

DEVELOPING STORIES AS MINDFUL LEARNING MATERIALS FOR INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

In the era where fictional works are popular with teenagers while there are still challenges in understanding English, the researchers conducted a study to develop short stories with the title “Berteman itu Sulit”. One of the challenges is the lack of varied learning material in grammar learning. The researchers propose to develop English material based on the student’s life context, that is mental health, to make the post-pandemic learning process interesting. The short stories are used as English mindful material with 5 tenses included; simple present tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense, past continuous tense, and present perfect tense. In developing short stories, the researchers went through 4 steps; 1) story development; 2) validation; 3) publication; 4) trying out 10 EFL students from random schools. With a total of 13 parts, the stories are being published on the Wattpad platform, the most popular fiction reading site in the post-pandemic era. There are three things to be underlined as the result; 1) the content for grammar material is adequate; 2) the learning material is validated as mindful and suitable for students to read; 3) the try-out questionnaire showed a positive result of EFL learners’ perspective to the material.

Keywords: English grammar, instructional media, mindful teaching, short story

Introduction

English is one of the languages most commonly taught in education curricula around the world, including in Indonesia. In Indonesia, English is an imperative subject that is incorporated into the formal education curriculum ranging from elementary school, middle school, and high school to higher education. Even so, based on EF Education First, the 2020 edition of the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EFI) for Indonesia is ranked 74th out of 100 countries. Even though in Indonesia English is taught from an early age, it has not produced satisfying results for Indonesian English proficiency. Four English skills are being taught in the education curriculum; listening skills, speaking skills, writing skills, and reading skills. Yet there is a key to mastering all of these skills, and that is grammar skill. Students in Indonesia have difficulties in learning grammar even though they have learned it in school. A study in 2007 showed that the cause of difficulties for both



teachers and students in learning grammar is the feeling of frustration by the disconnection of the rules of grammar and the ability to apply it automatically in the 4 English skills (Fonseca & Vasquez, 2007). The same study revealed that 60% of the students said learning grammar is boring. This shows that the least material that interests EFL students is grammar. This can be due not only to the boring situation in the classroom, but also the lack of application using grammar, and many more. Those all can lead to weak grammar proficiency.

These problems can be overcome by providing grammar learning media that uses a literacy approach. Brumfit and Carter (1986; cited in Şentürk & Kahraman, 2020) have suggested several ways in which the implementation uses literature and have also experimented with the implications of the use of literature in the language classroom. Most of the grammar content in the textbooks is not inclusive and tends to be formal, which makes the students unable to explore grammatical structures in their context. EFL learners are expected to incorporate within one's self to limited sentences through exercises, involving repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation (Biswas and Anis, 2017). This can be considered the main factor behind the students' problems in learning grammar. The strictness of grammar used in the classroom leads to the students' boredom and feeling unmotivated in learning. Not to mention, the need to apply grammar in real life or other words, in the learners' life context.

Meanwhile, literature as art, especially short stories provides authentic uses of language (Loukia, 2006). The same means are in line with Sapkota (2012; cited in Ismail & Sharan, 2020) who views literature as an effective tool to use in the learning process. There have been many other kinds of research and arguments regarding the effectiveness of literature in the language learning context. By being exposed to some literature works, the learner is unconsciously working on the process of creating meaning based on the context. For that reason, creating meaning in literature is a suitable medium to drive the learner to put it in a specific context, or in this case, mental health context. With that being said, literature can be carried for the present when mental health conditions are in trouble.

To acknowledge the learners' context for literature that is used as the learning material to overcome grammar learning process challenges, it is important to look at the students' characteristics, interests, and preferences. The causes of EFL students being unmotivated in the learning process are not only the grammar itself but also the students' facing challenges outside the classroom. It can be bullying, stress due to homework, filling up the parent's expectations, and so on. All of this time, when teachers see students with low motivation or laziness, teachers would just consider them bad students and give them bad grades. It is always unknown whether it is just their bad habit or it leads to mental health problems. To know the truth, it is important to find a way to prevent mental illness and to maintain the students' mental health so it will not affect their school life.

There is no health without mental health. As defined by WHO (World Health Organization), "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Therefore, the existence of mental illness cannot be underestimated, because the number of cases is still sufficiently worrying. It is estimated that one in four people will suffer from a mental disorder during their lifetime.

Mental illness affected millions of people in this world, yet, there are still a lot of people who consider it taboo to talk about mental health. Young adult students cannot be excepted. Data from Rikesdas (LPB, 2018) shows the prevalence of mental illness as indicated by symptoms of depression and anxiety reaches around 6.1% from age 15 and over of the total population of Indonesia, or around 11 million people. For young adults aged 15-24 years old, it is indicated that 6,2% have depression. Depression can lead to the tendency to do self-harm or even suicide. Additionally, there are 80-90% of suicide cases happen because of depression and anxiety. As reported by a suicidologist, 4.2% of students in Indonesia are suffering from suicidal thoughts. In a keyword, search targeting stigma and mental illness, Ayuningtyas, et al. (2018) view that until now, people with severe mental disorders in Indonesia are still being treated wrongly. This happens because of the inappropriate stigma, leaving a sign that the understanding of mental health in Indonesia tends to be low. It is found from the evidence in the data that 91% of Indonesians who has mental illness are not being taken care of properly and only the remaining 9% have been taken care of well. This status of mental health is crucial to be put into action by bringing out this context as the topic of the material in the form of literature when it comes to dealing with grammar learning challenges which are as crucial as the mental health issue.

This study is intended to develop a mindful learning material in the form of literature—a short story, which brings up the issue of mental health in middle school students in Indonesia, to be a solution for the EFL students' grammar challenges dealing with a lack of motivation, boringness of the learning process, and the lack of contextual materials. The main focus will be on Indonesian students since it certainly makes the fact that Indonesia is ranked 60th out of 61 countries regarding reading interest as seen from the 2016 Most Literate Nation in The World survey. However, Indonesian reading interest, especially in this case Indonesian EFL students, cannot be said to be low. The number of book talks or discussions on social media, book-lovers communities, and the best-selling book on the market can prove that it is not low reading interest, but Indonesian people have an interest in reading fictional works.

The challenges in understanding grammar for EFL students

Because of students' preferences and teachers' perceptions in the EFL learning process can lead to matching both students' and teachers' needs. According to the study about teachers' strategies for teaching grammar by Souisa and Yanuarius (2020), most of the teachers who became the participants of the research, view that senior high school EFL teachers are dealing with various challenges in teaching grammar, from the most general problem to the specific one based on the students' characteristics. All teachers agreed that students have various learning styles that affect the grammar learning process. Lack of attention, having no background knowledge of English grammar, demotivation in developing grammar, etc; are the difficulties for students in learning grammar. Despite the various teaching strategies that the teachers have used, the students are most likely not enjoying the learning grammar process.

This study also found that 90% of teachers view grammar as evolving and substitute procedures, so it is necessary to consider grammar as learning as sustained activity. In other words, there is a need to provide varied approaches and

methods in teaching grammar continuously. Besides acknowledging the need for various approaches and methods, it is also necessary to enrich authentic material based on students contextualizing the life of using the language. Data from the same study showed that 84% of the teachers believe that it is better to provide students with various illustrations of language used to help the students engage in applying the English language in their classroom practices.

EFL teachers must look for ways of implementing exercises outside the regular curriculum utilizing creating a naturalistic learning situation (Oktay & Osam, 2013). Naturalistic learning situations can be realized by using the native language during the learning process. According to Cook & Hall (2003; 2012), using the native language in an EFL classroom has advantages. First, the native language has an important role during the EFL learning process. For lower levels, native language has a role to explain the meaning of words or vocabulary and grammar structures efficiently. Since grammar itself is known as the “algebra of language”, it is completely practical to do the explanation in L1 to make the grammar learning practice and acquisition done clearly (Demir, 2012). Second, the confidence and a successful sign of EFL students are caused by using their native language. If the native language can support the students’ understanding, there is a must to use it as a supportive learning tool (Deller & Price, 2007 p. 9). Third, a foreign language can be learned easily by deepening the experience of similarities between the native language and the target language during the learning process. Méndez & Pavón (2012) in their study stated that languages are used to transfer knowledge, in other words, there is a need to transmit one language to another language since it has been learned in their native language. Moreover, applying the native language in a classroom leads to some ways to improve the foreign language. For example, it can help teachers in expressing the meaning of words, explain grammatical issues, and taking control of the class properly; students can use L1 as their cooperative learning source and individual strategy.

There are several reasons the EFL learning process’s achievement is affected by the native language, one of them is the consideration of monotony in class and textbooks to teach so the foreign language learning process can be done effectively. Using students’ native language during the language learning process is also a necessary strategy that may affect learners’ understanding during the EFL learning process. With this consideration, there is a need for strategies in EFL approaches and methods to use the native language. The importance of using the native language in English as a foreign language learning process has many adaptations of teaching methods and approaches, which also means this pedagogic problem has not completely been solved regardless of various research results in the language learning field. In other words, this study continues the attempt to develop material using the native language in the EFL learning process.

It is expected for teachers to cope with EFL students’ challenges in grammar learning. Many strategies have been suggested, and enriching authentic material is one of them, which is based on students’ life context by using the language. In consideration of how important it is to use English in local and global contexts, it can lead to the raising awareness of the learners of linguistic and cultural diversity (Si, 2018). In practice, finding this kind of authentic material is difficult. Thus, this study is intended to develop the material using the student’s and teachers’ mother tongue or native language as it has many advantages in the EFL learning process

and it is obligated to match both students' and teachers' needs and strategies that have been applied.

Stories as language learning materials

The tendency of Indonesian EFL students who prefer to read fiction books compared to textbooks can be a solution, that is by making literature a medium for learning English, especially grammar. According to Savvidou (2004, p. 3), "using literature in the EFL classroom can reinforce learners' knowledge of the lexical and grammatical structure and offers foreign language learners the opportunity to develop their linguistic and communicative skills". Some second language instructors and scholars reassure the use of literature to improve learners' abilities in the target language (Heath, 1993; Paran, 2008). Povey (1967, p. 22; cited in Bağatur, 2017), points out that the purpose of applying literature in foreign language courses is that "literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax". Several literary genres can be used in EFL learning such as songs, poems, plays, and stories. Among the various types of genres, stories are the most common type that is used in educational settings (Wajnryb, 2003; cited in Al Harrasi, 2012, p. 52). In addition, Collie and Slater (1991 cited in Pardede, 2011, p. 15) point out that short stories have enough content in terms of length and inner construction amongst all of the genres of literature which can be implemented in the teaching and learning process. Instead of creating a literature book, it is more relatable to use short stories in the learning process. In other words, short stories were chosen to be material for EFL students' grammar learning.

To effectively teach English, there are several developed approaches, methods, techniques, and materials throughout the language teaching history. McCormick & Zutell (2010) found in their study that many pieces of evidence show that there is an impact on the material the students read, which can affect students' language level. Over time, some materials can no longer be used and there are new materials that are more suitable for use in the present. But the material in the form of literature is timeless and can be used at any time. Collei & Slater in their book (1987) stated that many reasonable causes of teachers using literature in the learning process, one of them are seeing the value of literature regardless of the problems that the learners experience when they try to present their literary works in the class. Thus, it is important to make sure of the suitability of the literature for EFL learners.

Maley (2001) points out the suitability reasoning of literature as instructional media for EFL learners. (1) Universality: all known languages have literature with various themes expressed inside it like love, death, separation, nature, etc. which is common to all cultures. All literature over the world has similar literary conventions and genres. (2) Non-triviality: literature does not trivialize or look down on the topic like many other language teaching resources trivialize texts. It offers genuine and authentic inputs. (3) Personal relevance: ideas, events, and things expressed in literature are either experienced by learners or can be imagined; therefore, they can find relevance between the literature and their personal life. (4) Variety: there is a great variety of language and subject matters talked about in literature. Students can select non-monotonous and multi-purpose literary texts. (5) Interest: by nature, literature is intrinsically attractive as it deals with familiar subject matters

appealingly and interestingly. (6) Economy and suggestive power: one of the distinguishing features of literature is the reminiscent meaning that words and sentences remind us of. Literature expresses above what mentioned in it and a lot of things can be conveyed with few words. (7) Ambiguity: literature is able to reveal different interpretations. It is almost impossible between two readers of one literary work to have an identical understanding of one single text. This diversity of approaches and interpretations creates an opportunity for a genuine exchange of ideas and pushed interaction to have happened. Furthermore, every learner can freely interpret a particular literary work without worrying about the correct answer of it.

Based on the recent analysis of literature written for teens (Koss & Teale, 2009), 25 percent of books reviewed were focused on mental illness. The researcher found some of them. The first book *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher can be used to discuss issues like bullying and build awareness to prevent suicide. The issue of depression among teenagers is also shown in the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. In Indonesian literature itself, there is a book called *Dunia Duniya* by Dewi Sartika that talks about bullying. There are also a few short stories about mental illness such as *The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Feather* by Edgar Allen Poe, *The Idiots* by Joseph Conrad, *First Light* by Robert Russell Sassor, and many more. Those literature texts can be used as mindful material for learning English as well as promoting the prevention of mental illness.

In educational settings, material means any items (it can be visual, audio, or text) that help the learners' understanding of the subject matter. Thus, mindful material can be defined as any material that contains mindfulness inside. Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) defines mindfulness as the awareness that arises as a result of paying attention to a present experience deliberately and without judgment to be able to respond with acceptance, rather than react, to the things experienced from time to time. In reality, as human beings, people have minimum awareness inside the mind, rather, we are likely to focus on the external things that affect us such as the interactions with others, the thoughts about the past, or the fears of the future. Langer (1992) defines this condition as mindlessness. Mindlessness is the root of mental illnesses like stress, anxiety, depression, and many others. For young adult learners, mental illness can lead to decreased performance in EFL learning. Thus, there is a need to reduce it by providing mindful materials.

The discussion of mental illness might sound personal but the thought of learners relating to one another can help them reduce the stigma of mental illness being a taboo thing and starts opening up. This relationship between EFL learners with mental illness is not always about them experiencing it but also to the point they are seeing their friends struggling with it. Most teenagers feel comfortable in finding out that they are not alone in their experiences and questions about this sensitive topic. In addition, it is a must to put thought into the students' experience when selecting teaching methods, media, and assessment (Barratt-Pugh and Rohl, 2000; cited in Musthafa, 2010) to create instructional media.

Yet it cannot be found enough literature texts in course books and lesson plans that focus on mental health context, most of them contain only grammatical knowledge. Aini (2013) in their study found that there are some problems in the teaching process to select instructional media due to the limited time, limited cost allocation, availability of instructional media, and appropriateness of instructional

media. It is common to see artificial reading passages, making it lack inclusive literary works inside the course books that are used to teach the learner. Thus, the skill to create instructional media in the form of literature in the teaching and learning process is needed; specifically, with the mental health context inside it. Instructional media itself is defined by Scanlan as all materials that can be used as an instructor and teacher manage to conduct the instruction to the learning process and support students in reaching instructional objectives. Kilickaya (2004) also argued authentic materials are effective to stimulate language learning. Curtain and Dahlberg (2000; cited in Musthafa, 2010) believe that the instruction of the material should be based “on topics and contexts that are relevant to the young learners.”

Mental health context is needed as the most relevant topic for creating instructional media. In other words, there is a process of mindful learning and teaching in implementing the mindful material to the EFL learners. It is confirmed that using literature that included EFL language learning that the teachers provide any situations for learners to put in view their engagement in mindfulness in the learning process, learning tasks, and at the same time reading comprehension tasks (Khomnari, et al., 2020). The concept of mindful teaching consists of mindfulness itself and compassion, which means having complementary qualities and benefits, especially for teachers (Raab, 2014). Teachers’ initiation to set the various materials with integrating mental health context can impact the learning process effectiveness. To do that, teachers need to understand their experiences related to the context, identify the student’s needs, and carry out the applicable educational strategies. In addition, when the mindful teaching process conceives a learning environment that matches students’ needs, students might presumably reflect and internalize the calm, clear, and kind qualities caused by the mindful experience. Colaianne et al. (2019) in their study found that perceptions of mindful teaching were related to the adjustment in students’ awareness that a school is a place where there is a recognition of their needs of self-related, which then leads to the student change in mindfulness, self-compassion, and compassion for those around from time to time. As important as it is to create an atmosphere that can make the learners experience mindful activities that promote students’ mental health. It is equally important for designing a material or medium to teach in a mindful way (Kidd, et al., 2015). Based on the findings in the reviewed literature, this study has enlightened me regarding the research in discovering the research methodology, analysis, discussion of results, and conclusions that will contribute to the EFL domain.

Method

The study is conducted by using Research and Development (R&D). Research and Development (R&D) is the research methodology that combines two approaches such as 1) research and 2) development to create an innovative curriculum and learning. In another word, it was meant to purposely create a product through the development process. The said product is the short stories by the title “Berteman itu Sulit” with mental health context as instructional material for grammar learning. With that, the researchers use a similar research and development process as Rofii, Murtadho, & Rahmat (2018) in their writing module development that adopted the Borg & Gall model (1983). It has 4 steps: preliminary research; model development planning; validation, evaluation, and revision; and

model implementation. This development model then was modified to achieve the use of the study in the actual situations (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006).

In this study, the researchers modified the process into 4 steps to make it relatable in developing the short stories: (1) story development, this is where the researchers established the stories in detail for 3 months. The details include story plotting, character development, conflict development, compiling, and implementing 5 tenses to the stories (simple present tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense, past continuous tense, and present perfect tense). (2) validation, with the help of experts, the stories are being validated the learning material and the grammar, as well as the instrument validation for the tryout questionnaire. (3) publication, the researchers used an online platform named Wattpad to publish the short stories to use the most popular reading site among the EFL students. (4) try out, to know the perspective of the EFL learners in the developed mindful material, the researchers used a survey method by choosing 10 random students to fill out the given questionnaire as the try-out result. All of the students are at the age of 13-18 years old, exactly in the same position as the characters of the story. There is no certain gender and level of English proficiency as long as the students are attending English classes in their school.

Findings and Discussion

The research findings presented below showed the process of developing short stories as mindful learning for Indonesian EFL students. The first section is the development of “Berteman itu Sulit” which summed up the first and second steps, the story development and validation. The second section is the publication of “Berteman itu Sulit” including the third and fourth steps that is the publication and trying out the result.

The development of “Berteman itu Sulit”

The short stories have been written for 3 months from May until July. It is being published through Wattpad by the title “Berteman itu Sulit” with 13 parts of stories and 5 tenses included, that is simple present tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense, past continuous tense, and present perfect tense. The story is about Hana who is always needed by her classmates but never as a close friend. It is hard for her to make close friends like the others, all she does is try to help her friends. Dimas, the new student, is the opposite. He becomes everyone’s friend only in a few days, but he has a bad attitude. Once Hana confronts him because of his behavior of letting the others copy his answer during the exam (or cheating), the whole class turned her down and bullying happened days after. Suffering from bullying, both Hana and Dimas tried to stop it and managed to meet many more kinds of friends along the way. Ghina, is trying to win an English Olympiad because she is struggling with her family's financial status. Aura starts the bullying but is feeling lonely and wants validation from her friends. Regan, the class captain stressed out due to filling up his parents’ expectations to be the perfect student. In the end; Ghina, Dimas, and the others succeed to help Hana to stop the bullying that is represented as a “present continuous that needs to be stopped”.

The validation result is divided into 3 parts. First, the grammar included in the story has an 8 out of 10 scores. Second, the media (Wattpad and the story appearance) validated 85 points. Third, the instrument to collect data for tryouts in

the form of a questionnaire's score is 90. After being validated, the stories were shared online and public through Wattpad with the rating setting Young Adult (13-18 years old) on August 13th with 13 parts of stories.

The publication of “Berteman itu Sulit”

The developed short stories are shared online and can be accessed by the public with the target audience setting Young Adults. The researchers then choose 10 random readers to join the tryout phase. In this phase, the participants filled out a questionnaire after reading “Berteman itu Sulit”. The instrument used in this study is the six aspects from the standard User Experience Questionnaire (UEQ). The aspects are as follows: *attractiveness, perspicuity, efficiency, dependability, stimulation, and novelty*. The researcher modifies the questionnaire based on the needs of the study. Thus, the researcher only uses two aspects of the questionnaire to determine the try-out result, that is *attractiveness, perspicuity, and stimulation*.

Based on the result of the questionnaire, there are 4 students aged 13, 2 students in age 14, 1 student is 16 years old, 2 students are 17 years old, and 1 more student is 18 years old. The students are all from different areas of living in Indonesia. This made the stories successfully published to reach EFL students from any area in Indonesia.

Thus, these are the result of the tryout.

1) “Berteman itu Sulit” attractiveness for EFL students

Continuing to the questionnaire, the first result of the tryout is *attractiveness*.

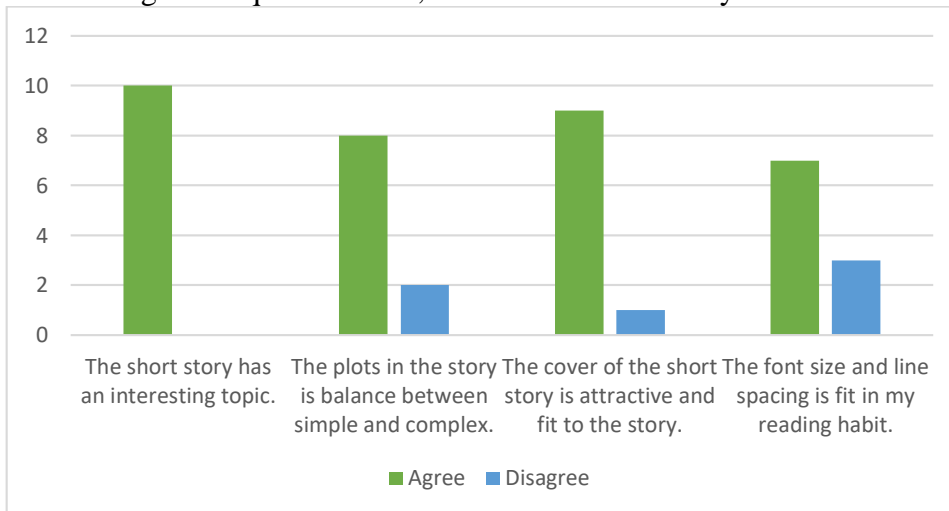


Figure 1. The attractiveness of “Berteman itu Sulit” for Indonesian EFL students

In this attractiveness part, there are 2 categories of questions that are the likeability and appearance of the story. The figure above shows 4 questions in both categories. Based on the result, 100% of students agreed that “Berteman itu Sulit” has an interesting topic. Moreover, the plots of the story are already balanced between simple and complex with 80% of students agreeing with this statement. As a way of promoting the story to be read by students, 90% agreed that the cover of the short story is attractive and fits the story context. Additionally, the font size and line spacing of the story fit 70% of students’ reading habits. The 30% of students who are not suitable with the font size and line spacing are due to not being

accustomed to the Wattpad’s appearance settings. Overall, “Berteman itu Sulit” has met most of the students’ attraction.

2) The perspicuity of “Berteman itu Sulit”

In this part, 6 questions are divided into 2 categories. Category number 1 is the accessibility of the stories. It is concluded that all of the students agreed that “Berteman itu Sulit” is accessible. This result is shown in the figure below.

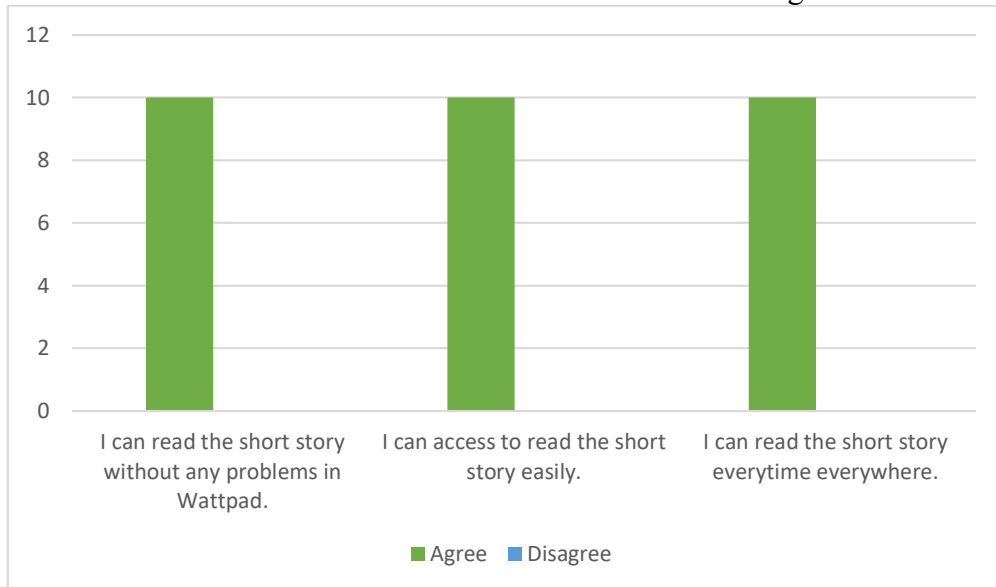


Figure 2. Accessibility of “Berteman itu Sulit” for Indonesian EFL Students

Category number 2 is the relatability of the stories with the students’ life context. There are different answers to each question as revealed below.

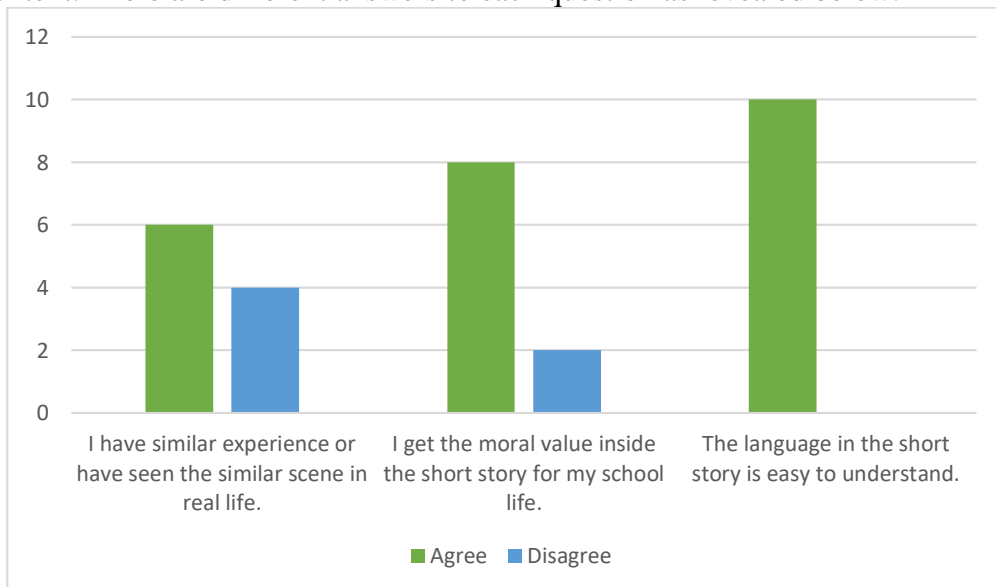


Figure 3. The relatability of “Berteman itu Sulit” for Indonesian EFL students

Based on the chart above, it can be concluded that 60% of the students have a similar experience in real life. In other words, the story “Berteman itu Sulit” is not fully related to the EFL students’ life. Yet, 80% of students agreed that there is

moral value inside the short story specifically for their school life. Thus, even if 40% of the students do not have a similar experience, the short story still can obtain life lessons for their school life context. More importantly, 100% of the students agreed that the language in the short story is easy to understand. This is a sign of how important the stories are to be read by EFL students using their native language.

3) EFL students’ stimulation towards “Berteman itu Sulit”

The last questions are to know students’ excitement and motivation. The excitement is shown in the first and second questions (from left) and the motivation category is the last question (the right one) shown in the figure.

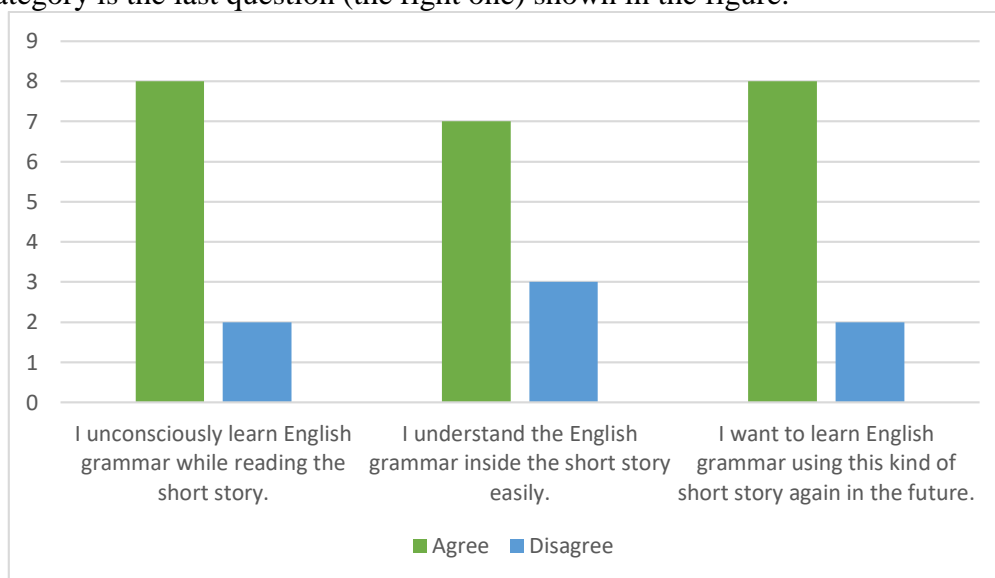


Figure 4. Stimulation of “Berteman itu Sulit” for Indonesian EFL Students

Based on the figure above, 80% of the students unconsciously learn English grammar while reading the short story, while 2 students do not. 70% of the students understand the English grammar inside the short story easily. This is a positive result that the short stories by the title “Berteman itu Sulit” can be used as learning material for EFL students, by looking at the excitement of the students. The last question revealed that 80% of the students are motivated to learn English grammar using this kind of short story in the future.

Conclusion

Due to the demotivation, lack of contextual materials, and many others for EFL learners in Indonesia dealing with grammar, the developed story “Berteman itu Sulit” has been produced to be mindful material for the learners in young adult age. Indonesian EFL Learners tend to like to read fictional stories more than textbooks and the importance of considering the learners’ relation with the context of the stories, “Berteman itu Sulit” can help the learners to be able to feel mindfulness while unconsciously learning grammar. As a result, the contribution of the teacher and publisher in Indonesia’s literature aspect is essential. Moreover, there is an urgency to provide various teaching strategies in the learning process. Hence, there might be a need to do further research in the future to implement the

material to the learners. Further investigation to use the stories as material to promote grammar proficiency will extend the theories by using a literacy approach and mindfulness as the main topic.

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