

USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO DEVELOP READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED ESL LEARNERS

Abstract. *Authentic materials play an important role in modern English language teaching because they expose learners to real-life language use and meaningful communication. This article discusses the effectiveness of authentic materials in developing reading comprehension skills among intermediate and advanced ESL learners. Authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, online articles, advertisements, blogs, and academic texts help students improve vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Unlike simplified textbook passages, authentic texts provide natural language patterns and realistic contexts that prepare learners for academic and everyday communication.*

Keywords: *authentic materials, reading comprehension, ESL learners, language teaching, reading strategies*

Introduction. Reading comprehension is one of the most essential skills in English language learning because it helps learners gain information, develop vocabulary, and improve academic performance. Many ESL learners face difficulties in understanding complex texts, identifying main ideas, and interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary. Traditional textbooks often contain simplified passages that may not fully prepare students for real-world communication. As a result, many educators emphasize the importance of using authentic materials in English language teaching.

Authentic materials refer to texts that are originally created for native speakers rather than for language learners. These materials include newspapers, websites, restaurant menus, magazine articles, social media posts, academic journals, and other real-life resources. Such materials expose students to natural language use, realistic vocabulary, and cultural information. According to Nuttall (1996), authentic texts can motivate learners because they show how language is used in real communication situations. Intermediate and advanced learners especially benefit from authentic materials because they already possess basic language knowledge and are ready to interact with more challenging texts. Authentic reading tasks encourage students to use different reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, predicting, and inferring meaning from context.

The Importance of Authentic Materials in ESL Reading Classes

Authentic materials are considered highly valuable in language teaching because they connect classroom learning with real-life communication. Students often become more motivated when they read texts related to current events, entertainment, science, technology, or social issues. Real-world materials create a meaningful learning environment where learners understand the practical purpose of reading English. One major advantage of authentic materials is vocabulary development. Students encounter words and expressions that are commonly used in everyday communication. Unlike textbook vocabulary lists, authentic texts provide contextualized language, which helps learners understand meaning more effectively. For example, reading online news articles exposes students to academic vocabulary, transition phrases, and topic-specific terminology. Another important benefit is the development of reading fluency. Authentic texts encourage learners to process information naturally rather than focusing only on grammar exercises. Through repeated exposure to real language, students improve reading speed and comprehension skills. Intermediate and advanced learners gradually become more comfortable with complex sentence structures and unfamiliar expressions.

Authentic materials also improve learners' cultural awareness. Reading texts from different countries and communities helps students understand cultural perspectives, traditions, and

communication styles. This is especially important in modern English language teaching because language and culture are closely connected.

Types of Authentic Materials Used for Reading Instruction

Teachers can use various types of authentic materials depending on learners' needs and proficiency levels. Newspapers and magazine articles are commonly used because they contain current information and diverse topics. News articles help students practice identifying main ideas, supporting details, and opinions. Online resources are another effective option. Blogs, educational websites, and social media posts expose learners to informal and formal writing styles. Academic articles can also be introduced to advanced learners who need English for university studies or professional purposes. Visual authentic materials such as advertisements, posters, menus, and brochures are particularly useful for intermediate learners. These materials combine images and text, making comprehension easier and more engaging. Teachers may also use movie subtitles, interviews, and podcasts together with reading tasks to create integrated-skill

Despite their benefits, authentic materials may create certain difficulties for learners and teachers. One common challenge is language complexity. Authentic texts often contain idioms, slang, difficult vocabulary, and complicated grammatical structures that may overwhelm students. Learners can become frustrated if the material is too difficult for their proficiency level. Another challenge is text selection. Teachers need to carefully choose materials that are suitable for learners' interests, language abilities, and academic goals. Materials that are too long or culturally unfamiliar may reduce student motivation. Time management can also be problematic. Preparing authentic materials requires additional effort because teachers may need to adapt texts, create comprehension questions, and design classroom activities. Furthermore, some authentic resources contain unnecessary information that may distract learners from lesson objectives.

In reading lessons, authentic materials should be used with clear classroom procedures. For intermediate ESL learners, the teacher can choose short texts such as news reports, advertisements, travel brochures, emails, or website articles. For example, if the lesson topic is "healthy lifestyle," students may read a short online article about sleep habits or fast food. Before reading, the teacher can write five or six key words on the board and ask students to predict the content of the text. This activity prepares learners for reading and helps them connect the topic with their background knowledge. During the reading stage, students should not be asked to translate the whole text. Instead, they can complete focused tasks. First, they may skim the text and choose the best title. Then, they can scan the text to find specific information such as names, numbers, dates, reasons, or examples. After that, they can answer comprehension questions that move from simple to more analytical. For instance, the first questions may ask about factual information, while later questions may require students to explain the writer's purpose or identify the main argument.

Authentic materials can also be used in group work. The teacher may divide one text into several sections and give each group a different part. Each group reads its section, summarizes the main idea, and explains it to the class. This jigsaw reading activity reduces the difficulty of long texts and encourages cooperation. It also gives students a reason to communicate in English after reading. Another useful classroom technique is vocabulary-in-context work. Instead of giving a separate vocabulary list, the teacher can ask students to find unfamiliar words in the text and guess their meanings from context. Students can look at surrounding words, examples, contrast markers, or pictures to understand meaning. For example, if the text says "However, many students find online learning challenging," learners can understand that "challenging" means difficult because of the contrast and context.

Finally, post-reading activities should help students use the information from the text. They can write a short summary, prepare two discussion questions, compare the text with their own experience, or give a short oral response. These activities make reading more meaningful because students do not only read for answers; they also use the text as a source for communication, reflection, and critical thinking.

Strategies for Effective Classroom Implementation

Teachers can apply several strategies to successfully use authentic materials in reading classes. First, it is important to select texts that match learners' proficiency levels and interests. Topics related to students' daily lives, future careers, or hobbies usually increase motivation and participation. Second, teachers should provide pre-reading activities to activate background knowledge and introduce key vocabulary. Brainstorming, prediction tasks, and discussion questions help learners prepare for the text and reduce anxiety. During reading activities, teachers can encourage students to use reading strategies such as skimming for general understanding and scanning for specific information. Pair work and group discussions also help learners share ideas and clarify misunderstandings. Post-reading activities are equally important because they develop critical thinking and communication skills. Students can summarize texts, express opinions, compare ideas, or relate the reading topic to personal experiences. Such activities promote deeper comprehension and meaningful language use. Scaffolding is another essential strategy. Teachers may simplify instructions, highlight key information, or divide long texts into smaller sections. Gradually, learners become more independent and confident when working with authentic materials.

Authentic materials are especially useful because they help learners develop important reading strategies. In many ESL classrooms, students often try to understand every single word in a text. However, this habit can slow down reading and make comprehension more difficult. Authentic materials encourage learners to focus on the general meaning first and then pay attention to specific details. For example, when students read a newspaper article, they can first look at the headline, pictures, and first paragraph to predict the topic. After that, they can scan the text to find names, dates, numbers, or important facts. This process helps students become more strategic readers. They learn that successful reading does not always mean translating every word. Instead, it means understanding the main message, recognizing supporting details, and making logical guesses from context. These skills are very important for intermediate and advanced learners because they often need to read longer texts for academic or professional purposes. Authentic materials also help students practice inference skills. Many real-life texts do not explain everything directly. Readers need to understand implied meaning, writer's attitude, and the purpose of the text. For example, in an opinion article, students may need to identify whether the writer supports or disagrees with an idea. This kind of reading develops critical thinking as well as language comprehension.

Another important reason for using authentic materials is their positive effect on learner motivation. Textbook passages may sometimes feel artificial or disconnected from students' real lives. In contrast, authentic texts usually contain current, practical, and interesting information. When learners read about modern technology, education, travel, health, films, or social media, they are more likely to participate actively in the lesson. Motivation is closely connected to successful reading comprehension. If students are interested in a topic, they usually spend more time trying to understand the text. They ask questions, share opinions, and connect the topic with their personal experiences. For example, an article about the influence of social media can lead to meaningful classroom discussion because most students already have background knowledge about this topic. For intermediate learners, authentic materials can make reading less boring and more purposeful. For advanced learners, they provide intellectual challenge and prepare them for real academic reading. Therefore, authentic texts can support both language development and learner engagement.

Conclusion

Authentic materials are highly effective tools for improving reading comprehension skills among intermediate and advanced ESL learners. They expose students to natural language, realistic vocabulary, and meaningful communication contexts. Authentic texts also increase learner motivation, improve reading fluency, expand vocabulary knowledge, and develop cultural awareness. Although authentic materials may present challenges such as language difficulty and preparation time, these problems can be reduced through careful text selection and appropriate classroom support. Teachers should adapt materials according to learners' needs and provide clear

reading strategies to help students succeed. Overall, the integration of authentic materials into ESL reading instruction creates a more engaging and practical learning experience. As English continues to function as a global language, learners need opportunities to interact with real-world texts that prepare them for academic, professional, and everyday communication.

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