

Exploring the Role of Authentic Materials in Reading Instruction: Students' Perceptions, Preferences, and Comprehension Outcomes

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Abstract

The integration of authentic materials in reading lessons has gained significant attention in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, as these materials provide real-world language exposure that enhances comprehension and motivation. Despite their advantages, many students face challenges in understanding authentic texts due to unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and lack of proper reading strategies. This study aims to explore high school students' perceptions and preferences regarding the use of authentic materials in reading lessons, identifying both the benefits and challenges encountered. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving 20 high school students from South Tangerang, using classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews for data collection. The findings reveal that students perceive authentic materials positively, appreciating their relevance and ability to engage learners with real-world content. However, challenges such as difficult vocabulary and complex structures were highlighted. Students preferred illustrated materials like comics, magazines, and short stories, while finding academic articles and newspapers difficult. The study suggests that while authentic materials can enhance engagement and motivation, their effectiveness depends on careful selection aligned with students' proficiency levels. It recommends that educators provide scaffolding, teach reading strategies, and adopt a balanced approach by combining authentic and simplified materials for optimal learning outcomes.

Keywords: Authentic Materials; Students' Perceptions; Student Preferences; Reading Comprehension

INTRODUCTION

The integration of authentic materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has become increasingly relevant, particularly in reading instruction. Authentic materials—such as newspapers, magazines, online articles, novels, and comics—are designed for native speakers rather than learners (Rahimov, 2024). Their use in classrooms is believed to increase engagement, motivation, and real-world language exposure. Unlike traditional textbooks, which focus primarily on grammar and vocabulary in isolation, authentic materials expose students to natural language use, improving their comprehension and cultural awareness. However, many students still struggle with English reading comprehension due to their limited exposure to authentic texts, making it difficult to apply their language skills in practical settings (Mukhalladun et al., 2020). Reading comprehension remains a challenge for many EFL learners. Studies indicate that students often find reading English texts difficult due to unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of interest, and structural complexity (Ganie et al., 2019). Traditional materials may not align with students' needs, leading to disengagement and reduced motivation. Teachers, therefore, need to explore how authentic materials can be effectively utilized to make reading more engaging and relevant to students' experiences (Mitrulescu & Negoescu, 2024). Several linguistic and pedagogical theories support the use of authentic materials in language learning. Learners acquire language more effectively when exposed to

meaningful and comprehensible input; Authentic materials provide rich linguistic exposure that reflects real-world usage (Cai, 2024). The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach further supports this practice by emphasizing interaction and practical communication over rote memorization of grammatical rules (Nunan, 1989). Research has consistently demonstrated that students are more engaged when exposed to real-world materials that connect language learning to their daily lives (Ouafaa & Koumachi, 2023). The advantages of using authentic materials in reading instruction have been highlighted in numerous studies. Sayi (2024) found that authentic materials provide diverse language input, helping students acquire new expressions, idioms, and sentence structures in a natural way. Albiladi (2018) noted that students who engage with real-world texts demonstrate higher motivation and a better understanding of cultural contexts. Furthermore, authentic materials make reading more interactive and engaging, which increases students' confidence in using English beyond the classroom (Oguz & Bahar, 2008). However, despite these benefits, authentic materials can also pose challenges. Namaziandost et al. (2022) found some issues such as difficult vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and complex sentence structures, which may overwhelm students. Additionally, Xiaojing & Haijun (2023) pointed out that many students lack the necessary reading strategies to navigate authentic texts effectively. Teachers must, therefore, carefully select materials that match students' proficiency levels while ensuring meaningful linguistic exposure. Students' attitudes toward authentic materials have also been widely studied. Halim et al. (2018) found that students generally perceive real-world texts as more interesting and relevant compared to traditional textbooks. Hidayat & Nurazimi (2021) emphasized that students experience a sense of accomplishment when they successfully comprehend authentic texts, which enhances their confidence and motivation. Regarding preferences, Sukmawati (2020) discovered that illustrated comics, magazines, and fiction novels are among the most favored choices for high school students, as they combine text with visuals, making reading less daunting and more enjoyable. While extensive research supports the use of authentic materials, most studies focus on university students or adult learners, leaving a gap in research on high school students, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts. Further studies are needed to compare the effectiveness of different types of authentic materials in improving reading comprehension and motivation among high school learners. The integration of authentic materials into reading instruction presents both opportunities and challenges. Understanding students' perceptions and preferences can help educators develop more effective and engaging reading curricula that support meaningful language development and foster lifelong reading habits in English. This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of authentic materials in reading lessons and identify their preferences regarding different types of authentic resources. Additionally, this research examines the benefits and challenges of incorporating authentic materials into reading instruction.

METHOD

Research Design

This qualitative study uses a case study design to explore students' perceptions of authentic materials in reading lessons. The case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon within a specific educational context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method is particularly suited for exploring complex issues in real-life settings, offering rich, context-specific data (Yin, 2016). Participants include 20 high school students in South Tangerang, selected based on their exposure to both traditional and authentic materials. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that students had prior experience with these materials and varied

proficiency levels, aligning with the guidelines for selecting participants in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and used solely for research purposes. Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms for all participants. The participants of this study are 20 high school students in the 11th grade at a private school in South Tangerang. Purposive sampling was used to select students who have prior exposure to both traditional and authentic reading materials. The selection criteria include: (1) students who have experience using authentic materials, (2) accessibility and willingness to participate, and (3) representation of various proficiency levels in English.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection involved three techniques: classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations are a key method in qualitative research, providing insights into student behaviors and interactions with authentic materials (Oguz & Bahar, 2008). Open-ended questionnaires allowed students to express their perceptions and preferences in their own words, offering a comprehensive view of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Semi-structured interviews (consisting of 8 questions-see appendix 1) were conducted to gain deeper insights into students' motivations, challenges, and preferences regarding authentic materials (Roberts, 2020). Three data collection methods were utilized to obtain comprehensive insights: class observations, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2021) guidelines, ensuring a structured process for coding and interpreting the qualitative data. The researcher employed both inductive and deductive coding methods to identify themes and patterns across the data, maintaining rigor in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To ensure validity, a second reviewer was consulted to verify the coding process and ensure inter-rater reliability (Creswell, 2013).

Triangulation

To ensure ethical compliance, data collection and analysis adhered to research ethics guidelines, protecting participants' rights and confidentiality. This reinforced the credibility and reliability of the findings. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study employs methodological triangulation, which involves cross-verifying data from multiple sources, including class observations, questionnaires, and interviews (Creswell, 2013). This approach enhances the credibility of findings by allowing a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions. Data from observations provide contextual insights, while questionnaires capture individual perspectives, and interviews offer deeper explanations. The integration of these data sources strengthens the robustness of the research conclusions. Data collected from observations, questionnaires, and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). The analysis followed these steps: The process begins with familiarization with the data, which involves reading and re-reading responses to identify recurring themes. Once a thorough understanding is established, initial codes are generated by categorizing data into meaningful segments based on emerging patterns. These codes are then grouped into broader themes that encapsulate the key findings. The identified themes undergo

a review process to ensure they accurately represent the data and are refined as needed. Following this, each theme is assigned a concise and descriptive label to enhance clarity. Finally, the findings are presented in a structured report, incorporating supporting quotes from participants to provide depth and context to the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Students' Perceptions of Authentic Materials in Reading Lessons

The integration of authentic materials in reading lessons has been recognized for its potential to improve language learning by providing real-world context and exposure to natural language use. This section examines students' perceptions of these materials in the classroom, focusing on their perceived value, relevance, and challenges. The following subsections will explore the benefits students associate with authentic materials, as well as the difficulties they encounter when engaging with them.

1.1 Perceived Value of Authentic Materials

Most students viewed authentic materials positively, highlighting their relevance, engaging content, and ability to enhance their learning experience. Many students found that authentic materials made reading lessons more interactive and enjoyable compared to traditional textbooks

Table 1. Perceived Value of Authentic Materials

Perceived Value	Number of Students (%)
Highly Valuable	70% (14 out of 20)
Moderately Valuable	20% (4 out of 20)
Not Valuable	10% (2 out of 20)

Table 2. Student feedback and key insights of Authentic Materials:

Student	Feedback	Key Insights
Student 1	<i>"Reading authentic materials is more engaging because it contains real-life content, unlike textbooks which are sometimes monotonous."</i>	Authentic Materials Increase Engagement: Authentic materials, offering real-life content, are more engaging and less monotonous than traditional textbooks.
Student 2	<i>"I learned new vocabulary and expressions that are commonly used by native speakers, which makes reading more meaningful."</i>	Exposure to Real-World Language: Authentic materials expose students to real-world vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, enhancing their language learning experience.
Student 3	<i>"I feel more motivated to read English texts, especially with topics that interest me, like comics and short stories."</i>	Motivation Through Relevant Topics: Students are more motivated to read when the materials are aligned with their personal interests, such as comics or short stories.
Student 4	<i>"Authentic materials make learning fun and easier to understand, especially with"</i>	Visual Aids Support Comprehension: The use of visuals in authentic materials, such as

colorful illustrations and relevant content. comics and magazines, helps students understand and enjoy reading more.

1.2 Challenges in Using Authentic Materials

Table 3. Challenges in Using Authentic Materials

Challenge Type	Number of Students (%)
Difficult Vocabulary	50% (10 out of 20)
Complex Sentence Structures	30% (6 out of 20)
Overwhelming Content Variety	20% (4 out of 20)

Despite their positive perceptions, students also noted some difficulties. The primary challenge reported was unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures.

Table 4. Student feedback and key challenges in using Authentic materials

Student Feedback	Key Challenges
<i>“Sometimes, the words used in authentic materials are too difficult, making it hard for me to understand the whole text.” (Student 13)</i>	Difficult vocabulary makes comprehension harder.
<i>“I struggle with long and complex sentences, especially in news articles.” (Student 18)</i>	News articles contain challenging structures.
<i>“At first, it was difficult, but with time, I started recognizing more words and phrases, which made reading easier.” (Student 7)</i>	Regular exposure improves comprehension over time.

2. Students’ Preferences for Authentic Materials

2.1 The Number of Students Preferring Authentic Materials

Students expressed different preferences for the types of authentic materials they enjoyed reading. The majority favored illustrated materials such as comics, magazines, and short stories.

Table 5. Most Preferred Types of Authentic Materials

Material Type	Preferred by Students (%)
Illustrated Comics	8 students 40%
Magazines	7 students 35%
Short Stories	3 students 15%
Novels	2 students 10%

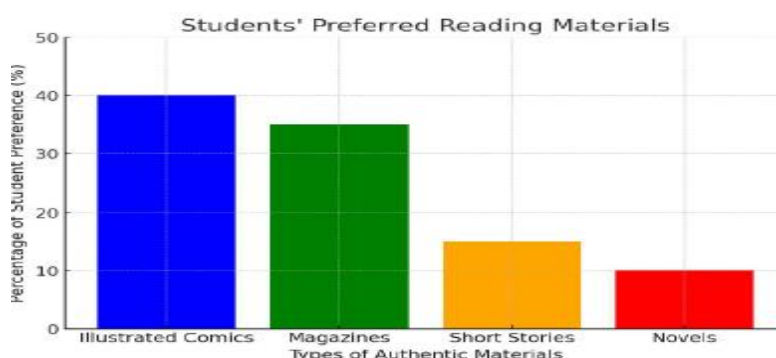


Figure 1. Students’ Preferred Reading Materials

Table 6. Student feedback and key insights of preferring Authentic material

Student	Feedback	Key Insights
Student 4	<i>“Magazines and online articles are my favorite because I can choose topics that interest me, making learning more enjoyable.”</i>	Personalization and Motivation: Authentic materials that align with students’ interests increase their motivation and make learning more enjoyable.
Student 1	<i>“I prefer reading comics and magazines over textbooks because they are more engaging and fun.”</i>	Increased Engagement: A large number of students prefer authentic materials like comics and magazines for their engaging and enjoyable nature, which makes learning less monotonous.
Student 3	<i>“I enjoy reading authentic materials such as news articles and short stories, as they provide new insights and vocabulary.”</i>	Exposure to New Vocabulary: Authentic materials help students acquire new vocabulary and gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives, making the learning experience richer.
Student 5	<i>“Reading authentic materials makes me feel more connected to the language because it’s used in real situations, unlike the textbook.”</i>	Connection to Real-World Use: Authentic materials make students feel more connected to the language as they reflect its real-world use, unlike textbooks which can feel disconnected.

2.2 Least Preferred Types of Authentic Materials

While most students appreciated illustrated materials, some found newspapers and academic articles challenging.

Table 7. Student feedback and least preferred of Authentic material types

Student	Feedback	Least Preferred Materials
Student 12	<i>“I find it difficult to read long news articles because the vocabulary and content are too advanced for me.”</i>	Newspapers and Articles: Some students prefer not to read long news articles due to complex vocabulary and dense content, which can be overwhelming.
Student 15	<i>“I don’t like reading formal reports or technical documents; they are too complicated and not engaging.”</i>	Technical Reports and Academic Articles: Technical materials or academic articles are often avoided by students because they can be overly formal and challenging to engage with.
Student 14	<i>“Newspapers and magazines are too wordy, and I find it hard to focus on all the details.”</i>	Newspapers and Magazines: While some students enjoy magazines, others find them too dense and not as engaging, especially when the articles are lengthy and detailed.
Student 9	<i>“I don’t enjoy reading formal documents like manuals; they just don’t capture my interest.”</i>	Instructional Manuals: Students are less interested in instructional or formal documents as they feel disconnected from the engaging content they prefer.

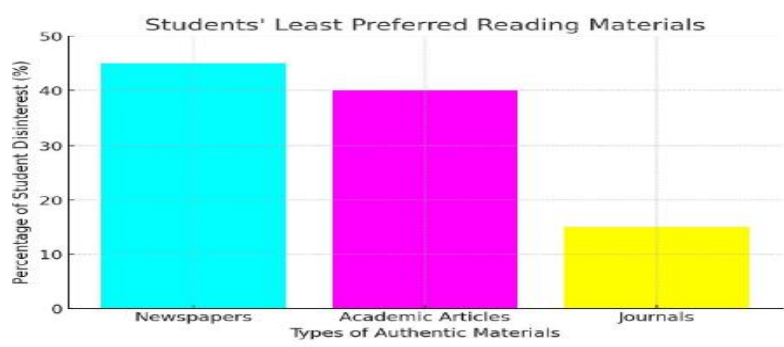


Figure 2. Students' Least Preferred Reading Materials

3. Impact of Authentic Materials on Motivation

3.1 Enhancing Student Motivation through Authentic Materials

Authentic materials contributed significantly to students' motivation in reading. Many students reported that these materials encouraged them to read more frequently.

Student feedback and motivation impact through Authentic materials

Student	Feedback	Motivation Impact
Student 2	<i>"I feel more motivated to read English texts, especially with topics that interest me, like comics and short stories."</i>	Increased Motivation through Relevant Topics: Students are more motivated when reading authentic materials that align with their personal interests, such as comics and stories.
Student 5	<i>"Reading authentic materials like National Geographic made learning so much more exciting, and I started reading more outside of class."</i>	Authentic Materials Spark Interest: Exposure to authentic materials such as National Geographic increases interest and motivates students to engage with reading outside the classroom.
Student 7	<i>"Comics with text and images helped me understand better because the visuals supported the text, and it made reading more enjoyable."</i>	Visual Appeal Boosts Engagement: The combination of visuals and text in authentic materials like comics makes reading enjoyable, which directly boosts student motivation.

3.2 Practical Application in Real-Life Situations

Students also appreciated the practicality of authentic materials, as they allowed them to learn useful language skills applicable in real-life scenarios.

Table 8. Student Feedback and Practical Impact in Real-Life Situations

Student	Feedback	Practical Impact
Student 1	<i>"Reading authentic materials like news articles made me feel like I was learning something useful for my future."</i>	Real-Life Relevance: Authentic materials make students feel more connected to real-world scenarios, preparing them for practical language use outside the classroom.
Student 14	<i>"When I read magazines about space and science, I felt like I could apply the new vocabulary and knowledge in real conversations."</i>	Enhanced Language Application: Authentic materials provide students with vocabulary and knowledge that can be directly applied in everyday situations and conversations.

Student 16	<i>"I feel more confident now when I read English websites or instructions because I know they are similar to what I encounter in real life."</i>	Confidence in Real-World Use: Exposure to authentic materials boosts students' confidence in using English in real-life contexts, such as reading websites or following instructions.
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The key findings of this study reveal that students have a largely positive perception of authentic materials in reading lessons, viewing them as engaging, informative, and highly relevant to real-life situations. These materials sparked greater interest in reading and helped students develop practical language skills. However, students faced significant challenges, particularly with difficult vocabulary and complex sentence structures, which hindered their comprehension. In terms of preferences, illustrated materials such as comics, magazines, and short stories were the most favored, offering a balance of text and visuals that made reading more accessible. Conversely, materials like newspapers and academic articles were less popular due to their formal language and complexity. Despite these challenges, authentic materials were found to be motivating, with students expressing increased enthusiasm for reading when engaging with real-world content. These findings suggest that integrating authentic materials into reading lessons can enhance student engagement and motivation while also presenting challenges that need to be addressed through appropriate scaffolding and support from educators.

Discussion

A majority of students expressed positive perceptions of authentic materials, particularly highlighting their capacity to engage learners, provide real-world relevance, and motivate students to read. These results align with the findings of Mitrulescu & Negoescu (2024) and Ouafaa & Koumachi (2023), who demonstrated that exposure to authentic texts enhances both language comprehension and learner motivation. Additionally, the preference for illustrated materials, such as comics and magazines, suggests that visual aids facilitate comprehension, as evidenced by Sukmawati (2020). However, the study also revealed several challenges, including unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and the use of idiomatic expressions, which are consistent with the difficulties highlighted by Namaziandost et al. (2022). These challenges underscore the need for strategic scaffolding to enhance the efficacy of authentic materials in reading lessons, ensuring that they remain accessible and supportive for all learners. A key observation in this study was the gap between students' preferences and their actual reading abilities. While students favored engaging and visually supported materials, they struggled with more complex texts such as newspapers and academic articles. This finding suggests that authentic materials should be carefully selected based on students' proficiency levels. Xiaojing & Haijun (2023) emphasized that successful implementation of authentic materials requires gradual exposure to increasingly complex texts, allowing learners to develop necessary reading strategies over time. Additionally, Halim et al. (2018) found that a balance between authentic and simplified materials can ease the transition from controlled reading exercises to real-world texts, reducing students' anxiety and frustration. The motivational impact of authentic materials was another crucial aspect of this study. Students reported increased interest in reading when engaging with real-world texts, supporting Albiladi's (2018) argument that authentic materials foster intrinsic motivation. This engagement is particularly important for EFL learners, as motivation is a key factor in sustaining language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). However, motivation alone is not sufficient if students lack the strategies to process authentic texts effectively. Oguz & Bahar (2008) argue that teachers must provide explicit instruction on reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and contextual inference

to help students navigate complex texts. Without proper guidance, exposure to authentic materials may overwhelm students, leading to disengagement rather than improved comprehension. Interestingly, this study also revealed that while students valued authentic materials, they faced difficulties applying their reading skills to real-life situations. While they appreciated the practical relevance of authentic texts, many struggled with confidence in using newly acquired vocabulary and expressions in conversation. This finding is in line with the research of Mayarega et al., (2023) who suggested that exposure alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by interactive activities such as discussions, presentations, and role-playing exercises to bridge the gap between passive reading and active language use. Integrating interactive activities can facilitate the practical application of newly acquired language skills, bridging the gap between reading comprehension and real-world communication.

It was observed in this study that the role of educators in facilitating the use of authentic materials was another significant finding. Although students acknowledged the benefits of authentic texts, the study found that effective implementation was often inconsistent. This study aligns with research conducted by Akbari & Razavi (2015) who noted that while teachers recognize the value of authentic materials, many lack the necessary training to integrate them effectively into their curricula. A structured approach, including professional development workshops and collaborative lesson planning, is essential to ensure that teachers can maximize the benefits of authentic materials while mitigating their challenges. Educators should consider students' proficiency levels when selecting authentic texts and provide targeted support to help learners develop effective reading skills. Despite the strong support for authentic materials in the literature, some studies present opposing views. For example, Park (2017) argued that extensive reading with simplified texts is more effective for lower-proficiency learners, as it reduces cognitive overload and promotes reading fluency. Additionally, Nation & Waring (2019) suggested that extensive reading of graded readers provides a more structured vocabulary acquisition process compared to authentic materials, which may introduce too many unfamiliar words at once. While this perspective is valid, it does not negate the benefits of authentic materials but rather highlights the need for a balanced approach that incorporates both graded and authentic texts based on learners' needs. The findings of this study reinforce the argument that authentic materials play a vital role in enhancing reading engagement and motivation among EFL learners. However, challenges such as difficult vocabulary, complex structures, and limited reading strategies must be addressed through scaffolding and explicit instruction. While some studies advocate for extensive reading with simplified texts, a blended approach incorporating both graded and authentic materials may offer the most effective pathway for improving reading proficiency in EFL contexts. By implementing these changes, educators can bridge the gap between controlled reading and real-world comprehension, ensuring that students develop both the motivation and the skills necessary for effective language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions and preferences of high school students regarding the use of authentic materials in reading lessons, shedding light on both the benefits and challenges these materials present in EFL classrooms. The findings reveal that the majority of students view authentic materials positively, appreciating their relevance and real-world applicability, which enhances their engagement and motivation to read. Particularly, illustrated materials such as comics, magazines, and short stories were favored, as they provided a balance of text and visuals that facilitated comprehension. However, students also reported difficulties with challenging vocabulary and complex sentence structures, which posed barriers to understanding and hindered their full engagement with certain authentic texts, such as newspapers and

academic articles. The motivational impact of authentic materials was evident, as many students felt more motivated to read and use English outside the classroom, recognizing the practical benefits of learning language through real-world content. Nevertheless, the study also found that exposure to authentic materials alone is not sufficient; students require explicit instruction on reading strategies and scaffolding to navigate complex texts successfully. The findings suggest that educators should carefully select authentic materials that align with students' proficiency levels, and provide necessary support to help students develop effective reading strategies. A blended approach, combining both authentic and simplified materials, is recommended to maximize the benefits while mitigating the challenges. Future research should explore further the integration of these materials in diverse educational contexts to improve reading skills and motivation across various learner levels.

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