

## **The Effect of Authentic Materials on Writing Performance across Different Levels of Proficiency**

**Sony Sukmawan**

Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia  
*Email: sony\_sukmawan@ub.ac.id*

**Lestari Setyowati**

Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia  
*Email: lestari.setyowati.fs@um.ac.id*

**Ana Ahsana El-Sulukiyyah**

Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Universitas PGRI Wiranegara, Pasuruan, Indonesia  
*Email: aahsana3@gmail.com*

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### **Abstract**

The use of authentic materials for language teaching is common. Yet, there is not much information about what type of instructional materials benefits learners. The purpose of the study is to find empirical evidence of whether non-fiction authentic materials are more superior than fiction authentic material. The researchers used an experimental design to answer the research question. The population of the study was all students who took an essay writing course at University PGRI Wiranegara in the academic year 2019-2020. The sample was taken by using a systematic random sampling method which results in two equal numbers of students in two experimental groups. Group A was taught with non-fiction authentic material, while group B was taught with the fiction authentic material. The researchers used ANOVA to analyze the data in SPSS 22. The process of teaching and learning followed the writing as a process approach and was done in a blended-learning setting because of the pandemic of COVID 19. The result shows that there is no significant interaction between content type and proficiency level ( $F(2,30) = 1.347, p = .275$ ). The main effect of content type on writing performance was not significant ( $F(1,30) = .001, p = .973$ ), but the main effect of proficiency level on writing performance is significant such that the students who have a higher level of writing proficiency have better performance than the students who have a lower level of writing proficiency ( $F(2,30) = 5.653, p = .008$ ). The researchers conclude that both types of authentic materials are equally effective to improve the students' essay writing performance.

**Keywords:** authentic, essay, fiction, materials, non-fiction

### **Introduction**

The use of authentic material in language teaching has attracted a lot of attention from many researchers, teachers/lecturers, and practitioners. The debate over whether to use real-life materials or simplified materials for language classes has been going on for some time between

researchers and language learning theorists (Crossley, Louwrese, McCarthy, & McNamara, 2007). These researchers provide arguments and evidence to decide which material is considered useful for language learners from a linguistic point of view. Crossley et al (2007) used the Coh-Metrix computation tool to investigate differences in linguistic structure between a simplified sample of texts from seven ESL textbooks and several authentic reading texts. The researchers concluded that the simplified / artificial material provided more benefits for beginners because the text used more repetition and high-frequency words which helped comprehension. On the other hand, authentic material provided more benefits for intermediate or advanced learners due to language use.

Some researchers are also interested in knowing how literature benefits the students to improve their language skills. Some research focuses on the effectiveness of using authentic materials in the form of fiction and non-fiction can be found for learning to read (Appley, 1988; Baniabdelrahman, 2006; Hatimah, Rofiq, & Andayani, 2013). In Appley's (1988) study, the finding reveals that the students who were taught by authentic literature (short stories, plays, and poetry) have the same reading ability as students who were taught by using non-fiction material. Previous research also revealed that authentic material is beneficial to improve the students' listening skills (Otte, 2006) and to increase vocabulary (Ghanbari, Esmaili & Shamsaddini, 2015). Fabusuyi (2014) also conducted research that focused on the use of folklore for teaching German. He concluded that the use of folklore in foreign language classes is practical and effective because it is not only useful for language teaching but also provides cultural awareness and raise respect for others.

Previous research also has shown that the use of authentic material for language learning is proven to be effective in improving students' writing skills (Arifa, 2011; Sukmawan, Setyowati & Nurmasyah, 2015). Sukmawan *et al.* (2015) found that fiction can help students who are learning to write. Other research also shows similar results. Setyowati's (2016) study indicates that classic flash fiction applies to learn to write. The result of her research reveals that the students were able to state a thesis statement in the opening paragraph. Yet, they were unable to develop the main idea in the body of the essay by giving sufficient details and examples. Recent research shows that the teaching of literature and language skills, especially writing skills, can be integrated (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2018). In their study, the students learned to write essays by using authentic literary material. The results revealed that learning to write through analyzing the intrinsic elements of literary works helped them to understand the stories better.

Research in general has shown that authentic material is beneficial for students and teachers (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014). In the context of language learning in Indonesia, the use of authentic material to teach writing has been extensively researched. First, Styati (2016) investigated the effect of authentic material on students' ability to write paragraphs. The research subjects were second-semester students majoring in English at STKIP PGRI Madiun. In her studies, she uses YouTube videos and serial images as authentic materials. Through the use of quasi-experimental designs, she found that images were more effective at improving students' writing skills than YouTube videos. The same results were also found in experimental research conducted by Aqly, Komariah, & Heriansyah (2017). Their research subjects were class X social studies students at SMA Lab Unsyiah. By using one-group pre-test and post-test design, the results showed that there was a significant difference in students' post-test scores after they learned to write using authentic material.

Sundana (2017) investigated the effectiveness of authentic material for teaching writing at the university level by using an experimental design. He divided the students into two groups;

experimental group and control group. In the experimental group, students were given authentic material to write descriptive text where the material was from the internet, namely from <https://www.booksie.com>, <http://www.imdb.com>, and Readers' Digest Magazine, while the control group not. The results of his research indicate that authentic material is proven to be effective in improving students' ability in writing descriptive texts.

Second, Arifa (2011) also conducted experimental research to determine the effect of authentic material on students' ability to write procedural texts at the high school level. The research subjects were 10th-grade students of Islamic state secondary schools in Palangkaraya, Indonesia by taking two classes, each consisting of 30 students. The experimental group was taught using authentic material in the procedural text, while the control group was taught using non-authentic material. The results showed that the experimental group showed better performance in making procedure texts as compared to the control group. It was concluded that the use of authentic material was effective in improving students' abilities in making procedural texts. Recent research has also revealed that authentic material is effective in improving students' ability to write essays (El-Sulukiyyah & Aisyah, 2019). Furthermore, through experimental design carried out at a university in Ecuador, Chamba, Reinoso, Rengifo (2019) have also proven that students who use authentic material are able to write better in terms of coherence, cohesion, use of vocabulary, grammar, and also in cultural understanding.

The results of previous literature studies show consistently that learning using authentic material is effective in improving the students' language skills than not using authentic material. However, research has not yet revealed which type of authentic material is more effective for improving students' writing skills, whether in the form of literature (fiction) or in a factual form (non-fiction). Therefore, this study focuses on investigating the effects of authentic fiction and non-fiction material on students' essay writing skills.

This research has implications for theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this research adds the body of knowledge in terms of writing studies, learning materials, and the use of literature for learning language skills. Since most of the previous research is conducted in the context of English as a first language (L1) or a second language (L2), the results of this study is expected to enrich the knowledge of teaching writing, especially in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. Second, this research will also enrich the study of the use of authentic material in foreign language learning. Practically, this research is useful for teachers/lecturers who teach writing. The results of this study will provide information on the importance of using authentic material in the form of literature, whether they are in the form of oral literature, folklore, classic, modern literature both in first and second/foreign language. Using authentic material in a writing class will encourage teachers/lecturers to be more creative, innovative, and less dependent on the use of textbooks/lessons. Specifically, using authentic global issue-oriented material for teaching writing can foster students' cultural literacy and train them to think critically.

#### Research Questions:

1. Is the students' writing performance who use non-fiction authentic material better than those who use fiction authentic material?
2. Is the students' essay writing performance affected by the students' level of writing proficiency?

#### Method

This research uses a factorial design. A factor is a different name for an independent

variable. Factorial designs are described using “A x B” notation. “A” is for the number of levels of one independent variable and “B” is for the number of levels of the second independent variable. In this study, the researchers had a 2 x 3 factorial design. This study has a 2 (content type authentic materials: nonfiction and fiction) by 3 (Writing proficiency: high, mid, low).

Due to the manipulation of the content type independent variables, the researchers used two experimental groups. The targeted population of this research was all students who joined the essay writing class in the English Education Study Program of University PGRI Wiranegara. The total population was 36 students. The researchers formed two experimental groups by assigning the students randomly to group A and group B through a systematic random sampling method. Yet, in this research, each group consisted of 18 students. Group A used authentic non-fiction material, and group B used authentic materials in fiction form. The teaching and learning process took 14 weeks to complete. The researchers used ANOVA analysis in SPSS 22.

The pre-test was used to differentiate the students' level of writing proficiency into low, mid, and high. To do this, the researchers used the institutional standard to decide whether the students fall into the low, mid, and high level. The researchers developed learning material. The development of learning materials for the data collections follows the stages of the research and development. All the authentic materials were about global issues (poverty, gender equality, environmental protection, and disease). The instructional materials for the fiction group (B class) used short story genres both modern and classic. Meanwhile, the non-fiction group (A-class) uses the news as authentic materials. The essay genre taught to the students was expository and argumentative essay developed by problem-solution, examples and details, cause-effects, and comparison-contrast.

### Instrument

To collect the data, the researchers developed the test instrument both for pre-test and post-test. The writing tests for the pre-test and post-test underwent several stages of research and development procedure, namely developing, validating, trying out, revising, and making the final test format. In the pre-test, students wrote an essay in 90 minutes entitled ‘My reason why I should be very economical on the use of water’. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the students wrote about ‘How to minimize the use of plastics in everyday life’. Another instrument used by the researchers was the assessment rubric. The researchers used Jacobs ESL Composition Profile to score the students' writing. This profile is a 100-point scale and uses five sets of criteria in judging an essay. They are content criteria, organizational criteria, vocabulary criteria, language use criteria, and punctuation criteria. The profile is one of the most commonly used and reliable profiles for assessing the composition of students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) or a second language (ESL).

### Procedure

The research was conducted in a blended learning setting. The first four meetings were in a conventional face to face meeting in the classroom. The rest of the meetings were online because of the outbreak of COVID 19. Since the government issued a ‘stay home order’ and ‘learn from home’ order, all the process of teaching and learning shifted from direct face-to-face to online meeting. The online class used Whatsapp Group (WAG), Telegram, and Google Meet application.

The teaching of writing during the research followed the process approach for teaching writing. At first, the students learned the structure of the essay through a model. After that, they read the authentic materials and discussed the text. The next step was brainstorming and making

the first draft. The students made the first draft at home. Each draft was shown to the lecturer to be given feedback in relation to content, idea development, and language. The students revised the draft and sent the revision to the lecturer. Some students revised several times. The lecturer accepted the final draft only when the composition had been checked with the Grammarly application and Plagiarism checker online application. The draft and the revision were sent through the WAG application.

## Result and discussion

Before the ANOVA computation, the researchers need to find out whether the data meet the basic statistical assumption of ANOVA analysis. As stated in Laerd Statistics (2018), there six statistical assumptions that need to be fulfilled to run the ANOVA analysis. They are 1) the dependent variable should be either in ratio or interval scale, 2) the independent variable should consist of at least two independent groups, 3) there should be independent of observations, 4) there should be no significant outliers, 5) the dependent variables should have an approximately normal distribution in each group of an independent variable, and 6) the data should pass the homogeneity of variances test.

### Fulfilling statistical assumptions

The data in this study fulfilled the first three statistical assumptions, namely interval data, two independent groups (fiction and non-fiction), and independent observation. To fulfill whether there are no significant outliers in both groups, the researchers ran the statistical analysis.



Figure 1. Outlier test of fiction group (left) and non-fiction (right) group

Figure 1 shows that there is no significant outliers in fiction and non-fiction group. Thus, assumption number four is met. The next assumption that requires statistical test is whether the data is in normal distribution.

Table 1. Normal distribution result

Writing	Fiction	Skewness	.517	.536
		Kurtosis	-.466	1.038
	Non fiction	Skewness	-.190	.536
		Kurtosis	-.566	1.038

The skewedness and kurtosis score form the fiction and non-fiction group show that the data is approximately normally distributed. Thus, the assumption of normal distribution is met.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics				
Dependent Variable: Writing Score				
Content Type (Fiction/Non-fiction)	Proficiency Level (High/Mid/Low)	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Fiction	High	82.6429	4.93891	7
	Mid	78.0625	2.95729	8
	Low	80.8333	6.25167	3
	Total	80.3056	4.63408	18
Non-fiction	High	84.1875	2.69838	8
	Mid	80.5000	2.85357	8
	Low	77.0000	4.24264	2
	Total	81.7500	3.68722	18
Total	High	83.4667	3.83809	15
	Mid	79.2813	3.07663	16
	Low	79.3000	5.33385	5
	Total	81.0278	4.19173	36

The data from the descriptive statistics also show that the total number of the high achievers are 15 students, the mid achievers are 16 students, and the low achievers are 5 students. The mean of the fiction class is 80.3056 and the non-fiction mean is 81.7500. The difference in the mean between both groups is 1.4444. The mean of the high achievers and the mid achievers in the non-fiction group is higher than the fiction group. Yet, the low achievers mean of the fiction group is higher than the low achiever in the non-fiction group. To find out whether these differences are statistically significant, statistical computation needs to be conducted.

Table 3. Normality test assumption six groups (1 vs 2 vs 3 vs 4 vs 5 vs 6)

Tests of Normality							
Group under Analysis		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Writng Score	Fiction High	.147	7	.200*	.965	7	.861
	Nonfiction High	.149	8	.200*	.946	8	.674
	Fiction Mid	.140	8	.200*	.970	8	.901
	Nonfiction Mid	.250	8	.150	.870	8	.152
	Fiction Low	.178	3	.	.999	3	.956
	Nonfiction Low	.260	2	.			

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The computation shows that all the significance values are higher than the alpha value ( $p > 0.05$ ). The nonfiction value (low) is empty because the SPSS cannot make any computation as the number of the sample is too small. Anyhow, the analysis shows that the normality assumption is met. For a more detailed analysis, the researchers computed the normality test in each group (fiction and nonfiction group) and the level groups.

Table 4. Two groups (fiction vs nonfiction)

Tests of Normality							
	Content Type (Fiction/ Non-fiction)	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Wrritng Score	Fiction	.111	18	.200*	.952	18	.465
	Non-fiction	.133	18	.200*	.959	18	.586

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.  
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The  $p$  value in Kolmogrov- Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk in both groups is higher than the alpha value ( $> \alpha .05$ ). The computation shows that the normality assumption in two groups (fiction vs. non fiction) is met.

Table 5. Three groups (high vs mid vs low)

Tests of Normality							
	Proficiency Level (High/Mid/Low)	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Wrritng Score	High	.104	15	.200*	.974	15	.916
	Mid	.161	16	.200*	.979	16	.951
	Low	.216	5	.200*	.916	5	.504

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.  
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Similarly, the  $p$  values of Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shaphiro-Wilk for proficiency level (high, mid, and low) are bigger than the alpha value ( $> \alpha .05$ ). This shows that the normality assumption in three groups (high vs. mid vs. low) is met.

Table 6. The levene's test

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances <sup>a</sup>			
Dependent Variable: Writing Score			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.036	5	30	.415

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.  
a. Design: Intercept + content\_type + proficiency\_level + content\_type \* proficeincy\_level

The result of homogeneity of variance shows that the significance value is higher than .05 ( $p .415 > \alpha .05$ ). It means that the variances of the population of the dependent variable are equal for both groups. The result of the Levene's test show that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is met.

Hypothesis testing

Table 7. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects  
Dependent Variable: Writing Score

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power <sup>b</sup>
Corrected Model	203.261 <sup>a</sup>	5	40.652	2.962	.027	.331	14.811	.783
Intercept	172816.161	1	172816.161	12592.525	.000	.998	12592.525	1.000
content_type	.016	1	.016	.001	.973	.000	.001	.050
proficiency_level	155.149	2	77.574	5.653	.008	.274	11.305	.824
content_type * proficiency_level	36.966	2	18.483	1.347	.275	.082	2.694	.268
Error	411.711	30	13.724					
Total	236973.000	36						
Corrected Total	614.972	35						

a. R Squared = .331 (Adjusted R Squared = .219)  
b. Computed using alpha = .05

The ANOVA analysis shows that there is two main effects analysis. The main effect of content type on writing performance was not significant ( $F(1,30) = .001, p .973$ ), but the main effect of proficiency level on writing performance is significant such that the students who have a higher level of writing proficiency have better performance than the students who have a lower level of writing proficiency ( $F(2,30) = 5.653, p .008$ ).

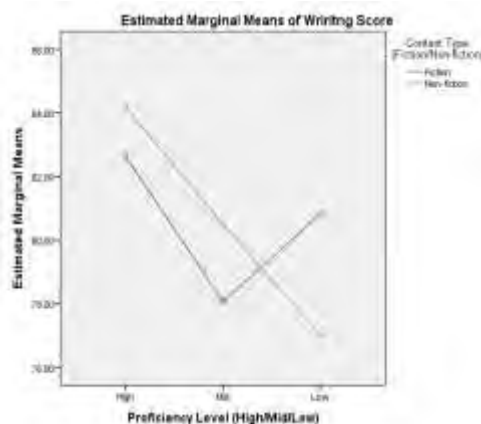


Diagram 1. The interaction effect content type vs. writing proficiency level



Yet, the result of the interaction effect analysis shows that there was no significant interaction between content type and proficiency level ( $F(2,30) = 1.347, p = .275$ ). The difference in the writing performance in the proficiency level does not depend on whether the students learn by using different types of authentic materials (fiction or nonfiction). The difference occurs in all proficiency levels, regardless of whether they use nonfiction or fiction authentic materials. The researchers conclude that fiction authentic materials appear to be relatively as effective as nonfiction ones.

## Discussion

Teaching and learning writing in a foreign language context both require skills, skill to teach, and skill to learn. It is always a

a challenge to teach writing to students who learn English, especially to those who have limited exposure to the target language. One way of enabling the students to have sufficient exposure to English is by giving them authentic materials to learn the target language (Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2019). There are many types of authentic materials in everyday life. Among others are informational texts, such as news and article features (Sundana, 2018). Setyowati & Sukmawan (2019) categorize two types of authentic materials into printed materials and web-based materials. The printed materials are those that have been printed and or published on the printed form, such as hardcover books, newspapers, brochures, etc. The web-based materials, on the other hand, are any materials published online in the form of digital materials that are accessible through links on web pages.

With the advance of technology, web-based materials are becoming more and more common to use for classroom teaching. Research has shown that authentic materials benefit language learning (Fabusuyi, 2014; Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014; Ghanbari et al., 2015). Yet, research that focuses on the use of the type of authentic materials for teaching writing in a foreign language context is not much informed. The use of literature for teaching writing is necessary. As a type of authentic material, literature gives many advantages for EFL learners especially for their communicative competence (Takahashi, 2015).

This research uses two types of authentic materials, the literary works (fiction) and the nonfictions, such as news. The result shows that there is no difference in the students' writing performance when they were taught with fictions and nonfictions authentic materials to write essays ( $F(1,30) = .001, p .973$ ). It implies that authentic materials in the form of fiction and non-fiction seem to be equally effective. The result of this study supports Appley's (1988) research. Although Appley (1988) conducted a study in a reading skill context, she found out that the students who used literature authentic materials (short stories, plays, and poetry) achieve similar reading performance as those who used non-authentic materials. The result of this study also supports previous research that authentic materials can significantly improve the students' writing ability (Aqly, Komariah, & Heriansyah, 2017). The present study also supports Ward, Schell, Brown, & Thomason (2019) research. They state that both fiction and non-fiction texts promote English language learners' literacy skills and language development.

In this research, the treatment in both classes employed a reading to write activity. The students read the authentic materials first before they responded to them and gave their thoughts in written form. According to Alomrani (2014), the teaching of reading and the teaching of writing should be an integrated activity. These skills support each other because, without sufficient reading, the students would be able to write well.

Thus, in writing as a process approach, the integration of reading and writing should be during the planning and drafting phase (Alomrani, 2014). Similarly, in this study, the inclusion of the authentic materials in writing as a process approach is given in the planning and drafting part. Therefore, for practical use, the result of the study shows that foreign/second language teachers/lecturers can use authentic materials for teaching essay writing. The writing teachers/lecturers can utilize both nonfiction authentic materials (news, article features in newspaper/magazine) and literature (short stories, flash fictions, narrative poems) to teach writing.

The researchers identified two possible causes of why the null hypothesis fails to be rejected. The first cause was probably an inadequate number of samples. The computation of the observed power in the first main effect (table 7) was insufficient. Power refers to the probability that the test will find a statistically significant difference when such a difference exists (Hintze, 2011). In other words, power is the probability that a researcher will be able to reject the null hypothesis. It is generally accepted that power should be .8 or higher (Hintze, 2011; Suresh & Chandrashekar, 2012). Thus, if the researcher has .8 or more observed power,

there is a greater chance that the researchers would be able to detect an effect, given that the effect exists. Suresh & Chandrashekar (2012) state a statistical power and sample size are positively correlated which means that a larger sample size will likely have more power to reject the null hypothesis. He further states that the use of power analysis has become an integral part of behavioral sciences whenever an empirical study is performed. Therefore, with the observed power only .05, as shown in Table 7, the researchers believe that the power to reject the null hypothesis is considered too small. Thus, there is a possibility that the researchers would be able to reject the null hypothesis if the number of samples in each group is increased. More samples mean more power ( high chance) to detect a difference between groups if it truly exists.

The second reason why the researchers were unable to reject the null hypothesis might be caused by the factuality of the reading content (fiction vs. non-fiction). Hartung, Withers, Hagoort,& Willems (2017) state that the value of narrative lays more on the characters of the narrative materials than whether the content / the story is fiction or non-fiction. Almost all news is written in expository genres and gives sufficient detailed information to readers about what happens in society or life in general. On the other hand, the narrative genre talks about people and social knowledge from the point of view of a character/s whether they are fictional or real. Hartung et. al (2017) found that a strong predictor of reading behavior of reading goals is associated with certain situations and types of text rather than with prior knowledge about a story being fictional or based on true events. Their study implies that the students' reading behavior is not affected by whether the story is indeed imaginary (fiction) or based on true events. For readers, fiction is as real as facts. Hartung et. al (2017) state that readers' reading expectations arose when they face reading situations (e.g reading news or literature) which later affect their reading behavior to activate particular reading goals. Taken into the context of this study, there is a probability that the students in group B ( the fiction group) have similar reading behavior.

Furthermore, as stated by Topping (2015), fiction reading materials tend to be read more carefully than the nonfiction materials. This implies that the students' in the fiction group seemed to have 'more serious' reading comprehension than the nonfiction group because when reading literary texts, readers tend to use more inferring strategies to get a better understanding of the story they read. As stated by Martin (2012), readers apply more reading strategies when reading fiction, such as inferring and summarizing. Thus, to have more critical reading, using literary text is better than non-literary text (Nurrohmah, Suparman, & Sukirlan, 2015). Even though the vocabulary in narrative texts tend to be more familiar to the students and appear less frequently than the non-

fiction texts, the vocabulary in non-fiction texts tends to be longer and more conceptually complex (Hiebert, & Cervetti, 2011). Both literary texts and informative (non-fiction) texts share their own distinctive feature in terms of text structure and vocabulary. The result of this study shows that the distinctive features of fiction and non-fiction texts have no effect on the students' ability to respond to the texts and in writing their opinion about the related topic.

## Conclusion

The researchers conclude that the use of authentic materials, either fiction or non-fiction, is equally effective for teaching essay writing. Even though the mean of the non-fiction group is slightly higher than the mean of the fiction group, the computation shows that the difference is not statistically significant. Yet, there is a significant difference across different levels of writing proficiency regardless of the type of authentic materials. The result of the study also reveals that there is no interaction effect between content type (fiction vs. non-fiction) and level of writing proficiency.

To have more profound information about the effect of authentic materials on the students' writing performance in a foreign/second language context, future researchers are suggested to increase the sample size if any replication should be made. To do this, future researchers can run a statistical power analysis program to predict the number of samples required to reject the null hypothesis if any relationship does exist. Future researchers also need to investigate whether the use of a different type of authentic materials yields the same result when they are applied to a lower level of education (the senior high and junior high school students) or other levels of writing course (paragraph writing). More specifically, future researchers are suggested to find out the effect of authentic materials across the writing genre, or/and on the students' idea development.

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