

Authentic Materials In Reading Classrooms: An Investigation From Pre-University Students' Perspectives At A Private University In Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

The use of authentic materials in the classroom has been debated, with the student benefiting from proximity to the original language and context. Actual materials are not only very motivating and provide a sense of accomplishment upon comprehension, but they also encourage further reading. Students face a number of hurdles when working with authentic literary English texts, despite their many benefits. This paper sought to explore how students perceive the usage of real resources in reading classrooms. The data was acquired through the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The majority of students, according to the findings, prefer using actual resources. They believed that access to authentic resources for reading activities would enhance their vocabulary, understanding of reading texts, scanning and skimming skills, and ability to interpret explicit and implicit information. In addition, the use of more authentic materials in reading sessions expanded their social awareness, particularly of the cultures of English-speaking nations. It was revealed that internet materials, photographs, and posters were the most prevalent types of authentic materials used in student reading sessions. Poems, novels, and short stories were the least popular and should be used for additional reading assignments or projects at home. Some recommendations for future research were also proposed in this current study.

Keywords: Authentic materials, students' perspective, reading classroom,

I. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly held that in order for students to improve their language skills, they must be exposed to a great deal of input. The classroom is where EFL students receive the majority of their language input. Rarely do students take the initiative to seek out foreign language resources outside of class or engage in reading beyond the requirements of the course. Educators blame the rise of multimedia for a drop in students' interest in reading (Chong & Renganathan, 2017). In recent years, classroom instruction and academic inquiry have increasingly emphasized considerable reading. Some researchers have determined that reading substantially affects academic performance (Day & Bamford, 2000;

Hunter, 2009). It can equip students with a vast vocabulary, syntax, and other language skills to enhance their proficiency in the target language.

Reading instruction in English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) is intended to improve student's language skills to the point where they are able to comprehend and absorb works of fiction and nonfiction written in the original language (Nation, 2008).

Students have been given access to a diverse range of reading materials in order to assist them in developing their reading abilities. Specifically, Singhal (2001) emphasized that certain reading styles favor using non-authentic or manufactured

texts. These texts can provide more meaningful and created language, boosting numerous aspects of language acquisition, such as grammar and vocabulary (Singhal, 2001). In contrast, several contemporary reading practices emphasize presenting students with texts directly pulled from the daily lives of native speakers. This method was used to link ELLs with the real language spoken by native speakers (Gilmore, 2007).

Numerous studies have proved the value of genuine materials in English education. Some researchers demonstrate that real resources are helpful for teaching English and that they may be utilized as media to boost students' writing skills, vocabulary in listening skills, and listening comprehension (Masood, 2013; Rodngam, 2011; Sulistyani, 2014; Zyzik & Polio, 2017). The results of the studies indicate that accurate content can be an effective tool for enhancing language skills. The researchers can extensively examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of authentic material in writing and listening skills. It would be preferable if there were more researchers on the same subject with varying linguistic abilities.

Although there is a wealth of literature on the topic of using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms, it is still crucial to understand how language learners and specific readers experience this practice. It has been observed that a lack of research examines students' perspectives toward the use of authentic materials in their reading classes. Consequently, there is an urgent need to investigate these perceptions in an effort to comprehend the students' attitudes and preferences when utilizing these materials. It is envisaged that this would result in improved ways of instruction in English reading classes.

This study sought to investigate students' perspectives toward using authentic materials in reading classes. To address the aforementioned issue, the following questions were presented:

1. What are pre-university students' perceptions of using authentic materials in reading classrooms?
2. What are pre-university students' preferences on the types of authentic materials in reading classrooms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are real-life texts that were not prepared for instructional purposes (Berardo, 2006). Tomlinson (2003) confirms this, adding that authentic texts were not created with language teaching in mind. The use of writings, photos, and video clips that were not developed for educational purposes is also considered authentic content (Richards, 2017). Previously, Tomlinson (2013) claimed that a genuine piece of writing is one that seeks to share ideas rather than impart knowledge. Original works are those that provide a social function within a language community, which is congruent with the previous assertion (Berardo, 2006). According to Tomlinson (2003), an authentic reading source is one in which students communicate to achieve a purpose rather than simply practicing the language. The conclusion is that authentic information is created not for the purpose of teaching or learning but rather to inform and communicate with the user.

2.2 Types of Authentic Materials

A storybook, newspaper, magazine, short video, music, photograph, or any other material can be defined as legitimate material. However, the teacher must categorize those items so that he can use the suitable material in class. Oura (2012) divides authentic material into three categories:

- 1) Authentic audio-visual materials include TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news clips, comedy programs, movies, operas, short videos, music videos, documentaries, and sales pitches.

2) PowerPoint slides, photographs, paintings, children's artwork, stick figure drawings, wordless street signs, silhouettes, images, ink bolts, postcard pictures, wordless picture books, stamps, and X-rays are all examples of authentic visual materials that students can view and enjoy without needing to read any text.

3) Newspapers, movie posters, song lyrics, menus, food packaging, tourist guides, university catalogs, phone books, maps, electronic guides, comic books, picture books, greeting cards, grocery coupons, massage pins, and bus schedules are all examples of authentic printed materials.

2.3 Authentic Materials and Reading Activities

Reading is one of the four essential language teaching skills that play an important part in language education. According to Ewald (2007), the goal of reading is varied for each person who does it; for some, it is to improve one's vocabulary and comprehension of written language, while for others, it is an opportunity to improve one's grammar and speaking skills. McNeil (2006) characterizes reading as a pleasurable activity that can provide the reader with fulfillment. Furthermore, the term "authentic reading" is being applied more frequently than ever before in language instruction. Min and Hsu (2008) claim that authentic denotes absolute, genuine, and legitimate, while Berardo (2006) defines authenticity as exchanges between readers and a book, as opposed to the text itself. It is believed that learning is a continual process that transcends the physical environment of a text and involves the discovery of meaning as well as the processing of information. Berardo (2006) indicates that non-authentic texts are produced for the goal of language acquisition.

Students will be better able to apply their knowledge of language to real-world situations if they are immersed in authentic content. As previously said, the emphasis on formless learning significantly influenced many

instructors. This could result in inadequate exposure to genuine language usage for language learners. Students may have missed a culturally loaded word when it was positioned outside of its original context in a textbook, even though the goal of the textbook was to increase students' appreciation for the target language (Gilmore, 2007). Moreover, when the speaker's attention is on the language's content, the natural language environment is revealed. The classroom activities must therefore imitate the usage of the language in real-world situations.

The disadvantages of authentic materials include their tendency to be overly culturally biased, requiring readers to have a thorough understanding of the cultural background, as well as their tendency to have too many mixed-up structural elements, which can make decoding the texts more difficult for less-adept readers (Martinez, 2002). According to Richards (2001), problems might also arise for the instructor while dealing with actual materials due to the presence of challenging language, superfluous vocabulary words, and complex language patterns. Picking the improper kind of literature might make learning new terminology and utilizing new structures more challenging for the student. On the contrary, this may discourage the student. They can become outdated just as soon as textbooks can, but they can be updated or changed with much less hassle and expense.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Participants in Phase 1 of the study were fifty pre-university students aged 18 to 19 from a private institution in Vietnam. These students have just completed their six-level English preparation course. In levels 1 through 4, students improved their listening and speaking skills. Levels 5 and 6 of its required curriculum emphasize reading and writing skills. The textbooks utilized at all levels are legitimate Macmillan and Oxford publications. In the second phase of the study, ten

students were chosen at random for interviews to ensure objectivity and produce more informative results.

All participants volunteered for the study, which was authorized by the university administration and their lecturers.

3.2 Research design and instruments

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to achieve the research aim. Mixed-method research collects and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data, "mixing" the data sources to provide a more thorough understanding of the specified study problem (Creswell, 2009, 2015; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As quantitative and qualitative data are acquired successively, they are collected and evaluated independently. While quantitative approaches are utilized in the initial stages of research, qualitative measurements are used to highlight, confirm, or further explain quantitative conclusions.

In this study, the researcher employed two primary data collection methods. The initial tool was an interview, followed by a questionnaire. The interview consisted of two sets of questions; the first set was for the pilot study, and the second set was for following up on the outcomes of the data acquired from the second instrument, a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed from Al-Mussallam's questionnaires (2009) to collect information about students' demographics, current classes with textbooks, use of authentic materials, and preferred types of authentic materials (Al-Musallam, 2009). Nonetheless, some items are removed because they are irrelevant to the present investigation, while others are included to accommodate the requirements of the data in this study. In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with

eight participants in order to gain insight into the results of the previously issued questionnaire to students.

3.3 Procedures

The data collection technique lasted one month and was divided into two phases: the first phase consisted of collecting quantitative data using surveys, while the second phase consisted of collecting qualitative data by interviewing students. A pilot study involving 15 students was done to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability and validity, as well as to ensure that the statements' language was clear. Based on the suggestions of 15 participants who were eliminated from the study, the questionnaire was amended to include more precise and succinct language. The final survey, which was incorporated in Google Forms, was then emailed to 50 participants for completion. After one week, each form had been completely filled out.

The questionnaire's results were evaluated. After receiving the questionnaire findings, interviews with eight students were performed. These interviews were intended to validate the questionnaire results and explore students' insightful perspectives toward using authentic English materials in reading classes. Each session with an individual student lasted around 30 minutes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's findings regarding how students perceive authentic texts used in reading classes. The information was gathered by questionnaire and interview. The scale index in the following tables was statistically derived from the questionnaire and showed the extent to which students agreed with the questionnaire questions.

4.1 Survey's results

Table 1. Students' perspectives toward the use of authentic materials in reading classes

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Score	Scale Index
1. Authentic materials help improve my reading comprehension skills.	17	25	6	1	1	206	82%
	34%	50%	12%	2%	2%		
2. Authentic materials help improve my English vocabulary.	15	27	8	0	0	207	83%
	30%	54%	16%	0	0		
3. Authentic materials help me practice understanding implicit and explicit information.	15	20	14	0	1	198	79%
	30%	40%	28%	0	2%		
4. Authentic materials help me practice skimming and scanning texts.	11	32	4	2	1	200	80%
	22%	64%	8%	4%	2%		
5. Authentic materials help broaden my knowledge about Western cultures.	8	22	19	1	0	187	75%
	16%	44%	38%	2%	0		

The student's perceptions toward the authentic materials presented in their reading classes are depicted in Table 1. The students highly agreed, as indicated by the scale index of 83%. Statistically, the higher the percentage, the more participants agreed with the assertions; in this case, that authentic material can help them expand their vocabulary. Eighty-two percent, eighty percent, and seventy-nine percent of the students agreed that real resources might help them enhance their reading comprehension skills. These materials also allowed students to practice advanced reading abilities, such as comprehending explicit and implicit information (statement 3). In addition, the usage of actual materials in reading class could assist students in improving their scanning and skimming skills (statement 4). In addition, seventy-five percent of

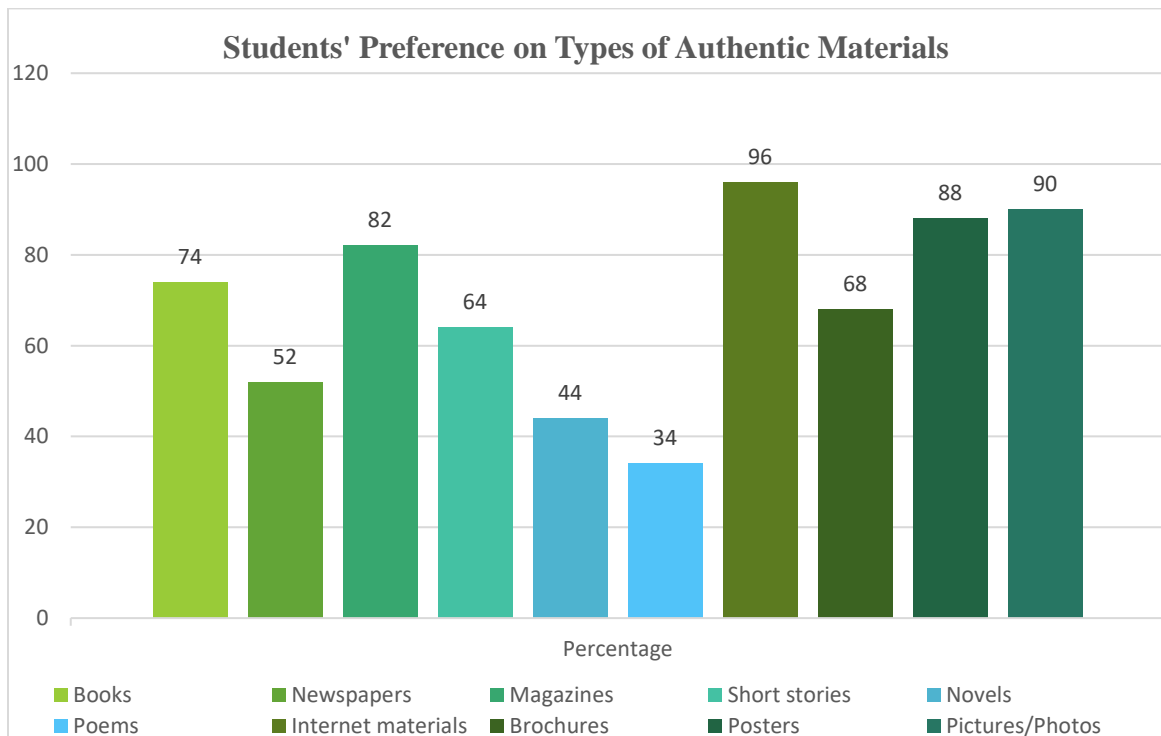
students from the scale index believed that these materials could help them gain a broader understanding of Western cultures, as the selection of texts in authentic reading sources was based on Western culture.

According to these findings, the majority of students viewed the utilization of actual texts in reading classes favorably. This finding is consistent with the results of earlier research (Al-Musallam, 2009; Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014; Halim, Mukminatien, & Anugerahwati, 2018; Tanasavate & Chinwonno, 2013). They believed that incorporating actual materials in reading exercises would improve students' vocabulary and help them practice reading skills, including scanning, skimming, and identifying specific or detailed information. Interestingly, Vietnamese

pre-university believed that reading a great deal of Western-based cultural materials from authentic sources broadened their social knowledge, particularly their comprehension of various English-speaking cultures.

The second section of the questionnaire elucidates the students' preferences for authentic reading resources. The resources that are most preferred and least preferred by students are listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Students' preference on types of authentic materials



As demonstrated in Figure 2, the student's preferences for authentic reading classroom materials, from most to least preferred, were as follows: internet materials, pictures/photos, posters, magazines, books, brochures, short stories, newspapers, novels, and poems. Internet-based resources were the most chosen authentic resources, with 96% of students opting for them. On the other hand, poetry was their least preferred genre, with only 34% of votes.

It could be seen that pre-university Vietnamese students favored the usage of particular authentic texts in the reading lesson. Internet materials are the most popular reading materials. Internet-based reading materials appear quick and handy for students, as they can quickly access them in class with an electronic

device and instructors' approval. It was fascinating that students in this study enjoyed using images and posters in reading sessions. They appeared more interested in picture-based reading exercises. Short stories, novels, and poems were the least chosen forms of literature. This validates the argument made by other studies (Al-Musallam, 2009; Tanasavate & Chinwonno, 2013) that poetry was not recommended as a classroom supplement. Hwang (2005) suggested that the poem's highly stylistic language elements, which occasionally violate language norms for aesthetic reasons, made it difficult for pupils to comprehend. In addition, reading short tales and novels takes time, thus ESL/EFL students should utilize them

as homework or reading assignments to improve their English reading skills.

4.2 Interview results

Two themes emerged in relation to students' perceptions of using authentic resources in reading classes: (1) categories of authentic materials, (2) skills to be enhanced after reading authentic materials.

(1) Categories of authentic materials

There are three categories of authentic reading materials favored by students in reading lessons, including internet-based materials, photographs, and posters. This result was consistent with the survey's findings regarding students' preferences for realistic materials utilized in reading classrooms. According to students, internet resources are convenient, save time, and enable them to obtain the most current information. Furthermore, students also stated that they valued instructors who prepared resources for reading activities, such as photos and posters, in a professional manner. They acknowledged that these realistic resources facilitated their vocabulary development, increased their engagement in reading activities, and made their learning process more exciting and meaningful. Meaningful learning is a crucial component of teaching and learning ideas offered by Brown (2007).

(2) skills to be enhanced after reading authentic materials

Reading original materials improves some abilities, such as word knowledge and the scanning-skimming reading technique.

2.1 Vocabulary Competence

All interviewees agreed that authentic reading resources might enhance students' language skills (Kennedy, 2014). A vast range of vocabulary is available in authentic sources. Students can increase their understanding of how to utilize the

words in proper circumstances. Some students reported that original materials inspire them to learn new vocabulary. Authentic texts frequently employ a range of textual frameworks. Since textbook updates take a considerable amount of time, it is considered that magazines and newspapers contain the most recent information. Authentic reading resources can provide students with a wealth of vocabulary that will improve their use of the target language.

2.2 Scanning-skimming strategy

Students stated that reading authentic reading materials allowed them to practice scanning and skimming. Students require the skill of skimming in order to quickly examine a text and gain a general understanding of it. Because it requires a higher level of reading and word recognition skills, students remarked that they might enhance their skimming method after gaining extensive exposure to real literature (Urquhart & Weir, 2014).

It is apparent that authentic resources give students interesting knowledge on a variety of topics on a daily basis. Therefore, individuals can practice skimming relevant information in authentic, engaging texts. Students can practice focusing on simply the text's broad or core themes, as well as compiling the information required to create a summary of the text.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the students' perspectives toward using authentic material in reading classes. The results indicated that the majority of students view the usage of actual materials favorably. They believed that real resources for reading activities would improve their vocabulary knowledge, comprehension of reading texts, reading abilities such as scanning and skimming, and capacity to interpret explicit and implicit information. In addition, the use of more authentic materials in reading sessions

expanded their social understanding, particularly regarding the culture of English-speaking countries.

In addition, it was discovered that internet materials, photographs, and posters were students' most preferred sorts of authentic materials utilized in reading sessions. Poems, novels, and short tales, which should be used for additional home reading activities or reading projects, were the least liked. In light of the fact that some of these top choices are more inspiring than others, they may represent the finest selections for future classroom use.

LIMITATION

The current study does have several limitations that need to be taken into consideration when thinking about future research on the perceptions of students regarding using authentic materials in reading lessons. To begin, the relatively small size of the sample population ($N = 50$), which puts doubt on the dependability of the results. It is conceivable to do the same research with English instructors to investigate the analytical views they bring to bear on how they utilize authentic reading resources. As a result, EFL teachers' perspectives on original input should be examined in subsequent research. Additional facets of authenticity that can be explored in the future include teachers' views on how authentic materials might foster the development of productive abilities and how to successfully include such materials in reading lesson planning.

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