

# The Use of Authentic Materials in the Teaching of Reading

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**Abstract:** Various people associate reading with various things. For some, reading is just learning how to recognize written words; for others, reading is a chance to practice speaking and learn pronunciation. But there's always a reason to read. It is a daily activity and a crucial component of our everyday existence, which are greatly undervalued and typically thought to be within the reach of all. The aim of reading greatly influences the motivation behind reading. The benefits of exposing students to genuine language in a real situation are explored, along with the usage of authentic resources in the classroom.

Using real materials also has the benefit of being very motivating, fostering a sense of accomplishment upon comprehension, and inspiring further reading. They also show how language usage has changed. There is a large range of text kinds available, and they may be updated and utilized repeatedly in addition to being highly adaptable (they can be used in various ways to encourage different talents).

Anything may be utilized as legitimate material, but the Internet is one of the best tools for improving reading skills since it has a wealth of readily available, diverse content.

**Keywords:** realia, motivating, authentic, materials, usage, comprehension, cohesion, reading, skills, real, further, talent, updated, repeatedly, tool, addition, benefit.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the primary justifications for utilizing real materials in the classroom is that the student won't come into contact with fake language after they leave the "safe," regulated language learning setting. Language in the real world and how it is actually utilized, not only in the classroom. The teacher's job is not to trick the language student; rather, it is to provide him with the knowledge and abilities needed to comprehend how the language is truly utilized.

Widdowson stated: "It has been traditionally supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified" when discussing the usage of real resources. In a manner that makes acquisition and access simple. According to guidelines these days, the language used should be genuine (Widdowson 1990:67).

inquiring as to whether their use is "inconsistent" with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) tenets. This essay's goal is to talk about the use of real materials in reading instruction.

"...An enjoyable, intense, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed," is how Alderson describes reading (2000:28). For some, reading is just being able to recognize written words, whereas for others, reading involves For others, it's a chance to practice speaking and teach pronunciation. But there's always a reason to read. We take it for granted and think that everyone can do it because it is something we do on a daily basis and is an essential part of our lives.

The aim of reading greatly influences the motivation behind reading. There are three basic reasons to read: to learn, to survive, or just for enjoyment. Reading for survival is said to be a reaction to our surroundings, a way to get knowledge, and it can involve reading street signs, schedules and

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advertisements. It is highly dependent on the reader's daily demands and frequently calls for an instant reaction to a circumstance. On the other hand, reading for learning is thought to be goal-oriented and done in a classroom setting. On the other hand, reading for enjoyment is not required. According to Nuttall (1996), the main concepts of reading are:

- ✓ *the idea of meaning;*
- ✓ *the transfer of meaning from one mind to another;*
- ✓ *the transfer of a message from writer to reader;*
- ✓ *how we get meaning by reading;*
- ✓ *how the reader, the writer and the text all contribute to the process.*

There are two ways that readers can digest texts: bottom-up and top-down. When a reader constructs meaning word by word, letter for letter, and closely examines lexicon and grammar, this is known as bottom-up processing. This is frequently connected to being sluggish or impoverished. Readers, however it can also occasionally happen when the reader's own schema knowledge is insufficient. On the other hand, top-down processing uses the reader's strong schema knowledge and "clues" found in the text to deduce the overall meaning of the text. This is frequently linked to a proficient reader who reads swiftly and effectively rather than word for word.

Interactive models provide the most thorough explanation of the reading process, "...in which every component in the reading process can interact with any other component." (Alderson 2000:18)", fusing aspects of top-down and bottom-up paradigms. In order for reading to take place, two processes are required: top-down to forecast meaning and bottom-up to verify it. Reading is thought of as an interactive activity (a discussion between writer and reader, even when the writer is not there). As a result, the two approaches to text processing are complimentary.

Schema theory holds that our experiences and knowledge about the world around us also affect how we read and comprehend texts (Bartlett 1932). It functions both constructively and actively, with our understanding of the universe being an ongoing process that after obtaining. It is interpreted in light of new information using existing knowledge. Good readers employ preexisting schemata and then change them with whatever new information they come across because they have a sense of what is typical (both linguistically and cognitively) and how the world functions.

Prior to reading, they also form assumptions or expectations, which are then either confirmed, refuted, or altered.

"Cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in the long term memory" is another way to characterize schemas. Wilson 1983, p. 34. Frequently, a writer will assume that the intended audience possesses the necessary schemata to understand the text and will, as a result, omit or leave out important information (presuppositions); nevertheless, this causes issues when the reader and writer do not have the same pertinent schema.

Genuine Resources & Genuineness: Origins and Options According to one definition, authentic texts are "...real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes." Wallace (1992:145) Because of this, they are intended for native speakers and include "real" vocabulary. These products are created with the intention of serving a social purpose within the linguistic community. As opposed to non-authentic texts that are specifically created for language acquisition (Peacock, 1997). Non-authentic texts focus on content that has to be taught and frequently use artificial and monotonous language that is characterized by a number of "false-text indicators," such as:

- ✓ *perfectly formed sentences (all the time);*
- ✓ *a question using a grammatical structure, gets a full answer;*
- ✓ *repetition of structures;*
- ✓ *very often does not "read" well.*



Because of its artificiality, the language and structures employed are quite different from anything a student will face in the real world and frequently do not accurately represent how the language is really used. They are helpful in teaching structures, however they are not particularly effective in enhancing reading abilities (only because of how strangely they read). They can be helpful in getting the student ready to read "real" literature in the future. If real texts are made for entirely other goals than language instruction, where do they originate from and how are they chosen?

There are countless real resources available for use in the classroom, but newspapers, periodicals, TV shows, movies, music, and literature are the most often utilized ones. The Internet is among the most helpful. Newspapers and other written materials, however, date quite. Rapid Internet updates, increased visual stimulation, and interactive features encourage readers to take an active rather than a passive approach to reading.

## **METHODS**

From a more pragmatic perspective, the Internet is a fact of the current world; the majority of pupils utilize it, and instructors can more easily access a limitless variety of content. From a more pragmatic and financial perspective, attempting to get genuine materials. Traveling overseas may be highly costly; an English-language newspaper or magazine might cost up to four times as much as it typically does, and the quality can occasionally suffer. Having unrestricted access at work often saves money and time while searching for materials. The type of resources that students will need and wish to be able to read whether traveling, studying abroad, or using the language in other situations outside of the classroom should be considered authentic.

Instead of focusing on form, authentic materials allow students to engage with the genuine language and substance. When they see the target language in use outside of the classroom, learners believe they are learning it. Since there are many different sources, it is important to remember that the goal should be to comprehend meaning rather than form, particularly when utilizing literary works where the focus is on the content rather than the style or literary form. When selecting books for use in the classroom, Nuttall outlines three primary criteria: readability, exploitability, and content appropriateness.

Out of the three, content suitability might be seen as the most crucial as it should both pique students' interests and be pertinent to their requirements. The sentences ought to inspire as well. "Evaluability" describes how a text can be utilized to enhance the kids' reading proficiency. A text has little value in the classroom if it cannot be used as a teaching tool.

It does not necessarily make sense to utilize anything just because it is in English. In addition to referring to the quantity of new vocabulary and any new grammatical forms, readability also describes the text's structural and lexical difficulties. Now. It's critical to evaluate pupils at the appropriate level for them.

The selection of authentic materials is also influenced by presentation and variety. Using a diversity of texts may add interest to a reading lesson. When studying a single topic, as might be the case with English, students sometimes find it to be quite monotonous. For Particular Uses (ESP). Using books that cover the same subject matter has the benefit of requiring students to put in very little deliberate effort to master the same vocabulary. Conversely, the learner becomes extremely specialized in that one field and not in others.

When presenting the text to the learner, it's crucial to consider whether or not it seems legitimate. The "authentic" presentation helps place the text in context by utilizing images, diagrams, and photographs. This aids the reader in comprehending not just the text's intended meaning but also its application. A text that is more visually appealing will pique the student's interest and encourage them to read. Although it can seem like a very minor detail, a student's first impression of any piece is its look. A page full of text is not as likely to draw the reader in as an article that looks "attractive." Without taking any of these aspects into account, it is sometimes very simple to just download an article from the Internet and show the student a page full of impersonal type.



When selecting genuine materials for the classroom, it's also important to think about if the book pushes students' intellectual limits without using excessive vocabulary, whether the language is representative of spoken or written language, and is the language in the book naturally occurring, or has it been altered to incorporate instances of a certain lesson plan? It's also critical that the book be examined well; may insightful questions be posed about it, or activities based on it be developed? Above all, does the literature pique the student's interest in reading independently, teach him something he doesn't already know, and present fresh, timely concepts?

## RESULTS

CLT places a strong emphasis on authenticity by exposing students to the same language as native speakers. There are four different kinds of authenticity in the classroom, and using genuine texts is one of them.

1. *Authenticity of the texts which we may use as input data for our students;*
2. *Authenticity of the learners' own interpretations of such texts;*
3. *Authenticity of tasks conducive to language learning;*
4. *Authenticity of the actual social situation of the classroom language. (Breen 1985:61)*

Widdowson distinguishes between "authentic" and "genuine," taking a process-oriented approach to authenticity. Authenticity is a native speaker's reaction (which may also include the one the writer meant while responding), whereas genuine is an example of native speaker language. composing the text.):

Authenticity can therefore be considered to be the interaction between the reader and the text and not just the text in itself. Reading is considered to be an ongoing interaction, going beyond the physical context of the text, looking for meaning as well as processing information. Goodman takes this even further claiming that reading is "...an essential interaction between language and thought..." (1988:12) Where the writer encodes his thoughts as language and the reader decodes the language into thought.

The Use Of Authentic Reading Materials In The Classroom One of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to "expose" the learner to as much real language as possible. Even if the classroom is not a "real-life" situation, authentic materials do have a very important place within it. It has been argued that by taking a text out of its original context, it loses its authenticity:

*"As soon as texts, whatever their original purpose, are brought into classrooms for pedagogic purposes they have, arguably, lost authenticity."* (Wallace 1992:79)

Even if true, the learner is still exposed to real discourse and not the artificial language of course textbooks, which tend not to contain any incidental or improper examples. They also tend to reflect the current teaching trend. Authentic materials also give the reader the opportunity to gain real information and know what is going on in the world around them. More times than not, they have something to say, be it giving information, a review. They also produce a sense of achievement.

Extracting real information from a real text in a new/different language can be extremely motivating, therefore increasing students' motivation for learning by exposing them to 'real' language (Guariento & Morley 2001). They also reflect the changes in language use, (again something that does not occur in textbooks, which become very dated, very quickly) as well as giving the learner the proof that the language is real and not only studied in the classroom:

*"Authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people."* (Nuttall 1996:172)

The wide variety of different types of text means that it is easier to find something that will interest the learner and may even encourage further reading or reading for pleasure. An advantage of taking a complete newspaper or magazine into classroom, rather than photocopies of an article, is that students can actually choose what they want to read. The more the learner reads, the better a reader he will become, not only improving his language level but also confidence. If the text interests the learner it



can also be related to his own experiences. One of the aims of authentic materials is to help the student react in the same way L1 speakers react in their first language (L1).

Learners who live in the target language environment, once outside of the classroom will encounter a variety of situations in which different reading purposes/skills are required. We can claim that learners are being exposed to real language and they feel that they are learning the 'real' language. The main advantages of using authentic materials in the classroom therefore include:

- ✓ *having a positive effect on student motivation;*
- ✓ *giving authentic cultural information;*
- ✓ *exposing students to real language;*
- ✓ *relating more closely to students' needs;*
- ✓ *supporting a more creative approach to teaching.*

## ANALYSES

These are what make us excited and willing to use authentic materials in our classrooms, but while using them, it is inevitable that we face some problems. The negative aspects of authentic materials are that they can be too culturally biased, often a good knowledge of cultural background is required when reading, as well as too many structures being mixed, causing lower levels problems when decoding the texts (Martinez 2002). Students often bring copies of newspaper articles (in particular the tabloids) or song lyrics to the classroom, asking to translate them after having looked up each word in the dictionary and not understood a single word.

Richards (2001) notes that authentic materials often contain difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items and complex language structures, which can often create problems for the teacher too. They can also become very dated, very quickly but unlike textbooks can be updated or replaced much easier and more cost effectively. The biggest problem with authentic materials is that if the wrong type of text is chosen, the vocabulary may not be relevant to the learner's needs and too many structures can create difficulty. This can have the opposite effect, rather than motivate the learner, it can de-motivate and in Krashenite terms "put up the effective filter".

### ***Authentic Reading Materials:***

| <i>Advantages</i>  | <i>Authentic Reading Materials</i> | <i>Disadvantages</i>   |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <p>"Real" language exposure with language change/variation being reflected</p> <p>Students are informed about what is happening in the world</p> <p>Textbooks tend not to include incidental/improper English and become outdated very quickly</p> <p>The same piece of material can be used for different tasks</p> <p>Ideal for teaching/practising mini-skills-skimming/scanning</p> <p>Contain a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials</p> <p>Encourage reading for pleasure, likely to contain topics of interest</p> |                                    | <p>Often too culturally biased, difficult to understand outside the language community</p> <p>Vocabulary might not be relevant to the student's immediate needs</p> <p>Too many structures are mixed so lower levels have problems decoding the texts</p> <p>Special preparation is necessary, can be time consuming</p> <p>Can become outdated easily, e.g. news stories, articles.</p> |

When bringing authentic materials into the classroom, it should always be done with a purpose, as highlighted by Senior "...we need to have a clear pedagogic goal in mind: what precisely we want our students to learn from these materials." (Senior 2005:71). Students feel more confident, more secure when handling authentic materials as long as the teacher gives them with pedagogical support. Authentic materials should be used in accordance with students' ability, with suitable tasks being given



in which total understanding is not important. In order to overcome the problems created by difficult authentic texts, one solution is to simplify them according to the level of the learner.

This can be done by removing any difficult words or structures but this can also remove basic discourse qualities, making the text “less” authentic. The basic parameters to consider when simplifying a text are:

- ✓ *Linguistic simplicity: grammatical structures, lexical items and readability;*
- ✓ *Cognitive simplicity: age, education, interests of the learner;*
- ✓ *Psychological simplicity: does it follow traditional social norms?*

Another possible solution is to give text related tasks. They are three basic types:

Pre-reading: used not just to test or compensate for linguistic/socio-cultural inadequacies but also used to activate existing schemata;

While-reading: used to encourage the learner to be a flexible, active reader also to promote a dialogue between reader and writer;

Post-reading: often are questions that follow a text, used to test understanding but sometimes a good schemata will be enough.

Rather than just simplifying the text by changing its language, it can be made more approachable by eliciting students' existing knowledge in pre-reading discussion, reviewing new vocabulary before reading, and then asking students to perform tasks that are within their competence, such as skimming to get the main idea or scanning for specific information, before they begin intensive reading. The reading approach must be authentic too. Students should read the text in a way that matches the reading purpose, the type of text, and the way people normally read.

This means that reading aloud will take place only in situations where it would take place outside the classroom. Reading is an activity with a purpose. The purpose for reading guides the reader's selection of texts. The purpose for reading also determines the appropriate approach to reading comprehension.

## DISCUSSION

My own experience of using authentic materials in the classroom with advanced learners was when given the task of designing an intensive reading course for university engineering students. The course was to last 6 weeks for a total of 36 hours teaching time, twice a week for 3 hours per lesson, with the only criteria being that they had to be able to read and understand English texts by the end of the course. Most of the students were either advanced or upperintermediate level.

The initial approach was to use ESP textbooks, one textbook that was tried was Oxford English for Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, but it was soon discovered that the students were not very motivated and the material not very stimulating. Materials downloaded from the Internet were then adapted, with tasks being designed to use the different reading skills. The skills concentrated upon were Extensive & Intensive reading and skimming & scanning. Extensive reading was good for larger texts that contained a lot of information, while intensive reading was used to obtain an exact understanding of the text.

Skimming & scanning were used in the pre-reading activities, either for getting a general idea of the text or the main points (so as to activate the students' schemata) or finding a specific piece of information. Authentic reading texts that were not simplified were then used and the approach later adopted was very similar to The Minimal Teaching Strategy (Allwright 1976) (this was a pure coincidence and discovered only after the courses had finished), with the use of task based activities, pair & group work (peer learning) and peer correction.

The role of the teacher in the classroom was a very low profile one, with most of the work being done outside of the classroom. Most of the preparation involved looking for suitable material and designing tasks. Once in the classroom after having set up the activity, very little to had to done which included



monitoring, giving advice and any eventual feedback. The students were highly motivated and preferred working with the authentic material, finding it more interesting, more up to date than the textbooks as well as generally more stimulating.

Whereas language control is necessary at lower levels, being advanced learners, their problem was neither lack of vocabulary nor control of the language but the fact that they could not use the same different types of reading skills when reading authentic texts as when reading in their L1. They all wanted to use a bottom-up approach and read intensively, word for word and very often translating. The aim of the course as well as the use of authentic materials was to make the students aware of the reading skills that they use in their L1 as well as how to use these skills when reading in a foreign language.

## CONCLUSION:

The use of authentic materials in the classroom has been discussed, with the student benefiting from the exposure to real language being used in a real context. Other aspects which proved positive when using authentic materials were that they are highly motivating, giving a sense of achievement when understood and encourage further reading. They also reflect the changes in the use of language, there is a wide variety of text types, they are also very versatile (they can be used in different ways to promote different skills) and can be used more than once as well as be updated.

Anything can be used as authentic material but for developing reading one of the most useful resources is the Internet, with large amounts of varied material being easily accessible.

One of the main reason for using authentic materials in the classroom is once outside the “safe”, controlled language learning environment, the learner will not encounter the artificial language of the classroom but the real world and language how it is really used. The role of the teacher is not to delude the language learner but to prepare him, giving the awareness and necessary skills so as to understand how the language is actually used. Having made a distinction between authentic and non-authentic material and evaluated the use of them in the classroom, it is worth taking into consideration Davies who wrote:

*“It is not that a text is understood because it is authentic but that it is authentic because it is understood. ...Everything the learner understands is authentic for him.” (Davies 1984:192)*

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