph. However, fear and guilt arise at the same time to describe the conflicting emotion generally exhibited by such learners. This is a reflection of a great challenge accompanying the footsteps of adult with low literacy, learning how to read. This statement is basically directed to low-literacy first language adult readers, but it could obviously apply to the nature of EFL adult learners striving to acquire English reading skills necessary to pursue their study to the higher level. This belief is based on the strong view which regards reading as probably the most important skill for second language learners in academic context. (Grabe, 1991)

In relation to the current study, a wide variety of researches have been conducted focusing on vocabulary, individual differences, various reading strategies, and EFL attitudes. These aspects are assumed to be intertwined with factors underlying schema theory proposed by Anderson i.e., learners' age, subculture, experience, interest, education, and belief system. The findings have become a great inspiration.

### The nature of the program

In an attempt to address the adult EFL learners' needs of reading skills over the period of eight weeks, comprising 12 sessions at English Language

Institute, a private English school, based in Makassar, content-based material (labelled as Content-based instruction for this study) is proposed to enhance the learners' reading performance. This choice is based on schema theory proposed by several psychologists and sociologists who postulate that the ability of the readers to comprehend text depends on the amount of knowledge they bring to the text. This pre-existing knowledge is known as the prior knowledge or the schema of the readers (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Clarke & Silberstein, 1979).

This ESP (English for Specific Purposes) program is a program designed for students with specific English needs. Seven classes with three different majors are taken as subjects; Engineering, Agriculture, and Economic classes. Three classes were selected randomly to be taught using CBI and four others with Traditional Instruction, using the pre-existing material. This program is designed to meet the learners' need of Reading skills to pursue further study to postgraduate program.

There was an issue among the English teachers handling the teaching of English in this program in the years before (the researcher herself is one of the teaching team). The dissatisfaction of several students with the material provided and the teaching approach implemented by some teachers has attracted the attention of the program administrator to call for a better solution from the teachers involved. It was there that the idea of exposing the learners to a content-based material began, and later, also implemented for the sake of this study.

There is a uniformity applied by the teachers in general to teach 'what is in the book' without

preparing any guidelines such as syllabus, etc. What is set and provided in the material becomes the lesson outlines for the teachers to follow. The textbook outlines will be presented in the following subsections.

### **The delivery format of the content-based material**

In response to the program administrator's concern, and for the sake of the present study, content-based material was produced by compiling several units from ESP (English for specific purposes) textbook called *Engineering* by Johnson & Johnson (1988), *Agriculture* by Yates (1989) and *Economics* by Yates (1989). The three textbooks were then used for respective classrooms i.e., Economics for the students majoring in Economic, Agriculture textbook for Agriculture students, and Engineering textbook for Engineering students.

Content-based instruction (CBI) is a type of classroom instruction, which "encourages the students to learn a new language by playing real pieces – actually using that language, from the very first class, as a real means of communication" (Stryker & Leaver, 1997:3). This kind of approach is different from the typical approach used in foreign language classrooms in which emphasis is put on studying about language, performing exercises and drills, etc. (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Content-based instruction is meant to empower the students to become independent learners and continue the learning process beyond the classroom.

CBI can be at once a philosophical orientation, a methodological system, a syllabus design for a single course, or a framework for an entire pro-

gram of instruction. CBI implies the total integration of language learning and content learning. It represents a significant departure from traditional foreign language teaching methods in that language proficiency is achieved by shifting the focus of instruction from the learning of language per se to the learning of language through the study of subject matter (Stryker & Leaver, 1997:5).

This statement inspires the use of Content-based instruction in several classrooms under investigation. Positive responses were gathered from all directions indicating the high expectation of everyone involved in the teaching and learning the new material. It was emphasized at the outset of the program that the material was used as a 'pilot study' before being implemented for the whole classes to avoid misunderstanding from those who still had to use the traditional material. A consensus was reached and the research was carried out without significant problems. The researcher was given easy access to observe the classroom whenever requested, and both the teachers and the learners were happy to participate.

In order to obtain as much information as possible, the researcher used video recording to observe each element of the classroom interactions. The focus was on the way teachers promote active participation of the learners and the way the learners receive the teaching points. This is meant to elicit how the schemata possessed by the learners, play a role during the process of teaching and learning using this content-based material. Some observed classroom interactions are presented in several segments as follows.

## Excerpt 4-4

- T : ENERGY... (Reading the title of the passage out loud) What do you know about Energy?  
 A : The power inside the body  
 T : Yes, that's energy. Does anybody ever think that they have energy inside their body?  
 Ss : (together): Yes...  
 B : If we have no energy, we can't do anything  
 T : You're right! Give me an example.  
 A : To move the chair from one place to another...  
 T : Good! Any other idea? ...

The above segment represents several opening activities in the classrooms observed. Most teachers always start with a 'brainstorming' activity to activate the learners' prior knowledge about the topic. The question about energy in general as presented in the above excerpt could be interpreted as the teacher's attempt to activate the schema of the learners, which according to Anderson (1994) is the top priority to help learners engage in the reading activity in the classroom. The word 'energy' itself is very familiar to all individuals, as it has been derived as an Indonesian word, which means 'power', either as electric power, or human strength in doing daily activities. The above segment also shows that the two students (S1 and S2) have adequate knowledge of English to be able to respond in this foreign language. This might be due to the teacher's attempt to use English as a medium of instruction, which is also a form of direct exposure to English for the learners. This argument is based on several classroom observations in which some learners respond using the same language the teachers are using. Another example is provided below.

## Excerpt 4-5

T : “Coba perhatikan pertanyaan pertama, ‘what is important in the first paragraph? *Look at the first question, what is important in the first paragraph?* (the teacher reads the sentence aloud). Saya beri waktu tiga menit untuk membaca paragraf pertama” *You have three minutes to read the first paragraph.*

Ss : (All attention is paid to the first paragraph of the text. It is very quiet. The learners seem to internalise every sentence to find the answer).

T : (After approximately 3 minutes). Bagaimana? Ada ide? *Is there any idea?* (looking at the whole class and waiting for response)

S1 : (Raising his hand) Sepertinya, yang paling penting disini tiga pertanyaan itu pak. What, how and for whom to produce. Soalnya, ini kan berbicara tentang tiga isu pokok dalam ekonomi. Jadi, ketiga pertanyaan itu yang menurut saya paling penting. *It seems that the most important thing is the three questions there sir. What, how and for whom to produce. We can see, this talks about the three main issues in economy. So, these three questions are the most important ones.*

T : “Bagaimana yang lain? Setuju dengan jawaban tadi?” *What about the others? Do you agree with the answer?* (Asking for other responses).

S2 : (After looking around and found no response from other class members). “Kalau saya, mungkin yang penting adalah bahwa paragraph ini menunjukkan apa yang akan dibicarakan dalam paragraf selanjutnya. Biasanya kan begitu ya pak? Paragraf pertama dimaksudkan untuk mengklarifikasi isi bacaan selanjutnya?” *In my opinion, maybe the most important one is that this paragraph shows what to discuss in the next paragraph. It is usually like that, isn't it? The first paragraph is the opening part to clarify the content of the passage.*

T : (Smile, he responded) Keduanya bisa benar. Coba perhatikan lagi, hal apa yang paling penting. *Both could be correct. Look closely again, what is the most important thing?* (emphasizing with intonation, the word ‘paling’= *most*).

This segment is taken from an Economics classroom where 25 students are involved. There is no verbal instruction in English used in this classroom interaction. This is presumably why the learners prefer to use their first language to respond.

During the classroom observation though, the teacher approaches his students most of the time, especially when he assigns them to work in groups. Such a manner could give opportunity to every single student to ask the teachers questions whenever they need to, without having to feel embarrassed or reluctant. Questions are sometimes raised by the more active students, but most of the time they prefer to listen to the teacher’s grammatical explanation, e.g., about how specific words are morphemically built, for example the use of prefix, suffix, etc.

The above segment also manifests a general view of the teaching approach applied by the teachers in each classroom observed. The tendency of the teachers to ‘test’ instead of teach how to read’ is clearly shown over the observation. The teacher’s instruction such as, “*Look at the first question, what is important in the first paragraph?* (the teacher reads the sentence aloud). Saya beri waktu tiga menit untuk membaca paragraf pertama” *You have three minutes to read the first paragraph.*” is clearly a manner of ‘testing’ instead of leading the learners how to quickly find the answer. In such situations, as Anderson (1994:182) suggests, the teacher should

rather involve the learners in ‘guessing’ by recalling their background knowledge about the subject matter. Then, the learners may be asked to apply a “monitoring” strategy, which involves verification of their prediction and rechecking whether their guess is correct. Topics on economics are expected to engage the economic students much more readily and effectively.

Looking at S2 (student2)’s response in the above excerpt, it could be interpreted that the activation of this learner’ schema is in place.

S2 : (After looking around and found no response from other class members). Kalau saya, mungkin yang penting adalah ya.. itu... bahwa paragraph ini menunjukkan apa yang akan dibicarakan dalam paragraf selanjutnya. Biasanya kan begitu ya pak? Paragraf pertama kan... dimaksudkan untuk mengklarifikasi isi bacaan selanjutnya.” *In my opinion, maybe the most important one is that this paragraph shows what to discuss in the next paragraph. It is usually like that, isn't it? The first paragraph is the opening part to clarify the content of the passage”.*

This learner’s background knowledge and experience of what the opening paragraph is usually about has enabled him to recognize the most important idea presented in this particular paragraph. This explicitly indicates that he comprehends the text based on his prior knowledge. The teacher’s response by saying that both answers from student 1 (S1) and student 2 (S2) may be correct is a way of appreciating the learners’ effort to answer the question. This is a good way to motivate the learners to engage more, as they could be more efficacious.

In some other classes, similar teaching techniques are applied by other teachers. Another example is shown in the following segment.

Excerpt 4-6

T : (drawing a picture of a tree with visible roots on the bottom on the board for a few minutes and turning to the learners afterward) “Do you know what picture is this”?

S1 : It’s a plant!

T : Of course... (smiling) What parts of this plant can you recognize?

S1 : The leaves!

S2 : The stem!

S3 : The fruit! (The whole class are now laughing. No fruit has been drawn by the teacher as part of his tree).

The above segment is taken from an Agriculture classroom in which 26 students were involved, ready to work on unit 7 of the textbook entitled ‘Plant’. The seating arrangement is in rows, and it is very difficult to move the desk around to arrange a comfortable position to work in groups. The learners are then asked to work in pairs before the reading activity begins. The above opening section seems to be initiated by the teacher to attract the learners’ attention by drawing a picture of a tree on the whiteboard. This idea works so well that almost every learner immediately speaks to his/her pair, identifying each part of the tree in English. When then the teacher asks some questions on this topic, the enthusiasm of the learners is overwhelming, presumably because of their familiarity with the topic, especially with the picture presented on the board.

This type of ‘brainstorming’ activity could be associated with the type of pre-reading activities

mostly recommended by reading experts to be applied in each classroom (Levine & Reves, 1990). Besides, it could familiarize the learners with the topics to be read and discussed; it is also very effective in enhancing interest and also recalling the background knowledge of the learners. The enthusiastic responses from students 1, 2 and 3 as shown in the above excerpt reflect the learners' interest in the topic and their knowledge about the subject. The response of student 3 (S3) who proposes one component of a tree, 'fruit', even though it is not included in the picture on the board is a sign of schema activation. When parts of a tree are being discussed, it is easy to recall every part of it, as the picture of a tree with leaves, stem, flowers and fruit has stuck in the mind of this learner. This will later assist her to engage easily in the reading activities on the same topic.

Vocabulary cultivation suggested by Anderson (1994) seems to be also applied by most of the teachers during the classroom observation. The discrete vocabulary items presented at the end of each unit allow the teachers to spend time specifically on this required task. One example is shown in the following segment.

Excerpt 4-7

T: Sekarang nomor tiga ya? Ok. Coba perhatikan, Fill in the following table. *Now, it's number three, isn't it? Ok. Have a look! Fill in the following table* (uplifting her textbook to show the learners a table of Noun and Verb). Selain noun dan verb, jenis kata apa lagi yang ada? *Besides noun and verb, what other parts of speech do you know?*

S1 : Itu pak... kata keterangan! *It's adverb sir!*

T : Ya... apa lagi? *Yes... what else?*

S1 : Kata sifat pak! *Adjective sir!*

T : Jadi, semua sudah tahu perbedaan kata-kata tersebut kan? Coba lihat *So, everybody knows the difference between those parts of speech, right? Have a look!* (drawing a table on the whiteboard with parts of speech in English in each column and starts explaining. They then fill the gaps together based on the teachers' explanation).

The above segment indicates what Nation (1990 in Anderson, 1994:180) proposes as part of his four principles to be applied in teaching vocabulary, i.e.,

- (1) Explicit preparation of language learning materials through carefully controlling the vocabulary presented in written text,
- (2) Unfamiliar vocabulary is discussed as it naturally comes up,
- (3) Vocabulary should be taught in connection with other language activities, and
- (4) Vocabulary can also be taught independent of other language activities.

The point presented in the above excerpt falls into the fourth category which Nation defines it as analysing word classes. Other teaching techniques that he included as examples of discrete vocabulary teaching are the teaching of spelling rules, analysing word structure, mnemonic techniques, paraphrase activities and vocabulary puzzles. Although the classroom activities do not impose every single approach, it is clear that the teaching of vocabulary as shown in the above excerpt could enrich the learners' vocabulary as the word formation is being taught even though it is not explicitly provided in the material.

As mentioned in the preceding section all teachers involved in teaching in this program have



used the textbook as a guideline to carry out their teaching activities. There is no doubt that some of the vocabulary teaching will resemble the above example. Over the classroom observation, the other three principles are also maintained by the teachers to enhance word recognition of the learners and the use of those words in context. One clear example is shown in the following segment.

## Excerpt 4-8

Teacher moves around the class. She stops at any group whose discussion stagnates.

(D in Group 3): Bu, apa artinya equipment? (breaking the pause...) (*What is equipment madam?*) (He could find the answer by attending to the sentence).

T : Ketemu? (*Do you find the answer?*) (approaching group 3. All other students are busy finding the answer). What is equipment in Bahasa Indonesia? (trying to call for attention of the whole class by increasing the volume of her voice).

(A in group 2) : Alat! (*Tool!*) (looked very certain). Apa bedanya 'equipment', 'tool', dan 'device' bu? Yang saya tahu, ketiganya berarti alat. (*What is the difference between 'equipment', 'tool', and 'device' madam? I know all the three words mean 'alat'.*)

T : Ya, tergantung konteksnya. 'equipment' itu.... (*Yes, it all depends on the context. 'Equipment' is...*) (she starts explaining the word one by one).

This segment is taken from an engineering classroom in which unit 4 on Data communication and computer system are being discussed. The word 'equipment' has attracted student D from group 3. Since he does not know the meaning, he asks the

teacher who immediately returns the question to the rest of the class. This works well when another student (student A from group 2) gives a prompt response by translating the word into Bahasa Indonesia, the learners' first language. Nation (1994) suggests that words are easily remembered and recalled when they are learned in an unforgettable situation. The way student A responds and continues with the presentation of the series of synonyms, equipment, tool, and device could create a meaningful impression and thus ease of learning. These words could be learned simultaneously by the rest of the class, also through the help of the teacher's explanation, in which register (the use of words in context) (Qian, 1999) is being introduced.

It seems likely that using materials related to the background knowledge of the learners will enhance active participation and improve both the vocabulary and the reading comprehension of the learners. The following segment taken from an engineering class reveals an interesting teaching and learning process of the adult EFL learners.

## Excerpt 4-9

T : (explaining the words 'force' from the text and Indonesian word, 'habis'. The students are asked to read the text and answer the questions together).

T : "Saving energy" mis : mau ke lantai dua tidak perlu pakai lift. *For example, you want to go the second floor, you don't need to take the lift.* (The students discuss the energy... Some of them recall their memory about mass x acceleration).

T : (Trying to lead the students to understand the text by translating the words into Bahasa Indonesia. The students talk to each other to convince that their understanding

is correct).

T : Jadi kalau menghitung lamanya, lebih lama energi kinetik daripada potensial, karena saudara katakan begitu lepas dari ketinggian. *So, in terms of length of time, kinetic energy is longer than potential energy because you said 'when it falls down from the height.*

S1 : Tidak pak. Itu energi potensial karena dia punya potensi untuk jatuh. Jadi pada saat dia diam, itu energi potensial dan waktu jatuh, energi kinetik. *No sir! That is potential energy because it has the potential to fall down. When it doesn't move, that is potential energy and when it falls down, that is kinetic energy.* (all are laughing. Students read again individually).

S2 : Apa itu staggering pak? *What 'staggering means sir?*

T : Staggering itu goyang. Kalau seseorang staggering, itu sempoyongan. Kalau telter... *'Staggering means 'goyang (swaying)'. If someone is staggering, he can't walk properly. If someone is drunk.....(laughing...).*

T : Jadi mengenai Solar Energy, ya... Resources.... Air pasang,.... Ya... *So, about Solar energy, yes, Resources, the rise of the surface level of the sea...yes...* (the students are thinking).

S3 : Pak, subsequent itu apa pak? *Sir, what does subsequent mean sir?*

T : Mengganti! *substitute!*

S3 : Jadi, subsequent disini artinya apa? Perubahan? *So, what subsequent means here? Change?*

S2 : Ya! *Yes!*

The above segment is taken from an engineering class of 12 students. The whole class are ready to work on unit 2, Energy, Heat and Work. The interaction revealed above seems very relaxed. There seems to be no barrier between the teacher and the learners,

presumably because of the confidence the learners have in the topic presented.

### The delivery format of the traditional material

The notion of constructing comprehension by activating the learners' prior knowledge has been well established. Abraham (2000:2) for example, highlights that "activating knowledge about a topic is particularly important for second language readers whose world knowledge often far exceeds their linguistic skills". One way of enhancing the implication of this theory is by exposing the learners to their field-related material as has been discussed in the preceding section. How, then, are reading activities carried out, and how well can the learners cope and interact in the classroom when they are exposed to general topics? This section will scrutinize the format of delivery of the Traditional material containing general topics used for the Traditional Instruction group under investigation. The textbook is called '*Reading and Grammar*', compiled by a team of teachers of the Language Centre of Hasanuddin University and is designed on the basis of the needs assessment conducted earlier. This overview is expected to reveal the learners' engagement in the process of teaching and learning in the classrooms. Similar to CBI (Content-Based Instruction Group) discussed earlier, the focus of the observation was on the way teachers promote active participation of the learners and the way the learners receive the teaching points. Some of the insightful segments obtained through classroom observations are presented as follows.

## Excerpt 4-10

T : Now look at unit one. Language learning (He reads the title of the unit aloud to attract the learners' attention) Do you think you know the meaning of the italicised words? (He looks over the classroom but there is no response). Pernah dengar kata 'revise'? *Have you ever heard the word 'revise'?* (He continues by asking question).

S1 : Revise sama dengan revisi kan pak? Berarti the exam sudah direvisi atau dilihat kembali. *Revise is similar to 'revisi', right sir? This means that the exam has been revised or being overviewed.*

S2 : Bukan, ini question tag pak. Lihat hasn't it? Artinya, dia juga bertanya tapi tidak perlu dijawab. *No, this is a question tag sir. Look at the word 'hasn't it?' This means it is also asking but no answer is needed.*

T : Ya. Jadi tahu artinya revise ya? Bagaimana dengan kata 'consist of? *Yes. So you know what revise means. What about the phrase 'consist of?'*

This segment is taken from a first classroom meeting in which 28 Agriculture students attend. The teacher starts the lesson by introducing himself and explaining the procedure of assessments that will be taken throughout the program. He emphasizes the importance of completing homework and other assignment and also the learners' attendance in the class. The learners look serious even though the teacher seems humorous in his presentation. From the above excerpt, it could be concluded that vocabulary is the main concern of this material as it is presented right at the beginning of the unit. As a result, the teacher, who mostly relies on the textbook without having other teaching guidelines to follow, will most likely concentrate on this particular area first before going further to explore the reading

passage in the next section. According to Nation (1994), the type of exercise presented in the excerpt above, falls into the third category, i.e., vocabulary should be taught in connection with other language activity. Such approach is also essential as it could serve the function of activating the prior knowledge of the readers. Yet, a question arises as to whether or not the learned vocabulary from this section is actually used or repeated in the reading passage that comes later in the unit. Some parts of the passage are presented below.

## Excerpt 4-11

C. Read the passage and then answer the questions.

Reading comprehension.

I had gone to Belgrade on a ten-month scholarship to learn Serbo-Croat, a language in which I had only a very basic knowledge.

On my first day at the Language Institute in Belgrade I was graded and put into a class of twelve people, containing some nine different nationalities, including myself. The course consisted of listening in the language lab while following a text, then class practice, then listening in the lab again, then another session in the classroom. The lab bit was useful, but rather repetitive and boring after a while. The class sessions were extremely useful, with a variety of very competent teachers.

The course book consisted of a series of graded texts on the history and culture of Yugoslavia and contemporary developments in the country. Each text was followed by vocabulary list...

The above passage, which is half of the whole reading passage presented in unit 1, is followed by five multiple-choice questions. It is revealed that the

only word presented to be learned in unit 1, which comes up in the reading passage is the phrase 'consist of'. It seems obvious that the topic of this passage is connected to the main topic of the unit, i.e., 'language learning', but it is not intended to rehearse the words and phrases taught in the beginning of the unit. This, according to Brown (1993), limits the opportunity of the learners to acquire the taught vocabulary as it is easier to learn vocabulary which becomes the key to the comprehension of a text. Instead, these words are again 'tested', in section B 'Testing', in which the learners are assigned to fill in the information gaps by choosing the appropriate words from the list below the questions.

From the point of view of vocabulary learning as proposed by Levine & Reves (1990), discrete vocabulary should be taught through frequent and numerous recycling in order for the learners to internalize it easily and quickly. Besides, the four techniques in teaching vocabulary suggested by Nation (1990) and Cohen (1987) including rote repetition, use of context, mnemonic approaches, and analysis of word structure should be utilized to assist EFL learners to acquire new vocabulary.

The teaching format of the vocabulary section presented in excerpt 4-11 in some cases has met one principle of the teaching of vocabulary, i.e., the use of words in context (Nation, 1990; Cohen, 1987). However, if the vocabulary is taught in an attempt to help comprehension, Coady (1997) suggests that vocabulary should be taught before the text is read. In other words, the vocabulary being taught in the beginning of the class should be the one found in the reading passage. This will allow rote repetition of

certain taught vocabulary, and the actual context of use could be provided. Texts that repeat vocabulary are more likely to be comprehensible, especially to learners with lower English language proficiency (Cho & Krashen, 1994).

Nearly all teachers involved in the teaching of TI groups in which this traditional material is used, implement similar teaching methods to those used by the teacher discussed above. Most of them prefer to cultivate vocabulary to a great extent and spend most of the time dealing with questions raised by the students regarding synonyms, idiomatic expressions, and so on, and leave the reading comprehension passage until the end of the session. Sometimes, due to the time constraints, the reading comprehension passage is left to the students as homework, and will then be discussed in the next classroom meeting. Yet, the discussion will always be mainly on the learners' answers to the multiple-choice questions following the passage.

One example of the teacher-learner interactions focusing on idiomatic expression can be seen in the following segment.

#### Excerpt 4-12

S1 : Pak, saya kira itu sausage factory pabrik sosis. Ternyata bukan dalam konteks ini ya? (laughing) Kenapa bisa artinya sama dengan it's a piece of cake? Kita juga tidak punya padanan dalam bahasa Indonesia, jadi sulit untuk mereka-reka artinya... Sir, *I thought sausage factory means the factory where the sausage is made. In fact it is not according to this context (laughing) Why can the meaning be the same as it's a piece of cake? We don't even have the same expression in Bahasa Indonesia so it is difficult to guess its meaning.* (Other students attend care-

fully and nodding to indicate their agreement).

T : Ya.. seperti saya katakan tadi, kultur orang Inggris itu berbeda dengan kita... *Yes, like I said before, the British culture is different from ours...* (continue explaining how the expression might occur in terms of British culture).

This segment is taken from an economic background classroom in which 25 students attend. The dialogue emerges after discussing section C of unit 2 (The Exam). The learners seem to write down every meaning provided by the teacher without questions. This could suggest that they are actually switched off when they are assigned to answer questions, which are mostly unknown to them. These expressions are listed in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4-13

C. Here are some typical comments from the students. Explain what they mean.

1. It's a sausage factory
2. The exam was a piece of cake
3. I'm revising my notes
4. He's bone idle
5. I've got so much work to catch up with
6. I didn't do myself justice
7. I ran out of time
8. He cheated
9. It was a tricky question
10. I need lots of practice at grammar.

Looking at the response of the learners through their questions (see excerpt 4-13), it could be inferred that their unfamiliarity with the expressions being taught has caused a great difficulty to guess what these expressions mean. Their habit of consulting English-Indonesian dictionary does not provide any help either, simply because the dictionary is not

dealing with low-frequency types of expressions. The explanation provided by the teachers is very clear in nature. The intriguing question is whether or not the learners could easily internalize the meaning, considering the fact that such expressions are most likely non-existent in their field-related English texts that they will have to deal with in the future.

### **Differences and similarities in the delivery format of content-based material and traditional material.**

#### ***Differences***

From the above discussion, it is clear that the format of delivery of both materials is different in some ways. Content-based material is mainly initiated by activating the learners' background knowledge as indicated in the 'brainstorming' (pre-reading activities) while most teachers teaching the Traditional material prefer to immediately begin with the vocabulary section provided in the beginning of the unit. Another phenomenon revealed through the classroom observation is the active both-ways knowledge transfer from the teacher to students and vice versa in the delivery format of content-based material. The familiar topic presented in the material could enhance the learners' engagement and participation in the classroom activities as long as the teacher provides opportunities for the learners to share their knowledge about the subject matter (see, e.g., excerpt 4-9). This phenomenon ultimately enhances interest and motivation to learn. At the same time, teachers who have no background knowledge of the area could learn from their learners and are later able to apply the new knowledge to their new students. This kind of interaction does not seem to appear

in the Traditional material classrooms. Most of the time, the learners are introduced to new vocabulary. Unfortunately, these learned words are not related to their own setting and situation, particularly to their field of study. This lowers the learners' motivation to maintain the learned words, as they might forget them easily as a result of having little opportunity to practice them in real situations.

In terms of teaching approach applied in the classrooms, the application of content-based material is based primarily on the psycholinguistic approach introduced by Goodman (1967). "Reading is considered to be an active rather than a passive process of constructing meaning, and meaning is created through the interaction of the reader with the written text" (Hood, Solomon & Burns, 1996:20). This is made possible by the availability of rich schemata on the part of the learners who, in their capacity as adult learners, are more able to connect the new information with their pre-existing information and describe it in a very comprehensible way.

In the delivery format of traditional material on the other hand, communicative approach is mainly used. The learners are encouraged to learn how to exchange information based on the learned vocabulary and manipulate it according to their social needs. In some cases, the learned vocabulary is not easy to apply in an expected situation as it is set and taught in a very different cultural context.

### **Similarities**

In terms of teaching organization, teachers in both groups mostly follow the hierarchal order of

the textbook. This is due to the unavailability of the subject syllabus, which might lead to boredom on the part of both the teachers and the learners, as a result of being exposed to a monotonous organization of the units in the textbook.

### **CONCLUSION**

In summary, content-based instruction seems to engage the learners more actively in doing the classroom exercises, compared to the traditional material. This is largely due to the extent of familiarity of the students with the topics presented in the material. In content-based material classrooms, the learners are rich with pre-existing knowledge and vocabulary of the topic area, while in the traditional material classrooms both the vocabulary and the content area are mostly unfamiliar to the learners. Schema theory is undeniably essential to a large extent when adult EFL learners are confronted with reading comprehension exercises. Taking into consideration that schema theory should become the baseline for syllabus designer and material developer, this study encourages SLA practitioners and researchers to integrate the essence of this theory into their design.

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