

Vocational High School Students' Perception towards English Learning Materials based on the Social Semiotic Perspective

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Abstract--English learning materials for vocational high school students should meet students' needs for their future work place. Thus, it is necessary to reveal the students' perception towards the English learning materials they use at school based on the social semiotic perspective in order to provide better materials for them. We carried out in-depth interviews to vocational high school students in one of the schools in Semarang. The results show that students need materials which 1) accommodate topics needed in their future workplace, 2) are relevant with the students' language proficiency level, and 3) have relevant registers. Hopefully, this article can be an insight especially for vocational high school teachers and materials developers in developing materials for vocational high school students.

Keywords: English learning materials, social semiotic perspective, vocational high school students

I. INTRODUCTION

The English teaching and learning process in vocational high schools is different from that of the other senior high schools. One of the obvious differences lies in the learning materials. Vocational high school students have different nature from general senior high school students. The former will most likely straightaway go to the workforce and the later will continue to the university. Because of the different nature they have, their English learning materials should be differed.

When they graduate in the future, vocational high school students will experience different kinds of communication situations from senior high school students. Alumni of vocational high school students will for example meet many customers. They need special language to be taught in school in order to be able to communicate well with their customers. This is in line with the social semiotic perspective, which is a perspective that holds language as a means of communication as introduced by Halliday & Arnold [1]. English learning materials should provide the language needs of the students.

However, both vocational and senior high school students use the same learning materials in the form of a coursebook to study English. The government provides the same coursebook for both types of students. This can be seen as a crucial issue to be studied.

Many studies had been carried out to study further about English materials and coursebooks. Chen did a research which examines how multimodal resources in EFL textbooks are deployed to enable dialogic engagement with readers [2]. Chan assessed the extent to which situational authenticity had been implemented in three commercial ELT textbook series in Hong Kong [3]. Liu & Qu conducted a research that explored the multimodality of EFL textbooks for Chinese College Students [4]. Ren & Han did a research about the representation of pragmatic knowledge in recent ELT textbooks [5]. Tok evaluated English textbooks from teachers' perspective [6]. Lawrence evaluated the fitness of English textbooks in Hongkong [7]. Arroitia & Marquez analyzed the authenticity of real texts in advanced English language textbooks [8]. Raquitico studied the inclusion of non-native English literatures in English textbooks towards critical and multicultural literacy [9]. Reswari did a content analysis on a Curriculum 13 English textbook in Indonesia [10]. Siegel examined the authenticity of textbook topics [11]. Lastly, Wibowo & Rukmini did a study on formalic expression in English textbooks grade X1 [12]. Based on the studies done by the researchers above, we found a gap that those studies have not revealed what are really needed by the vocational high school students based on the social semiotic perspective. Vocational high school students' perception is important to be taken into account in this matter.

To fill in the gap, we conducted a research on vocational high students' perception towards English learning materials based on the social semiotic perspective. The purpose of our research is to reveal vocational high students' perception

towards English learning materials based on what they will face in their future workplace.

This study will hopefully contribute more insights for English teachers, material developers, and students on how vocational high school English materials should be. For example, teachers and material developers can modify the content of the coursebook so that it will be more relevant for the vocational high school students.

II. METHODS

This qualitative research was conducted in 2019 in one of the vocational schools in Semarang, Indonesia. We chose this school because it is a reputable school and it has high input students. We used the purposive sampling by asking the teacher to let me meet smart and critical students based on their scores. We chose smart and critical students because we need participants who can critically give their perception on the English materials.

We did in depth interviews to eight critical and smart students who study engineering. We interviewed them one by one with the interview guideline We prepared earlier. The points of the guideline were the topics, language level, and vocabularies in the coursebook based on the social semiotic perspective.

The data were analyzed descriptively by doing 1) data reduction, 2) data display, and 3) conclusion drawing and verification. These steps came from Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis procedure [13].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the objectives of this research, three main results were found. They are related to the vocational high school students' perception towards the topics, language, and vocabularies/registers in the coursebooks based on the social semiotic perspective.

3.1 The topics in the coursebook

Out of eight students, six students (75%) thought that the topics in the coursebooks are not relevant with their needs as engineering students. One student (12,5%) had the opinion that in some way, the topics are relevant and in some other ways they are not relevant. One student (12,5%) had the opinion that the topics are relevant. This result can be seen in the following pie chart.

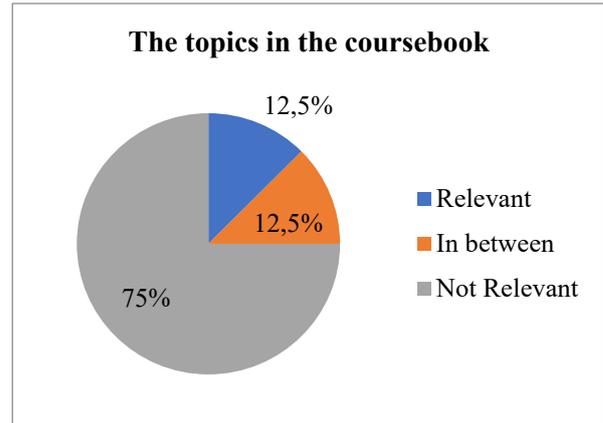


Fig. 1 The Result of Students' Perception on the Topics of the Coursebook

3.2 The language in the coursebook

From eight students, six students (75%) had the perception that the language in the coursebook can be well understood which means the language is relevant with their proficiency level. One student (12,5%) thought that the language can sometimes be understood and sometimes cannot be understood. One student (12,5%) pointed out that the language in the coursebook cannot be well understood. This result can be seen in the following pie chart.

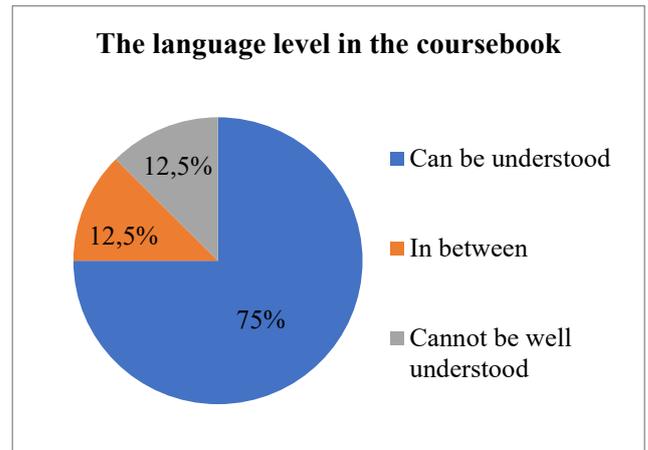


Fig. 2 The Result of Students' Perception on the Language of the Coursebook

3.3 The vocabularies/registers in the coursebook

Out of eight students, seven students (87,5%) gave the perception that the vocabularies/registers provided in the coursebook are not relevant with what they need in their future workplace. One student (12,5) gave the opinion that some vocabularies are relevant and some others are not relevant. None (0%) believed that the vocabularies are all relevant. This result can be seen in the following pie chart.

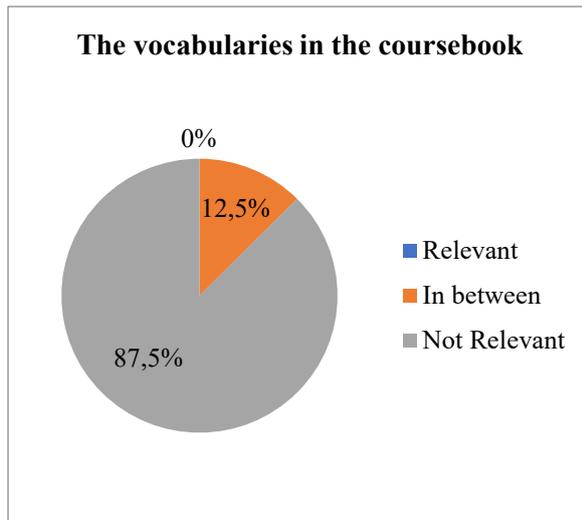


Fig. 3 The Result of Students' Perception on the Vocabularies/Registers in the Coursebook

The results of this research can be related to the social semiotic perspective. This perspective means that language is viewed as a system for expression of meaning, interaction, and communication as Brown said [14]. The students mostly had the opinion that the topics and vocabularies are not relevant with their needs in the future workplace.

In order to be able to communicate well in the workforce in the future, vocational high school students need topics and vocabularies or registers which are suitable with their future workplace. The novelty in this research is that it brings up the idea that students' perception can be also known from the social semiotic perspective.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the results, it can be concluded that most of the students had the perception that the language in the coursebook is easy to be understood. However, most of them had the perception that the topics and vocabularies provided in the coursebook are not relevant with their future workplace. The materials need to accommodate topics needed in their future workplace, be relevant with the students' language proficiency level, and have relevant registers.

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