

THE BENEFITS OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN READING CLASSES: A NARRATIVE THEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Oktafiani Darajatul Aliyah¹, Nanik Retnowati²

English Education Department,
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Ibn Khaldun, Bogor

Oktaffianida@gmail.com, nanik.retnowati@uika-bogor.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Membaca adalah proses interaktif yang melibatkan pembentukan makna, penalaran, dan interpretasi dalam konteks komunikatif dan sosial; namun, banyak pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) masih mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami teks akibat kosakata yang terbatas, keterampilan inferensi yang lemah, dan penggunaan bahan pembelajaran yang terputus dari pengalaman nyata. Sebagai tanggapan terhadap masalah ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap penggunaan bahan otentik dalam kelas membaca dan menganalisis relevansi yang dirasakan, dampak motivasi, serta kontribusinya terhadap pengembangan kosakata. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini dilakukan pada siswa kelas XI di sebuah sekolah menengah atas negeri di Bogor yang memiliki pengalaman belajar melalui berbagai bahan otentik, termasuk puisi, spanduk, poster, buku cerita, gambar, dan video. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, kemudian dianalisis secara tematis melalui pengkodean dan identifikasi pola. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa memandang materi otentik sebagai sangat relevan dengan konteks dunia nyata, lebih menarik daripada buku teks, dan efektif dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan partisipasi aktif. Selain itu, materi otentik ditemukan mendukung pengembangan kosakata dengan mengekspos pembelajar pada bahasa yang sering digunakan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, sehingga memudahkan pemahaman dan retensi. Temuan ini menyarankan bahwa integrasi materi otentik yang beragam dalam kelas membaca tidak hanya meningkatkan pemahaman linguistik dan budaya siswa tetapi juga menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih bermakna dan memotivasi, menyoroti implikasi pedagogis penting untuk kelas membaca bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL).

Kata kunci: materi otentik, kelas membaca, persepsi siswa, motivasi, pengembangan kosakata.

ABSTRACT

Reading is an interactive process that involves meaning-making, reasoning, and interpretation within communicative and social contexts; however, many EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in comprehending texts due to limited vocabulary, weak inferential skills, and the use of learning materials that are disconnected from real-life experiences. In response to this issue, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of authentic materials in reading classes and to examine their perceived relevance, motivational impact, and contribution to vocabulary development. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted with eleventh-grade students at a public senior high school in Bogor who had experience learning through various authentic materials, including poems, banners, posters, storybooks, pictures, and videos. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically through coding and pattern identification. The findings reveal that students perceive authentic materials as highly relevant to real-world contexts, more engaging than textbooks, and effective in enhancing motivation and active participation. Additionally, authentic materials were found to support vocabulary development by exposing learners to frequently used language encountered in daily life, thereby facilitating comprehension and retention. These findings suggest that the integration of diverse authentic materials in reading classes not only enhances students' linguistic and cultural understanding but also creates a more meaningful and motivating learning environment, highlighting important pedagogical implications for EFL reading classrooms.

Keywords: authentic materials, reading classes, students' perceptions, motivation, vocabulary development.

INTRODUCTION

According to Qanwal & Karim (2014), reading is not merely identifying letters or words, but rather an interactive effort to absorb and interpret messages conveyed in written form. Therefore, it demands some processes, including grasping significance, logical reasoning, and analytical thought, enabling individuals to derive meaning from texts within communicative settings. This view aligns with Putayeva (2025), who highlights that reading entails not just absorbing data but also assessing, interpreting, and comprehending concepts and viewpoints that foster social engagement and dialogue. Moreover, it aids learners in expanding their lexicon and grammatical proficiency while honing critical thinking, drawing conclusions, and appreciating cultural nuances in written materials, thereby bolstering overall linguistic proficiency (Aisyah et al., 2024). Therefore, the materials used in reading classes must be carefully considered to support the reading learning classes effectively.

In reading classes, many learners still have difficulty understanding written texts, especially when the material used is not connected to their real-life experiences. These difficulties are not only caused by students' limited linguistic abilities, but also by pedagogical practices that are not in line with the nature of reading as an interactive process that requires meaning-making, reasoning, and interpretation in a communicative and social context (Putayeva, 2025; Qanwal & Karim, 2014). Assiddiq (2019) explains that EFL learners often face obstacles in reading due to limited vocabulary, weak inferential skills, and the use of ineffective reading strategies, which ultimately hinder their ability to construct meaning from texts. In addition, the use of non-authentic materials, which is still widely practiced by teachers, is often irrelevant to students' daily lives, making it difficult to understand and unable to establish a connection between the text and the learners' personal experiences (Assiddiq, 2019; Pratiwi et al., 2024).

In response to these issues, the use of authentic materials in reading classes is seen as a potential pedagogical solution to bridge the gap between authentic and students' real-life experiences. Authentic materials present language used in everyday contexts, aligning with the essence of reading as an interactive process

involving meaning-making, reasoning, and interpretation in communicative and social contexts (Putayeva, 2025; Qanwal & Karim, 2014). A number of studies show that authentic materials help students understand the meaning of texts more deeply because they are exposed to relevant and real language contexts, while also increasing interest and motivation to learn (Baniabdelrahman, 2006; Nafisah & Mulyani, 2024; Wu, 2008). In addition, the use of authentic material sourced from current media, such as online texts and literary works, has been shown to create a more interesting, meaningful, and contextual learning atmosphere, thereby encouraging students' active involvement in the reading process (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020; Berardo, 2006; Ilahi et al., 2024).

The previous research have focused only on specific types of authentic materials, particularly printed materials. Therefore, this article aims to present a narrative thematic literature review that synthesizes the results of previous studies on the use of authentic materials in reading learning by grouping the literature into several main themes, comparing the similarities and differences in findings between studies, and identifying research gaps that can be used as a basis for further research and the development of reading classes. In this context, this study covers various types of authentic materials, including visual, audio-visual and print materials as described by Gebhard (1996), in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the role of authentic materials in reading classes.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions regarding the use of authentic materials in reading classes. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring how individuals interpret and make meaning of their learning experiences within educational settings (Creswell, 2013). In line with this approach, a case study design was employed to examine the perceptions of a specific group of students in a real classroom context using multiple data sources. The study was conducted with 11th-grade students at a public senior high school in Bogor who had prior experience learning reading through various authentic materials, including poems, banners, posters, storybooks, pictures, and videos. To guide the analysis, the data were

examined based on several key aspects, namely the real-world relevance of authentic materials, students' interest and motivation, vocabulary development, and challenges encountered during their use. The analysis process involved coding and organizing the data, followed by identifying recurring patterns and themes that emerged from students' responses. As this qualitative case study focuses on participants' perspectives, data were primarily collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Authentic Materials Relevant to the Real World

The findings indicate that most students hold positive perceptions of the use of authentic materials such as poems, banner, and story books are closely related to real-world contexts, as these materials are frequently encountered in their daily lives and therefore easier to understand and remember. This finding supports by Aladini & Farahbod (2020), who argue that authentic materials introduce real-world language into the classroom and create a more natural learning environment. Similarly, Nafisah & Mulyani, (2024) emphasize that exposure to authentic and relevant language contexts enables students to comprehend meaning more deeply. The use of poems and story books not only enhances comprehension but also contributes to students' cultural awareness by exposing them to authentic language use and cultural practices of native speakers, including daily routines, bedtime habits, and ways of expressing emotions. This finding aligns with Albiladi (2018), who states that authentic materials can in increasing students' cultural awareness. Therefore, these findings suggest that the diverse use of authentic materials in reading classes effectively supports both linguistic understanding and cultural learning.

Theme 2: The use of authentic materials in increasing interest and motivation

The findings of this study indicate that students are more interested in using authentic materials than textbooks because these materials are relevant to their daily lives, more engaging, easier to understand, and less boring. The relevance of authentic materials encourages students to be more actively involved in classroom thinking, as they

can easily relate the reading materials to their own experiences. This finding is supported with Baniabdelrahman (2006) who reported that students showed greater interest when learning through authentic materials compared to non-authentic ones. Moreover, this study extends previous research by employing a wider range of authentic materials, such as funny videos, poems, and banners, whereas earlier studies tended to focus on more limited types of authentic materials. Although students encountered certain difficulties when engaging with these materials, the challenges served as a motivating factor that encouraged them to improve their vocabulary and reading skills. This result aligns with Baniabdelrahman (2006) and Wu (2008) who found that authentic materials enhance students' motivation, engagement, and interest, which in turn supports the development of reading skills and vocabulary mastery. In conclusion, the synthesis of these findings suggests that the use of diverse authentic materials creates a more engaging learning environment and in promoting students' motivation, active participation, and language development in reading classes.

Theme 3: The benefits of using authentic materials in vocabulary development

The findings of this study show that students perceive the use of authentic materials as beneficial for vocabulary development, as materials such as banners, posters, and pictures expose them to vocabulary commonly used in real-life situations. This exposure makes vocabulary easier to understand and remember, as students frequently encounter these words in their daily activities (Jaelani, A., & Umam, A., 2021). This finding is consistent with Berardo (2006), who argues that authentic materials provide genuine linguistic exposure, including a variety of vocabulary and grammatical patterns typically found beyond the classroom. A similar view is expressed by Nurlia (2023), who emphasizes that presenting language in real-life contexts through authentic materials effectively supports students' vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, in line with Fitriana et al. (2019), the results indicate that the use of authentic materials in reading classes enhances the effectiveness of the reading process, as students find the texts easier to comprehend and are better able to retain new vocabulary. Additionally, Student et al. (2022) found that the use of digital learning media that

presents language in real-life contexts (authentic materials) positively influences students' vocabulary acquisition. The study reports that students perceive vocabulary presented in contextualized and authentic situations as easier to memorize and recall, as it is closely related to their daily experiences. Therefore, the use of diverse authentic materials not only strengthens students' vocabulary development but also contributes positively to the improvement of their reading skills by connecting learning activities to real-world contexts.

CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that authentic materials support reading instruction by helping learners connect classroom texts with their real-life experiences. The synthesis of the findings demonstrates that authentic materials contribute to reading learning through three interrelated aspects: real-world relevance, increased interest and motivation, and vocabulary development. Across these dimensions, authentic materials enable learners to comprehend texts more effectively, engage more actively in reading activities, and retain vocabulary through repeated exposure to language used in everyday contexts, while also enhancing cultural awareness. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the benefits of authentic materials are not automatic, as students may encounter challenges when engaging with unfamiliar content, suggesting that instructional guidance remains essential. These results imply that the pedagogical effectiveness of authentic materials depends on how they are selected, diversified, and integrated into reading instruction. Therefore, authentic materials should be strategically employed as pedagogical resources that support learners' motivation, linguistic development, and comprehension processes, rather than being used in isolation, thereby reinforcing their role in creating meaningful and contextualized EFL reading classrooms.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this literature review, the use of a variety of authentic materials relevant to the real world context has been proven to improve students' reading comprehension, cultural awareness, interest, motivation, and vocabulary development. Therefore, EFL teachers are advised to integrate various types of authentic

materials such as poems, stories, banners, posters, and videos into reading lessons, adapting them to students' daily experiences to make learning more meaningful and interesting. Furthermore, at the institutional level, schools are expected to support this implementation by providing access to a variety of authentic materials and providing training for teachers on strategies for selecting and utilizing authentic materials effectively in reading classes. At the academic level, further research is recommended to explore the use of authentic materials in different educational contexts and levels, as well as to further investigate their long-term impact on other language skills, thereby enriching empirical and theoretical studies on the role of authentic materials in EFL learning.

REFERENCES

- Aisyah, S., Usman, H., & Utami, N. C. M. (2024). Improving Reading Comprehension Skills Through a Whole Language Approach in Fifth Grade Elementary School Students. *Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, 7(1), 153–161. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jlls.v7i1.73673>
- Aladini, F., & Farahbod, F. (2020). Using a unique and long forgotten authentic material in the efl/esl classroom: Poetry. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1001.12>
- Albiladi, W. S. (2018). Exploring the Use of Written Authentic Materials in ESL Reading Classes: Benefits and Challenges. *English Language Teaching*, 12(1), 67. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n1p67>
- Assiddiq, M. A. (2019). Authentic Materials in Reading Comprehension Classroom: Its Effectiveness to Indonesian EFL Students' Achievement. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Studies*, 1(7), 707–712. <https://doi.org/10.29103/ijevs.v1i7.1676>
- Baniabdelrahman, A. A. (2006). The Effect of Using Authentic English Language Materials on EFL Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Sciences*, 07(01), 07–22. <https://doi.org/10.12785/jeps/070111>
- Berardo, S. A. (2006). The Use of Authentic Materials in the Teaching of Reading. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online*

- Journal*, 6(2), 60–69. http://search.proquest.com/docview/85666685?accountid=14548%5Cnhttp://metadata.lib.hku.hk/hku?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&genre=article&sid=ProQ:ProQ:llba&title=The+Use+of+Authentic+Materials+in+the+Teaching+of+Reading&ti
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. (2013). *Steps in Conducting a Scholarly Mixed Methods Study Abstract for DBER Group Discussion on 2013 - 11 - 14*.
- Fitriana, P., Hadijah, D., & Lestari, Z. W. (2019). Sudents' Perception toward The Use of Authentic Material in Teaching Reading. *ELTIN JOURNAL, Journal of English Language Teaching in Indonesia*, 7(1), 8–11.
- Gebhard, J. G. (1996). *Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: A Teacher Self-Development*. University of Michigan Press.
- Ilahi, L. K., Agustinasari S, M., Taufik, M., & Wicaksana, R. A. (2024). Teachers and Students' Perception Toward English Authentic Reading Materials Used in Junior High School. *JOALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature)*, 9(2), 393–416. <https://doi.org/10.33369/joall.v9i2.32418>
- Jaelani, A., & Umam, A. (2021). Preparing EFL pre-service teachers for curriculum 2013 through authentic materials and assessment integration. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 6(1), 171–177. <https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v6i1.829>
- Nafisah, N., & Mulyani, A. N. (2024). THE EFFECT OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION ACHIEVEMENT. *The Journal of English Literacy Education*, 11(1).
- Nurlia, V. (2023). Reading Authentic Materials To Enhance Students' Vocabulary Mastery. *Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 6(2).
- Pratiwi, S. G., Nugraha, S. I., & Miftakh, F. (2024). Investigating Teaching Materials in an EFL Reading Classroom. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 7(5), 1191–1206.
- Putayeva, E. (2025). Critical reading as an essential aspect of language acquisition. *EIKI Journal of Effective Teaching Methods*, 3(2), 158–172. <https://doi.org/10.59652/jetm.v3i2.520>
- Qanwal, S., & Karim, S. (2014). Identifying correlation between reading strategies instruction and 12 text comprehension. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(5), 1019–1032. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.5.5.1019-1032>
- Student, B. E., Retnowati, N., Sahril, M., Program, E. E., Ibn, U., & Bogor, K. (2022). *STUDENTS ' PERCEPTION OF USING DUOLING APPLICATION AS A MEDIA TO IMPROVE THEIR VOCABULARY*. 1–5.
- Wu, W. V. W. and P. N. (2008). Creating an Authentic EFL Learning Environment to Enhance Student Motivation to Study English. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(4).