

The Impact of Using Authentic Materials on Enhancing Reading Comprehension Among Third Semester English Students at Gulf of Sidra University

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أثر استخدام المواد الأصيلة في تعزيز مهارة استيعاب القراءة لدى طلاب الفصل
الثالث لقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة خليج السدرة

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الملخص:

تناولت هذه الدراسة أثر استخدام المواد الأصيلة في تعزيز مهارة استيعاب القراءة لدى طلبة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في الفصل الدراسي الثالث بجامعة خليج السدرة. واعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج المختلط، حيث جمعت بين التحليل الكمي لدرجات اختبارات الفهم القرائي والتحليل النوعي المستند إلى استبيانات الطلبة والمقابلات الشخصية. وأظهرت النتائج أن الطلبة الذين تعرضوا لنصوص أصيلة من مواد أصيلة مثل المقالات الصحفية، والإعلانات، والمحتوى الإلكتروني حققوا مستوى أعلى بشكل ملحوظ في الفهم القرائي مقارنة بأولئك الذين استخدموا مواد تقليدية معتمدة على الكتب الدراسية.

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كما أفاد الطلبة بزيادة دافعيتهم وانخراطهم في التعلم، إلى جانب تنامي وعيهم الثقافي عند التعامل مع المواضيع الحقيقية للمواد الأصيلة. وعلى الرغم من التحديات الأولية، تكيفت الغالبية العظمى من الطلبة بشكل جيد ووجدوا هذه المواد أكثر صلة وفاعلية. وتدعم الدراسة إدماج المواد الأصيلة في مناهج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، وتبرز قدرتها على ردم الفجوة بين التعليم التقليدي واستخدام اللغة في مواقف الحياة الواقعية التي تتطلب مرونة ومصطلحات حديثة وإحاطة بما يجري في العالم الحقيقي.

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of authentic materials on enhancing reading comprehension among third-semester English students at Gulf of Sidra University. Grounded in a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative analysis of comprehension test scores with qualitative insights from student questionnaires and interviews.

The findings reveal that students exposed to authentic texts—such as newspaper articles, advertisements, and online content—demonstrated significantly higher reading comprehension performance compared to those using traditional, textbook-based materials. Additionally, students reported increased motivation, engagement, and cultural awareness when working with authentic texts.

Despite initial challenges, the majority adapted well and found the materials more relevant and useful. The study supports the integration of authentic materials into English language curricula and highlights their potential to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use.

Introduction

Authenticity is a concept that is deeply rooted in educational and cultural fields. It refers to the quality of being genuine, real, true and relevant to the situation. Over time, the notion of authenticity has gained prominence, particularly in the Western world, driven by various cultural, existential, and philosophical factors.

In the context of language learning, authenticity plays an important role. Authentic texts offer learners the access to genuine language use. Unlike tailored texts designed especially only for current purposes, authentic

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materials provide real experience, reflecting real-world language structures, vocabulary, and discourse. These materials include a wide range of formats, from newspaper articles to advertisements, as well as audiovisual content like podcasts and films.

The use of authentic texts in language teaching presents texts to improve learners' engagement with realistic language and cultural contexts, fostering better understanding and practical application.

The debate surrounding the integration of authentic materials in language education has been explored extensively in academic literature. Scholars such as Widdowson (1990) emphasize the shift from simplified language to authentic materials in communicative language teaching (CLT). Others, like Wallace (2000), highlight the value of authentic texts in enabling learners to engage with language in meaningful and realistic ways. Philosophical perspectives, such as those of Derrida and Fish, further enrich the discussion by examining the fluidity and contextuality of authenticity in interpretation.

Research Aims

This research aims to explore the role of authentic materials in language learning, with a particular focus on reading. It investigates how authentic texts contribute to the development of reading skills, the challenges associated with their use, and the criteria for selecting suitable materials. By examining the interplay between authenticity and language instruction, this study seeks to provide insights into effective teaching practices that bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent authentic materials contribute to the development of reading skills in language learners?
2. How does the use of authentic materials in reading compare to traditional materials in enhancing language proficiency?

Literature Review

The use of authentic materials in English language teaching (ELT) has been widely supported in the literature as a means to promote learner motivation, comprehension, and practical language use. Scholars such as

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Widdowson (1990) argue that authentic materials offer real-life relevance, providing learners with language input that mirrors everyday communication. Wallace (2000) adds that these texts help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application, especially in reading.

Authentic materials also support Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes interaction and the practical use of language over rote memorization. According to Britishey Training Centre (n.d.), learners exposed to authentic materials show improved comprehension and retention because the context provided by such materials reinforces meaning.

However, the integration of authentic materials is not without challenges. Some educators highlight the difficulty of selecting appropriate texts for different proficiency levels, while others point to the cultural complexities embedded in such materials that may confuse learners.

Nevertheless, many studies report that when carefully selected and appropriately scaffolded, authentic materials significantly improve language skills, especially reading comprehension. Philosophers like Derrida (1967) and Fish (1980) contribute to the discourse by discussing how texts are interpreted based on the reader's context. This aligns with the goals of using authentic texts, which often demand that learners interpret language in varied and unpredictable ways, mirroring real-life experiences.

Empirical studies consistently indicate that when authentic materials are carefully selected and effectively scaffolded, they can significantly enhance language learning outcomes, particularly in reading comprehension. Instructional strategies such as pre-reading activities, vocabulary support, and guided discussion can help learners navigate complex texts and extract meaningful information. In this regard, authentic materials not only facilitate language development but also encourage critical thinking and active engagement with texts (Azizifar et al., 2015; Namaziandost et al., 2021).

The theoretical perspectives of philosophers and literary theorists such as Derrida (1967) and Fish (1980) further enrich the discussion on authentic text use by emphasizing the role of the reader in meaning construction. Their views suggest that texts are interpreted differently depending on the reader's background, experiences, and cultural context. This concept closely aligns with the pedagogical goals of authentic materials, which require learners to

interpret language in dynamic, varied, and sometimes unpredictable ways—much like real-life communication. Consequently, the use of authentic materials in reading instruction supports not only linguistic competence but also interpretive and critical literacy skills essential for effective language use.

The Importance of Reading

Reading is one of the four main language skills and plays a vital role in language learning. It is a key source of input through which learners acquire vocabulary, grammar, and knowledge of language structures. According to Harmer (2001), reading helps learners improve their overall language competence by exposing them to a wide range of linguistic forms and expressions.

Reading is especially important for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because it allows them to interact with the language beyond the classroom. Through reading, students can develop vocabulary knowledge, improve spelling, and become familiar with different writing styles. Moreover, reading enhances learners' critical thinking skills, as it requires understanding, interpreting, and evaluating information.

In academic contexts, reading is essential for students' success, as most learning materials, examinations, and references are presented in written form. For university students, strong reading skills enable them to understand textbooks, articles, and research materials effectively. Therefore, improving reading comprehension is a major goal in English language teaching.

Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are materials that are originally created for real-life communication rather than for teaching purposes. They are designed for native speakers of the language and reflect how language is naturally used in everyday situations. According to Nunan (1989), authentic materials are texts that are not specifically produced for language teaching but are used in the classroom to expose learners to real language use.

Examples of authentic materials include newspapers, magazines, advertisements, websites, menus, emails, and videos. These materials present real vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns, which help learners understand how language is used in real contexts. Widdowson (1990)

emphasizes that authentic materials help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

The use of authentic materials in reading classes can increase learners' motivation and engagement. When students read texts that are relevant to their lives and interests, they are more likely to participate actively and develop positive attitudes toward reading. Although authentic materials may be challenging at first, proper teacher guidance and support can help learners benefit from them effectively.

Types of Authentic Materials

Authentic materials can be classified into several types based on their form and mode of presentation. The most common types include:

1. Printed Authentic Materials

Printed materials include newspapers, magazines, brochures, leaflets, menus, and books. These materials are widely used in reading classes because they provide rich language input and expose learners to different text types and writing styles. Newspaper articles, for example, help students develop skimming and scanning skills, while magazines often present topics that interest learners.

2. Audio Authentic Materials

Audio materials such as radio programs, podcasts, interviews, and songs are also considered authentic materials. Although they mainly support listening skills, they can be used alongside reading through transcripts and subtitles to enhance comprehension and vocabulary learning.

3. Audio-Visual Authentic Materials

Audio-visual materials include movies, TV shows, documentaries, and online videos. These materials combine visual and auditory input, which helps learners understand meaning through context. When accompanied by written texts or subtitles, they can strongly support reading comprehension.

4. Digital and Online Authentic Materials

With the advancement of technology, digital authentic materials have become increasingly important. These include websites, blogs, social media posts, online articles, and emails. Digital materials are easily accessible and

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often deal with current and real-life topics, making them highly motivating for students.

In conclusion, the variety of authentic materials allows teachers to select suitable texts that match students' proficiency levels and interests. Using different types of authentic materials in reading classes can enrich learners' experience and contribute significantly to the development of reading comprehension skills.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach qualitative and quantitative to explore the role of authentic materials in language learning and their impact on the development of reading skills.

In addition, the reliability of the research instruments was assessed using appropriate statistical measures (e.g., Cronbach's alpha). Qualitative data were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to capture students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with authentic materials. These qualitative findings were thematically analyzed and used to support and interpret the quantitative results, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of authentic materials in enhancing reading skills.

The instruments

To achieve the objectives of this study and ensure comprehensive data collection, three main research instruments were employed: a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The use of multiple instruments allowed for data triangulation and enhanced the depth and accuracy of the findings.

The Subjects

The subjects of this study were third-semester English students enrolled at the Faculty of Education at Gulf of Sidra University. These students were selected due to their level of proficiency and relevance to the research focus on reading comprehension. They are 20 students.

The Procedures

A total of 20 students were chosen using purposive sampling. This sample size was considered adequate to draw meaningful conclusions while maintaining manageability for detailed analysis.

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The study utilized a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through reading comprehension tests, while qualitative data were gathered via questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This triangulation of data sources helped provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of authentic materials.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the data collected to investigate the impact of authentic materials on enhancing reading comprehension among third-semester English students at Gulf of Sidra University. The structure of this chapter begins with a description of the sample profile, followed by an analysis of the main variables of the study, and concluding with a discussion of the findings in light of the research questions and previous studies.

The data were collected through reading comprehension tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and mean score comparisons, while qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed thematically to provide deeper insight into students' perceptions and experiences with authentic materials.

Sample Profile (Table)

The sample of this study consisted of 20 third-semester English students from the Faculty of Education at Gulf of Sidra University. These students were selected because they had sufficient exposure to reading instruction and were able to compare traditional textbook materials with authentic texts.

In terms of general background, all participants were English majors and had previously studied English for several years before entering university. The majority of students reported regular exposure to English reading materials inside the classroom, while exposure outside the classroom varied depending on personal interest and access to online resources.

This relatively homogeneous sample helped ensure that differences in reading performance could be more closely associated with the type of materials used rather than major differences in language background.

Table 1: Profile of the Participants

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Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	5	25%
	Female	15	75%
Semester	Third semester	20	100%
Major	English	20	100%

Results of Reading Comprehension Tests

The reading comprehension tests were designed to compare students' performance when using authentic materials and when using traditional textbook-based materials.

The quantitative results showed a clear difference in students' reading comprehension performance. Students achieved higher mean scores when reading authentic texts compared to traditional texts.

Table 2: Comparison of Reading Comprehension Test Scores

Type of Material	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Traditional materials	12.1	2.3
Authentic materials	15.4	1.9

The results indicate that students performed better when authentic materials were used. This suggests that authentic texts support better understanding of main ideas, vocabulary in context, and overall comprehension.

Questionnaire Results: Students' Attitudes Toward Authentic Materials

The questionnaire was used to explore students' attitudes, motivation, and perceptions regarding the use of authentic materials in reading classes.

Table 3: Students' Responses to the Questionnaire (Summary)

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Authentic materials increase my motivation to read	16 (80%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)

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Authentic texts are more interesting than textbooks	15 (75%)	4 (20%)	1 (5%)
Authentic materials help me learn new vocabulary	17 (85%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)
Authentic materials improve my reading confidence	14 (70%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)

Motivation and Engagement

The majority of students agreed that authentic materials increased their motivation to read in English. Many students reported that real-world texts were more interesting and enjoyable than traditional textbook passages.

Vocabulary Development

Most students indicated that authentic materials helped them develop vocabulary more effectively through context and repeated exposure.

Confidence in Reading

The questionnaire results also showed that authentic materials increased students' confidence in reading English.

Interview Results: Qualitative Analysis

The semi-structured interviews provided deeper insight into students' experiences and opinions about using authentic materials.

Students' Perceptions of Authentic Materials

Most students described authentic materials as "useful," "realistic," and "interesting." They appreciated the opportunity to read texts similar to those used by native speakers in real-life situations. Students felt that authentic materials helped them understand how English is actually used, rather than how it is simplified in textbooks.

Challenges Faced by Students

Despite the positive attitudes, some students reported challenges when using authentic materials, especially at the beginning. These challenges included difficult vocabulary, cultural references, and longer sentence structures. However, students emphasized that teacher guidance, pre-reading

activities, and explanation of key vocabulary helped them overcome these difficulties.

Over time, students became more comfortable and confident when dealing with authentic texts.

Preference for Types of Authentic Materials

Students expressed a preference for certain types of authentic materials, such as news articles, blogs, and online texts. These materials were considered more engaging because they discussed current and relatable topics. Videos and multimedia texts were also mentioned as helpful in supporting comprehension through visual context.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the analysis of the reading comprehension tests, questionnaires, and interviews, several important findings emerged:

1. Authentic materials had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. Students achieved higher scores when reading authentic texts compared to traditional textbook materials.
2. The use of authentic materials increased students' motivation and engagement in reading classes. Most students found real-life texts more interesting and relevant to their needs.
3. Authentic materials contributed significantly to vocabulary development. Students reported learning new words through context, which helped them understand and remember vocabulary more effectively.
4. Students' confidence in reading English improved when they were exposed to authentic texts. Many students felt more prepared to read real English materials outside the classroom.
5. Although some students initially faced difficulties such as unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural references, these challenges decreased over time with teacher guidance and repeated exposure.

Overall, the findings confirm that authentic materials play an effective role in enhancing reading comprehension and improving students' attitudes toward reading in English.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

It is recommended that English programs integrate authentic texts, provide teacher training, and support students with scaffolding techniques. Future research could explore long-term effects and the impact on other language skills.

For English Teachers

1. Teachers are encouraged to integrate authentic materials regularly into reading lessons, such as newspaper articles, online texts, blogs, and short stories.
2. Pre-reading activities should be used to introduce key vocabulary and background information to reduce students' difficulty when dealing with authentic texts.
3. Teachers should provide guidance and support while allowing students to practice independent reading.
4. Group discussions and interactive activities should be encouraged to increase students' engagement and confidence.

For Curriculum Designers and University Administration

1. English language syllabi should include authentic materials as a core component of reading courses.
2. Training workshops should be provided for teachers on how to select and use authentic materials effectively.
3. Access to online resources and digital libraries should be improved to support the use of authentic texts.

For Students

1. Students are encouraged to read authentic English materials outside the classroom, such as online articles, social media posts, and news websites.
2. Learners should develop independent reading habits to enhance vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of authentic materials on enhancing reading comprehension among third-semester English students at Gulf of

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Sidra University. The results clearly show that authentic materials improve students' reading performance, motivation, vocabulary development, and confidence.

Authentic materials expose learners to real language use and meaningful contexts, which helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication. Although authentic texts may present challenges at first, appropriate teacher support and scaffolding can help students overcome these difficulties.

In conclusion, the study confirms that the integration of authentic materials into reading instruction is an effective and valuable approach that should be adopted in English language teaching programs.

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