

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE READING SKILLS THROUGH AUTHENTIC TEXTS

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ABSTRACT: *The present quantitative study was designed to investigate how far exposure to authentic texts is helpful in developing effective reading skills in learners. For comparative purpose, two schools one using authentic texts named Group A, and the other using inauthentic texts named Group B were identified and selected. Each group consisted of forty students. Both the groups were given the authentic texts to read and later, they were instructed to answer the comprehension questions based on the reading texts. Gain mean scores of both the tests were calculated and compared. The result of the study showed that the students already exposed to authentic text were able to comprehend the questions easily and in a better way as compared to those students who were exposed to inauthentic texts. The results were discussed further. Suggestions and recommendations were also made keeping in view the findings of the study.*

Key words: Authentic Text, Inauthentic Text, Extensive Reading

INTRODUCTION:

Reading is important in developing language acquisition and comprehension, determining academic success and enabling readers to extract relevant and required information from the text for task completion purposes. Reading is the ability to understand the written text. When choosing a reading text, it is important to take into consideration that the aim should be to understand the content and not form or stylistics. It involves interpreting meaning from the text by decoding words, understanding vocabulary, and creating connections between these and the reader's prior knowledge and experience. Unlike listening and oral comprehension, which develop fairly naturally, reading comprehension requires explicit teaching. Students need to be motivated and interested in reading to become successful readers. However, if they do not have the necessary skills or interest in the content of the texts they read, students may lose interest in reading. That is where the importance of using authentic texts to teach reading arises.

Authentic texts have to do with the usage of language as it occurs in the real world scenario in order to execute goals that are related to real life tasks. It generally includes texts in which the language has not been specifically altered for the purpose of teaching alone. Authentic texts refer to the use of language in a non-pedagogical way, which occurs naturally in society and depicts the culture of the target language. For example, slang and idioms, which are generally not used in inauthentic material, could appear in authentic material. Material especially designed for the acquisition of language is often supplied with vocabulary lists and explanatory comments. The text is altered formally and linguistically in order to make it simpler. Hence students exposed to such simplified teaching material are unable to grasp the real language as it occurs in the real world scenario. Language comprehension and deriving meaning out of authentic texts therefore becomes a problem for students who have not been exposed to it.

Research Question

How far is exposure to authentic texts helpful in developing effective reading skills in learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Skill: The process of reading is considered to be an interactive activity of learning and developing a language

skill. Alderson [1] defines that "every component in the reading process can interact with any other component". This 'component' may be the stock of experiences and pre-existing knowledge about the world in our mind which is known as the schema theory, explained by Bartlett [1]; it may also be the psychological variables or L1 variables while reading in L2, as identified by Jun in his work.

For academic learning, extensive reading is essential, as opined by Cummins [2]. Extensive reading presents vocabulary in breadth and depth and allows students an access to an advanced vocabulary that students will likely encounter in academic texts. In addition to vocabulary gain, extensive reading has consistently been proven to increase other competences. Wang [2] discovered the significant impact extensive reading training has on the communicative competence of college students. Studies by Hsu and Lee and Smith with college students in Taiwan also found positive effects of reading on writing. Huebner concludes that students who were involved in enhanced reading programs outperformed students not only in reading related skills but also in other academic achievements. Following their extensive program, Greenberg, Rodrigo, Berry, Brinck, and Joseph [2] unveiled their findings that the more learners read, the more confident they become.

McNeil's study with South Korean students manifested extensive reading enhancement not only in overall language competences but also in their motivation for continuous reading. Extensive reading clearly aids first- and second-language acquisition and fosters positive attitudes toward language learning. Earlier as well as recent literature on reading literacy emphasizes the importance of reading extensively. While textbooks and instructions are valuable and necessary in developing specific skills, it is essential for language learners to be exposed to as much of the target language as possible. If students have experience with only textbooks materials, they will have difficulty in comprehending the texts that address real contexts, as Nunan [3] stated in his book based on his empirical practices.

The Internet reading assigned for an English class in this study was intended to encourage students to read more substantially and extensively. The incorporation of the Internet materials was allowed because of easy access and adaptability, and the wide topicality available on the World Wide Web, as proposed by Teeler and Gray [3]. Students

were encouraged to read individually at home and discuss it in class with the teacher's assistance and facilitation. Drawing from the literature review and personal experience with extensive reading as instructional or learning practices, the researchers have observed numerous benefits from repeated exposure to print.

Authentic texts:

Authentic texts have been defined from several perspectives and purposes, such as cultural, communicative, pedagogical and academic. Jordon [3] explains about authentic texts as texts that are not composed for the purpose of teaching. Wallace[3]also identify authentic texts as "the real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes";yet many analysts claim that for EFL learners authentic texts are more appropriate and beneficial for making the students learn the language more genuinely in contrast to non-authentic texts that are specially designed for language learning purposes, (Peacock) [3].

Kilickaya [3], however, in his work summarized that the most common factor that can be derived from various definitions of authentic text is that authentic text give "exposure to real language and its use in its own community". Kilickaya [3] further cites, Philips and Shettlesworth 1978; Clarke 1989; Peacock 1997, as cited in Richards, 2001 to convey the following advantages of exposing the EFL learners to authentic texts:

According to these analysts authentic texts:

- Motivate the learner and have a positive effect on the learner because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people (Nuttall) [3].
- The learner acquires the real cultural information through the authentic text.
- The learner gets a chance to experience and practice the real language.
- The authentic texts provide a more creative approach for teaching and learning of the language.

There are also certain cons related to teaching through authentic texts. 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)[3]. Richards [3] 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 demotivate and in Krashenite terms "put up the effective filter". 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) [3]. One of the main goals for many learners of English as a second or foreign language is to be

able to read what is commonly referred to as *authentic texts*. By authentic texts refer to texts of all genres that are written with a native speaker, audience in mind—novels, academic papers, blogs, websites, textbooks, newspapers, assisted reading of such authentic texts requires a very large vocabulary, approximately 6,000-8,000 word families (Nation) [4]. Thus the benefits of using the authentic texts are brought forward when used appropriately in the language class by a competent teacher.

Teaching Authentic Texts in an EFL classroom:

Lee [3] claims that language learners are linguistically incapable of understanding literary texts until they reach the advanced level proficiency. As a response to Lee, Frantzen [3] suggested that studies in SLA underscore the importance of incorporating reading skills development in the beginning and intermediate level foreign language classroom. However, Bernhardt and Kramsch & Kramsch [3] argue that SLA researchers are not the only ones to blame. Their concern is that authentic literary texts are not introduced to students unless they are in a postsecondary literature classroom. Earlier studies indicate that students in postsecondary literature classrooms hardly have advanced level language proficiency, Bernhardt [3]. Investigating reading abilities of second language learners (Bernhardt) [3] provided evidence that grammar skills and linguistic ability accounts only for 30% of second language reading performance. These findings contradict with earlier claims that studying authentic literary texts requires advanced level language proficiency.

Inauthentic Texts:

Usually the inauthentic material does not have the characteristics of real-life language. It typically consists of the linguistic items that aim to teach or advance learners' knowledge about the language. An example of a inauthentic text is passages from textbooks that were created by the authors to illustrate or practice new linguistic items.

Konstantinos, D. and Jeppe, J. L. [1] carried out a research in the upper secondary schools of Sweden in order to evaluate the attitudes of teachers and students towards authentic texts. The results show that both students and teachers preferred to read authentic texts as these texts provided them with interesting topics. The teachers also preferred authentic texts in order to create an active classroom and expose students to the real world language but at the same time they pointed out that to substitute inauthentic texts completely was unrealistic. Therefore, a combination of the two types of texts should be preferred while teaching.

Hillman Pinheiro (n.d) [4] believes that the textbook is useful both to students and teachers and also that school material offers structure and guidance to students on how to read and learn. She further is of the opinion that through inauthentic material given in the textbook the teacher saves some time when preparing the lessons. Since teachers nowadays have so many things to do and so little time to spare; the readymade tasks in the textbook are often useful.

Linguists are therefore of the opinion that authentic texts should be introduced in the classroom as additional material along with the textbook and inauthentic material. There are multiple reasons as to why inauthentic materials may not be completely rejected. Reason being that the teaching of authentic texts is not simple business as the grading key

needs to be made with thorough contemplation keeping in view the culture of the students and that which is presented in the text. Simply finding an age appropriate authentic text does not solve the problem as with certain texts there may be copyright problems. Authentic texts are usually too high level and are generally not so advisable for beginner students. Authentic texts present language and cultural references that even native speakers from other countries, areas or age groups would not understand. This problem may be further aggravated by the fact that authentic texts include language that isn't in a dictionary. Keeping these aspects in mind the use of inauthentic texts cannot be completely banished from the classroom. Also in introducing various grammatical aspects of language the role of inauthentic texts have a part to play.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Question

How far is exposure to authentic texts helpful in developing effective reading skills in learners?

Research Methodology

The quantitative method was employed so that the data collected could be validated through various methods, the performance of the students was quantitatively measured through numerical scores.

Sampling

Purposive sampling has been employed in this research study, selecting 40 mixed ability students of grade seven who were exposed to authentic texts called group A and 40 mixed

ability students of grade seven were selected who were not exposed to authentic texts called group B. The schools were easily accessible and facilitated the research process.

Research Instruments and the Rationale

The tools used were two short authentic texts and comprehension questions which were a mixture of text based, inferential and opinion based questions from authentic texts given to the students to read. Document analysis was conducted (comprehension questions answered by students individually)

Data Triangulation Methods

The nature of the research was exploratory and the quantitative methods approach was employed in order to corroborate or contradict the data findings through multiple triangulation methods to ensure reliability, validity as well as credibility of the results of this research. Validity and reliability is an important criterion to an effective case study research (Yan). To ensure the validity of the research instrument, it was checked and approved by the educationist in the field of language and research. The reliability of the test was also investigated in the pilot study that was conducted by the researcher

Procedure of the Study

For the study two schools were selected one using authentic texts named as Group A and the other using inauthentic texts named as Group B. Each group was given two authentic texts to read and was asked to answer the comprehension questions based on the reading texts.

FINDINGS AND DATA PRESENTATIONS

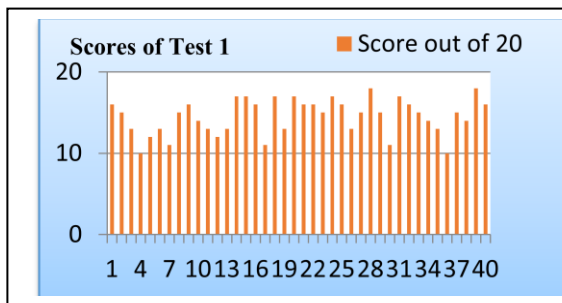
Table No 1 (a) Scores of the students exposed to authentic text. Test No 1

Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages	Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages
E	1	14	70%		21	18	90%
X	2	14	70%		22	16	80%
P	3	17	85%		23	15	75%
O	4	15	75%	T	24	18	90%
S	5	15	75%	E	25	16	80%
E	6	14	70%	X	26	15	75%
D	7	14	70%	T	27	14	70%
	8	16	85%	S	28	13	65%
T	9	12	60%		29	17	85%
O	10	16	80%		30	15	75%
	11	19	95%		31	11	55%
A	12	13	65%		32	16	80%
U	13	14	70%		33	17	85%
T	14	15	75%		34	15	75%
H	15	17	85%		35	17	85%
E	16	16	80%		36	16	80%
N	17	17	85%		37	14	70%
T	18	12	60%		38	13	65%
I	19	11	55%		39	18	90%
C	20	17	85%		40	16	80%

Table No 1 (b) Scores of the students exposed to authentic texts. Test No 2

Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages	Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages
E	1	16	80%		21	16	80%
X	2	15	75%	T	22	16	80%
P	3	13	65%	E	23	15	75%
O	4	10	50%	X	24	17	85%
S	5	12	12%	T	25	16	80%
E	6	13	65%	S	26	13	65%
D	7	11	55%	S	27	15	75%
	8	15	75%		28	18	90%
T	9	16	80%		29	15	75%
O	10	14	70%		30	11	55%
	11	13	65%		31	17	85%
A	12	12	60%		32	16	80%
U	13	13	65%		33	15	75%
T	14	17	85%		34	14	70%
H	15	17	85%		35	13	65%
E	16	16	80%		36	10	50%
N	17	11	55%		37	15	75%
T	18	17	85%		38	14	70%
I	19	13	65%		39	18	90%
C	20	17	85%		40	16	80%

Scores of the students exposed to authentic texts Graph 1



Scores of the students exposed to authentic texts Graph 2

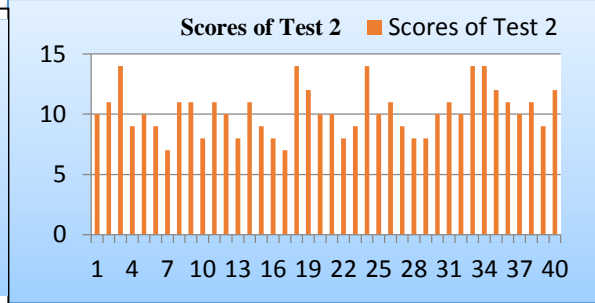


Table No 2 (a) Scores of the students exposed to inauthentic texts. Test No. 2:

Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages	Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages
E	1	11	55%	I	21	13	65%
X	2	10	50%	N	22	12	60%
P	3	9	45%	A	23	11	55%
O	4	10	50%	U	24	11	55%
S	5	11	55%	T	25	13	65%
E	6	12	60%	H	26	12	60%
D	7	9	45%	E	27	15	75%
	8	14	60%	N	28	10	50%
	9	10	50%	T	29	11	55%
T	10	11	55%	I	30	9	45%
O	11	11	55%	C	31	8	40%
	12	16	80%		32	15	75%
	13	12	60%	T	33	9	45%
	14	11	55%	E	34	11	55%
	15	10	50%	X	35	10	50%
	16	11	55%	T	36	11	55%
	17	12	60%	S	37	10	50%
	18	10	50%		38	11	55%
	19	11	55%		39	8	40%
	20	7	35%		40	7	35%

Table No 2 (b) Scores of the students exposed to inauthentic texts. Test No 2

Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages	Group A	Subject	Scores (/20)	Percentages
E	1	10	50%	I	21	10	50%
X	2	11	55%	N	22	8	40%
P	3	14	70%	A	23	9	45%
O	4	9	45%	U	24	14	65%
S	5	10	50%	T	25	10	50%
E	6	9	45%	H	26	11	55%
D	7	7	35%	E	27	9	45%
	8	11	55%	N	28	8	40%
	9	11	55%	T	29	8	40%
T	10	8	40%	I	30	10	50%
O	11	11	55%	C	31	11	55%
	12	10	50%		32	10	50%
	13	8	40%	T	33	14	65%
	14	11	55%	E	34	14	65%
	15	9	45%	X	35	12	60%
	16	8	40%	T	36	11	55%
	17	7	35%	S	37	10	50%
	18	14	65%		38	11	55%
	19	12	60%		39	9	45%
	20	10	50%		40	12	60%

Scores of the students exposed to inauthentic texts. Graph No 1
Graph No2:

Scores of the students exposed to inauthentic texts.

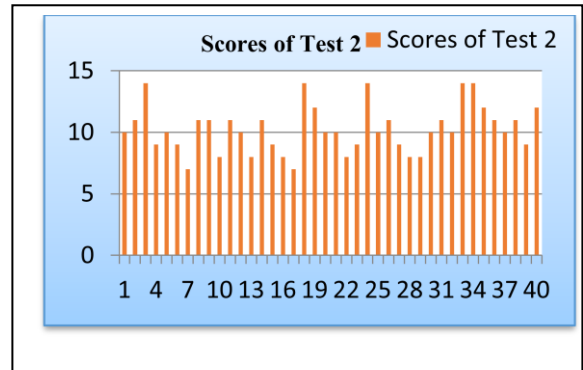
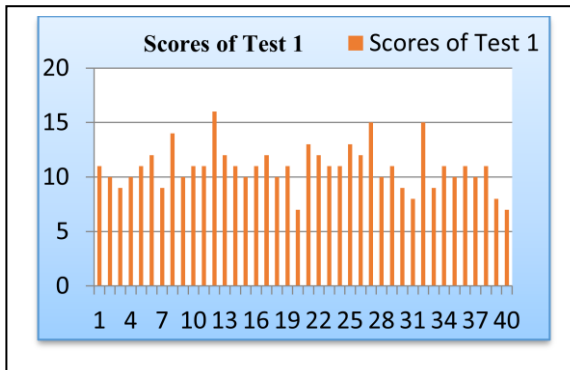
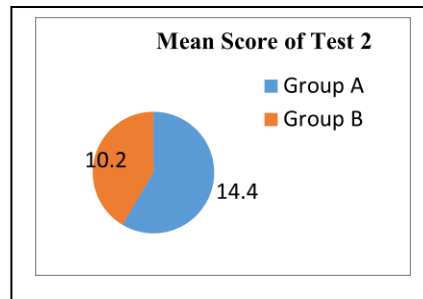
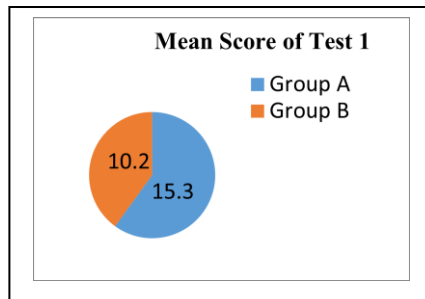


Table No3
Comparison between the mean scores of Test No1 &2 for Group A and B

Group	Mean Score	Group	Mean Score
A	15.3	A	14.4
B	10.2	B	10



Comparison between the mean scores of Test 1&2 for Group A&B

From Table 1 (a) and (b) shows that 44 % of students answered the comprehension questions well. They managed to answer the questions correctly. The overall comprehension scores for all forty students indicated that exposure to authentic text facilitated their comprehension process better. 1 % of in- authentic text readers performed well. 0 % students managed to answer all ten questions correctly. The mean differences in the scores of both texts were computed. From this difference, it can be deduced that authentic text readers performed better as compared to inauthentic text readers.

DISCUSSION: How far is exposure to authentic texts helpful in developing effective reading skills in learners?

In order to assess the reading skills of the students a test was designed and administered to students of authentic and inauthentic texts both. It was found that their characteristics varied greatly not just in their writing patterns, but also in terms of their levels of comprehension.

It was found that students who had been prior to the test exposed to authentic texts wrote with a certain fluency and ease, choosing words of their own. Most students attempted almost all the questions, including the text based questions and reflective or inference based questions. The usage of vocabulary was diverse and different from that which was used in the text of the test. They were comfortable in attempting the inferential questions and were able to infer and interpret what was said between the lines. There seemed to be a certain maturity in the thought pattern of the authentic text readers and they were able to frame out their thoughts well with clarity of intent and purpose especially in the opinion and imagination based questions.

On the other hand, students exposed to inauthentic texts wrote in a jittery pattern where in the vocabulary fluctuated immensely, that is to say that certain words were used which were out of context and did not convey the meaning intended. In case of the text based questions most students answered correctly, but the selection of words was almost exactly the same as that used in the text. Inauthentic text readers either did not attempt or attempted incorrectly the inferential and opinion based questions. Their usage of vocabulary was limited and in answering questions which had a word bank different from that used in the text the comprehension level was close to minimal. So much so that certain common words such as "hamper" and "consumption" were not understood by these students.

There are multiple reasons as to why students exposed to authentic texts performed better. The first and most obvious reason is that students who were the readers of authentic texts performed better primarily because they had prior experience in tackling such texts and the exercise given to them was not a novel experience. Also authentic text readers are trained to perform tasks that require critical thinking and attempting of questions that might sometimes require interpretation slightly beyond the boundaries of the text given. Students exposed to inauthentic texts are slack in their performance simply because having been exposed to texts that are overtly simplified; having little or no relevance to the real life experiences develops in these students a certain lapse in grasping key concepts and inferential understanding. Such students are poorly motivated simply because they are

generally made to read texts that they just cannot relate to and therefore in general, they become unenthusiastic in their reading and the following discussions. This is generally because inauthentic texts do not interest them as very few students can relate to them either thematically or linguistically. Texts play a vital role in teaching and acquiring a second language. It is almost imperative that a teacher uses texts that students can relate to in order to get their attention and to increase motivation. Theory over the years has also proved that it is important for the teacher to include the use of authentic texts in the classroom. This widens the students' capabilities of finding and subsequently reading material that appeal to them leading to a general interest in reading and interpreting texts, whereas this interest is visibly absent in the students exposed to text book material only leading to a general lapse in interpreting any piece of given information. The findings of this research paper co-related with the theories of Lundahl [1] who at length discusses that authentic texts motivates students to a greater extent and such students being motivated to read for a long period of time are generally more motivated to read and interpret texts.

One reason as to why students despite being exposed to authentic materials might still not do well is probably inappropriate teaching strategies. Reason being the concept of authentic texts is a new concept in our part of the world wherein students are unable to handle authentic texts and so are the teachers. Consequently, in exposing students to authentic texts more suitable and interesting texts need to be selected for reading; texts that depict a student's background, experience and knowledge; texts which are generally found in youth magazines, lifestyle magazines and newspapers etc. Also, formal structures and lexical items should not be the main domain of English language teaching. Rather, meaning and content should be the primary focus and students should be able to derive their own conclusions about what they have read and express their opinions regarding those. Linguists have tried to investigate the reading process by presenting various models. For a long time it was believed that there were two kinds of reading, namely the Bottom- up and the Top-down model. Lundahl [1] tries to explain the relationship between a reader and the text by referring to these two models. The Bottom-up model refers to the decoding of the language used in the text. That is interpreting sounds and words separately and then combining them into sentences. The Top-down model refers to the overall understanding of the text keeping in mind one's own experiences and background knowledge. These two theories are evidently very important in evaluating the reading of second language learners. The basic problem as to why students exposed to inauthentic texts are unable to understand inferential questions is primarily because inauthentic texts for second language learners are generally overtly simplified in order to suit their needs and create ease for their comprehension. Such texts generally have a very limited vocabulary of approximately 300 words and short sentences with no more than six or seven words. This simplification created in the inauthentic texts might serve the immediate purpose of understanding simplified information, however the more challenging skills of analytical thinking and inferential deductions of questions remains an under developed skill.

Furthermore, it may be argued that authentic material generally instills in the students a certain level of motivation when reading in English. Students when exposed to language as it occurs in the real world not only motivates them to understand and comprehend a certain given text, but also develops in them the caliber to interpret and deduct meaning out of texts that might not always be overtly simplified. Such texts give the students the know-how to view and analyze different language forms that are meant for practical, real life purposes. For example, a newspaper article or an interview can be perceived as more real than the texts one might find in textbooks. They could also include material such as factual texts, advertisements, warning signs, menus, pricelists, etc. Modern linguists are of the opinion that as teachers we might have done more harm than good by teaching simplified texts instead of authentic material. According to Arens, Byrnes & Swaffar [5] simplification generally alters the original text. This, in some cases, lessens the learners' lexical and cultural interpretation. Replacing easier words with difficult ones results in a phenomenon wherein students do not get a chance to learn certain English idioms or phrases. This replacement through synonyms and other vocabulary items also affects the second language learners' general ability to adopt new words. The main point that most linguists have stressed on is not to ignore traditional readability but to expand it. Language comprehension needs to be dealt with in terms of content, context and intent. Various language features that refer to forthcoming information are very important as they have been referred to as markers of cohesion. These cohesion markers include parts of speech, such as adverbs and conjunctions. In texts that are designed especially for the purpose of language learning alone, these markers are consciously or unconsciously deleted. This exposes the readers of inauthentic texts to a set pattern of sentence structure, making a difference not just in their readability levels but also in terms of their comprehension. Students who read inauthentic texts therefore, generally can respond only to simplified versions of language. However, when the texts referring to real life tasks are given to them they are rarely productive. The root cause of this problem, according to Alderson & Urquhart [6] is that readers of inauthentic texts are presented with material that lacks e.g. synonymy, transitional verbs and subordinate clauses, etc. Since these elements might have been erased from the original simplified version of the text, the students might lose track of what a certain text is all about. Similarly, when such students are exposed to authentic texts containing such features, they appear confounded in deriving sense out of the whole information. In contrast, authentic texts provide the student with information related to real life tasks, which is consequentially organized and develops analytical and relational thinking when dealing with the text. Inauthentic texts generally found in textbooks usually tell students what is right and wrong with a sentence grammatically. But they are rarely able to develop the ability to apply the knowledge learnt in a wider context. This essentially is the primary reason that students of inauthentic texts are unable to respond to information that they may be aware of but which has a different vocabulary or context. On the other hand authentic material requires the student to interpret at the various levels

of comprehension and at the same time be aware of their own weaknesses and strong points (Kramsch) [7].

Lundahl [1] propagates that authentic texts are better at attracting the attention of the reader as they have a "real" message and at the same time they may be viewed as more genuine. The cultural aspects are more vividly described with the usage of everyday language. Language, therefore for the students becomes more interesting and alive as it is not written with a specific aim (e.g. grammatical purpose) so that the actual gist or the main theme of the text falls into the background. On the other hand, the inauthentic texts according to Alderson and Urquhart [3] point out, is that the readers may miss out on the basic plot of a text since key phrases and events may be replaced with easier versions of it. It is therefore imperative that students are exposed to authentic texts that make sense and are written with a clearly defined purpose. At times in exposing students to unaltered authentic texts, the level of difficulty of the text may increase, but it has been researched upon that students are motivated to read a text which might be a little above their comprehension level. When a text has the plot or the main theme as the main element, it fine tunes the comprehension skills of the students. Such students are therefore able to view various texts analytically and respond to them with much more ease as compared to students exposed to inauthentic texts alone.

Teaching authentic texts alone does not solve the problems related to effective reading. While teaching authentic texts one needs to keep in mind quite a few aspects. Krashen(1987) [8] propagates that language acquisition does not need excessive use of grammatical rules and tedious drills in order to acquire language rather language is learnt through meaningful interaction in the target language which is the natural way of communication. For him the form of language is not considered to be important, but rather the message and the overall meaning that is being communicated and understood which is more important. The best methods for teaching authentic texts are those in which students are able to comprehend texts related to real life contexts in low anxiety situations. Also the level of difficulty of authentic texts needs to also be kept in mind wherein students to a certain extent feel challenged in attempting a certain test. This level of difficulty needs to increase with the passage of time, so as to increase the vocabulary of language learners, wherein they can easily administer their learnt concepts in the real world scenario.

By contrast Neuner [9] is of the opinion that when choosing a text, the linguistic level should not be the only concern. The teacher should also need to keep in mind the student's perception of the real world and all the information the student is presented with. Neuner talks of textual comprehension and elucidates his point of view through the example that a student may guess the meaning or a message of the text by simply analyzing and interpreting pictures or titles used in the text. The students, therefore view these texts in the light of their own personal and cultural experiences and draw relevant conclusions. Hence in designing tests based on authentic texts the socio-cultural knowledge of the students also plays an active role. Some students who might be sound in interpreting authentic texts from one part of the world

might not always relate to authentic text from a different part of the world wherein the cultural aspects might be very different from the native culture of the student. This is an important point that needs to be kept in mind while designing authentic texts as culture has a direct impact on language and the perceptions associated with it.

Through practice and persistence students should simply get used to these kinds of texts. In the beginning, they might not comprehend all the information given to them; the vocabulary items may seem unfamiliar to them, but the meaning of difficult words can be guessed and inferences and conclusions can be drawn. Certain writers are of the opinion that there is a difference between reading a text and being engaged in the reading of a text. Verhoeven & Snow [1] propagate that if a student is motivated in the reading of a text, the student tends to become a better learner. This happens primarily because a motivated reader will “activate prior knowledge to construct new understandings...” It has also been claimed that the development of literacy, primarily gained through the reading of texts and the motivation of students is a reciprocal relationship. The better one gets at understanding the texts read, the more motivated one will become. This encourages the reader to engage in the reading of more texts with varying levels of difficulty. Reading greatly assists in the textual understanding of authentic materials which in turn inspires students to read further. So the main role of an instructor is to get the students interested in authentic texts and to motivate them in the process of working with texts both within and outside the classroom.

Authentic texts can develop effective reading skills in the students only if the students are exposed to them under the right motivating circumstances in which the role of the teacher and the nature of the text itself comes to play a very important role.. Not all authentic texts may prove to be interesting for the students. Verhoven and Snow [1] have several suggestions on how to make sure that the students are motivated.

For certain texts motivating the students might prove to be very challenging, especially when it comes to longer texts since students generally find them boring and irrelevant. In contrast, students find texts related to television, radio and comics much more entertaining.

The theme of a text is therefore is of utmost importance even in authentic texts. In designing tests and reading activities one needs to keep in mind that the theme should be of interest and of relevance to the students, otherwise students despite being exposed to authentic texts might not be able to develop effective reading strategies. Verhoven and Snow [1] propagate that students will find a text interesting only if “It is familiar and easy to comprehend”. It is only through such texts that students are able to activate their cultural background and knowledge. In the teaching and designing of tests related to authentic material, the language of the text also becomes increasingly important and the right choices need to be made. If the text is far too easy the students are unlikely to stay motivated. It will seem to the students dull and lacking in purpose. In contrast, if a text is chosen which is far too difficult for the students they might only read the text without even trying to understand it. A text with a clearly defined purpose which interests the students is also one

aspect that motivates the students and keeps them interested. Kramersch [7] puts forth a theory saying that a text should generally be just above a student’s proficiency level. This way the student will feel challenged and motivated but will not find the text extremely difficult or impossible to understand and at the same time when students will be able to understand such a text, he or she will achieve a certain level of satisfaction in attempting questions related it. This makes language of a text accessible and at the same time challenging and stimulating for the reader adding in new words to the reader’s vocabulary.

In a nut shell exposure to authentic texts to quite an extent develops effective reading skills in the students as compared to students who are taught from the textbook alone having inauthentic texts. This stance has been further verified through the test conducted (see appendix “A”). However, the authentic texts require careful selection wherein texts are chosen keeping in mind the following aspects: The interest and aptitude of the students, Proficiency level of the students, Language of the text.

CONCLUSION:

The tables and graphs show that there is a difference in terms of reading performance of the authentic and in-authentic text readers. The students who read authentic texts did not have any problem with specific items of vocabulary. Consequently the general understanding of the key ideas in the text was not affected. The students scored indeed very highly on the reading comprehension questions. The difference reveals that the authentic text facilitates the students’ comprehension process which is better when compared to the inauthentic text. Thus, the results obtained by these students are very much in line with studies carried out by Vigil [9]. In reading, Vigil [9] found a significant difference in comprehension with language students who read unedited authentic texts. Not only did their comprehension skills increase, but there was also improvement in oral and written language performance. According to Grellet and Swaffar [5] authentic texts are vital; they motivate students, offer a real context, transmit the target language culture, and prepare students to read outside the classroom. Brown has also stated that “simplifying, or ‘doctoring up’ an existing short story or description is therefore not only necessary, but also is disservice to students who are thereby deprived of original material with its natural redundancy, humor, wit and other captivating features. Thus, it disapproves the theory that linguistic simplification will presumably decrease the language load a reader must grapple with, allowing the second language learner to concentrate on understanding the content of the text without being overly inhibited by difficult vocabulary or complex sentences. Therefore, it is evidently clear that exposure to authentic texts is helpful in developing effective reading skills in learners. All in all, it can be seen that the use of authentic reading texts in comparison to inauthentic reading texts is indeed beneficial in facilitating the students’ comprehension.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. While teaching reading to second language learners authentic texts should be used to maximize their

exposure to real language that is used by the natives in real life settings so that the learners can adopt the same language patterns themselves. However what is of utmost importance is the selection of appropriate and suitable texts by the teacher as far as the use of vocabulary, content and cultural background of the learners are concerned, They should be made familiar with these before they are asked to embark upon their linguistic journey.

2. The age, interests and gender of the students should also be taken into account before selecting an authentic text for them.
3. The authentic texts should be gradually introduced to the students if they have not been exposed to them already. A sudden and complete shift from the inauthentic texts to the authentic texts would destabilize their grasp on the material and demoralize them as well. Practice will eventually make them somewhat perfect.
4. The use of inauthentic texts should not be banned completely in the language class as these have their uses too, especially for the beginners and young learners who have to be taught the basic and general concepts, definitions and explanations of various aspects of language. What is important is to remember the students' needs and requirements and to tailor the lessons accordingly.

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