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Developing Reading Comprehension Through the Use of Authentic Materials

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Resumen

El uso de materiales auténticos de lectura se ha considerado un tema trascendental en la teoría y práctica de la enseñanza de idiomas. La efectividad del uso de textos auténticos de lectura ha sido aceptada, pero su aplicación en las aulas de idiomas se considera poco práctica o complicada. En el contexto ecuatoriano, no se ha investigado a profundidad el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora y el aumento de la motivación. El propósito de este estudio es presentar información bibliográfica acerca del uso de materiales auténticos como una herramienta significativa para aprender inglés, desarrollar la comprensión lectora, mejorar las habilidades de lectura y aumentar la motivación en los estudiantes. Varios investigadores han apoyado que el uso de materiales auténticos es imprescindible para aprender un idioma extranjero como el inglés y mejorar las habilidades lingüísticas. El presente estudio examina 15 artículos sobre motivación, uso de materiales auténticos de lectura y su efecto en la comprensión lectora. La mayoría de los estudios de investigación revisados se realizaron dentro del aula de clase y recogieron datos cuantitativos y cualitativos. De los 15 estudios, 14 autores llegaron a la conclusión de que los materiales auténticos eran útiles, especialmente en la mejora de las habilidades de comprensión de lectura, el uso natural del lenguaje y la motivación que fomenta el interés por la misma. El trabajo de investigación podría ser utilizado por profesores y diseñadores de currículos ya que los resultados destacan la efectividad de la inclusión de materiales auténticos de lectura.

Palabras clave: Comprensión lectora. Estrategias de lectura. Motivación. Interés. Autenticidad. Materiales auténticos.

Abstract

The use of authentic reading materials has been considered a key issue both in the theory and practice of language teaching. The effectiveness of using authentic reading texts has, by and large, been accepted, but their application in language classrooms has been sometimes deemed impractical or complicated. In the Ecuadorian context, there has not been much investigation carried out regarding the development of reading comprehension and the enhancement of motivation. The purpose of this study is to present bibliographic information to support the theory that the use of authentic materials is a significant tool to develop reading comprehension, improve reading skills, and enhance the motivation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Various scholars have supported the theory that the use of authentic materials is beneficial when learning a foreign language, namely, English, and the variety of such materials can contribute to enhancing language skills. The present study reviews 15 articles on the subject of authentic reading materials and motivation with regard to their effect on reading comprehension. The majority of the research studies was carried out in classroom settings gathering quantitative and qualitative data. Of the 15 studies, the authors of 14 came to the conclusion that authentic materials were useful, especially with regard to the enhancement of reading comprehension skills, the natural use of language, and motivation leading to reading interest. The present bibliographic research might be used by classroom practitioners and curriculum designers since the results underline the effectiveness of the inclusion of authentic reading materials.

Keywords: Reading comprehension. Reading strategies. Motivation. Interest. Authenticity. Authentic materials.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my parents, Martha and Rodrigo, who have always supported and guided me during my studies; to my siblings, Patricia and Andrés, who have taught me to do the things right, and to my niece and nephew, Camila and Joaquin, who have encouraged me in this long journey.

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Introduction

The following study is a piece of bibliographic research, which compiles information related to the use of authentic materials in order to develop students' reading comprehension as well as to enhance their motivation in learning English as a Foreign language. In the Ecuadorian context, there has not been much investigation carried out regarding the development of reading comprehension and the enhancement of motivation. The purpose of this study is to present bibliographic information in order to support the idea that the use of authentic materials is a significant tool to learn English, develop reading comprehension, improve reading skills, and enhance the motivation of EFL students. Various investigators have supported and reinforced the idea that the use of authentic materials is beneficial in order to learn a foreign language, namely, English, and the variety of such materials can contribute to enhancing language skills.

This investigation consists of the development of the following chapters which are structured as follows:

Chapter I: rationale, problem statement, and research questions.

Chapter II: basic concepts and definitions, description of authentic and non-authentic materials, conceptualization of reading comprehension and authentic materials, and a consideration of motivation.

Chapter III: the examination of 15 studies related to the topic of research and a review of the benefits and relevance of the above aspects.

Chapter IV: the selection criteria of the 15 studies and the methodology applied.

Chapter V: the analysis of the data presented in the tables in order to describe the findings.

Chapter VI: the conclusions and recommendations after the examination of the 15 studies and their analysis.

Chapter I

Description of the Research

This piece of research was carried out between March 2019 and January 2020. The task was to provide a critical outline of relevant academic articles related to the main issue of the investigation, namely, the usefulness of authentic materials for the improvement of reading comprehension and a potential increase in engagement and motivation.

1.1 Rationale and problem statement

In line with the task set for the bibliographic research following the approach of the book titled Synthesizing Research on Language Learning and Teaching (Norris & Ortega, 2006), the aim is to provide an overview of the academic research associated with developing reading comprehension through the use of authentic materials. The goal is to critically analyze the work that has been carried out in this regard, to look for possible inconsistencies and debatable issues as well as to identify research areas that have not been investigated before.

The purpose of the present exploratory bibliographic research is, therefore, critically assess the 15 research studies that have been conducted specifically in order to look at the possible outcomes of using authentic materials and their effect on improving reading comprehension skills.

The objective is to combine primary research with general observations while looking at controversies and suggest recommendations for further studies.

The use of authentic materials for reading comprehension appears to be a valid practice, but the exact choice and treatment of the selected materials might be problematic, and this is an issue that the researcher will come back to in the course of this analysis.

1.2 Research questions

Having read the 15 articles and considered the issues to be investigated, the research questions were formulated in a way so as to reflect the researcher's main concerns regarding the use of authentic materials in EFL classrooms.

Accordingly, the following research questions are posited:

1. To what extent does the use of authentic materials improve the reading skills of EFL students?

2. How does the use of authentic materials increase the motivation of EFL students to read?

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

Let us first look at why the use of authentic materials for the development of reading comprehension might be beneficial in language learning. In order to do so, we need to first look at the nature of reading comprehension.

While it is true that most people read every day, the manner and level of comprehension could differ from person to person, and this is especially true when someone reads in an additional language. Brantmeier defines reading comprehension as "…a critical part of the multifarious interplay of mechanisms involved in L2 reading" (as cited in Marzban & Davaji, 2015, p. 86). The author goes on to say that there are usually individual differences in reading comprehension skills and, as a result, students may interpret the same piece of text differently.

Let us now examine the concept of reading comprehension in more depth. Berardo (2006) states that reading "is something that we do every day, it is an integral part of our daily lives, taken very much for granted and generally assumed to be something that everyone can do" (p. 60). The author further adds that reading is an essential source of information both for general purposes and for communication in social settings.

Harmer (1998) emphasizes that reading is an incredibly active occupation, adding that through this activity students are able to grasp something that they may not have been aware of before. Reading is, therefore, a way to know, to feel, and to understand the world surrounding them. In language teaching, there are, supposedly, important benefits that arise from exposing students to reading materials that reflect usage in the target language community. Well-chosen, authentic pieces of text can provide both new information and engage learners reading in a foreign language.

"Authenticity" is not an easy term to define in the context of language teaching. Wallace (1992) argues that authentic texts are "…real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes" (p. 145). They are, therefore, written for native speakers and contain "real" language. Importantly, they have been created in order to accomplish a pragmatic task in the community that uses the given language for social purposes. Consequently, non-authentic texts are those that are specifically designed for language learning purposes (Peacock, 1997).

Guarentino and Morley (2001) underline that authentic texts are products created for a purpose, namely, to expose students to real language; learners can then assimilate and reproduce language by way of having a natural interaction with the real world. However, it is paramount that teachers take into account that authentic texts and tasks must fit the students' level in order to create interest and motivation, thereby promoting the learning of English in a natural way.

In a similar vein, Oguz and Bahar emphasize that authentic materials "connect the students to the social world and enable them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice" (as cited in Albiladi, 2019, p. 68).

Authentic materials do not only help students to get a taste of "real" language. Teachers can also benefit from using them. Wong, Kwok, and Choi (1995) suggest that the use of real-life materials allows teachers to design a more relevant curriculum that is in line with their learners' needs and interests.

Undoubtedly, authentic materials bring a sense of "reality" to the language classroom. Students are provided with texts and can learn natural language from English native speakers/writers, a process that lends authenticity to classroom work (Albiladi, 2019).

The introduction into the classroom of authentic texts has a long and venerable history. Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) underline that the use of authentic materials (whether it is meant

for reading or the development of other skills) is not new in English teaching. They go on to say

that teachers started using such resources decades ago in their classrooms in order to prepare

students for the real world. Authentic materials are meant to expose students to natural language

so that learners can interact in the classroom as they would need to perform outside of it.

Berardo (2006) lists down the most important sources of authentic materials (whether

spoken or written): "… newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs, and literature. One

of the most useful is the Internet" (p. 62). Watthanaboon and Rotchu (2017) draw attention to the

fact that while "printed materials date very quickly, the Internet is always updated, is interactive,

and provides visual stimulation" (p. 35).

Altogether, there seems to be general agreement about the pedagogical usefulness of

employing authentic materials. Ugalde (2008) puts the argument in favour of such resources

rather convincingly:

> If our intention is to help our students read, then why are we simplifying texts for
>
> them? Are they going to face simplified texts in real life? Will they be able to understand
>
> and enjoy authentic readings when they encounter them in non-academic environments?
>
> (p.78).

As for motivating learners of a second or foreign language, few would question that

learner engagement is crucial. In Marzban and Davaji's words (2015) "… motivation refers to

the desire to learn a language"(p. 86).

This brings us to the concept of motivation, which has also been a widely researched

topic in English Language Teaching (ELT). According to Dornyei and Ushioda, motivation

"…derives from the Latin word 'movere' meaning 'to move'; What moves a person to make

certain choices, engage in action, expand effort and persist in action" (as cited in Marzban & Davaji, 2015, p. 86).

Apsari (2014) stresses that "authentic materials are often more interesting because they reflect real life phenomena" (p. 89). This implies that motivation is related to the materials used to teach directly or learn. Indeed, the author refers to Nuttall, who emphasizes that "authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real life purposes by real people" (as cited in Apsari, 2014, p. 89), thus offering an opportunity to impact on students' reading comprehension.

By way of summary, it can be concluded that there is some consensus that authentic materials can promote language learning and can have a beneficial effect on reading comprehension as they reflect the social reality that learners face when using the target language. They also have a positive effect on motivation, which is a crucial element in the learning-teaching process.

Chapter III

Literature Review

In this chapter, fifteen studies related to the topic of the research are examined in order to review the benefits and relevance of the use of authentic materials for the development of reading comprehension and the enhancement of students' motivation in EFL classes.

In the next five sections, the following aspects are going to be considered: authentic materials in reading comprehension, authentic materials and the development of reading skills, reading strategies when using authentic materials, attitudes and beliefs on the use of authentic materials, and motivation and reading interest related to authentic materials.

3.1 Authentic materials in reading comprehension

Authentic materials have been used widely in the English language classroom in order to help the learning of the language and, more specifically, to improve students' reading comprehension skills. For instance, Islam and Santoso (2018) and Khoshbakht and Gorjian (2017) demonstrated that authentic materials improved reading comprehension and provided other benefits to students as well. In contrast, Apsari (2014) evidenced that the use of authentic materials did not produce better learning outcomes, but such materials would still need to be used in the English classroom. What follows here is a more detailed description of the three studies mentioned above in order to throw light on how authentic materials were used and to what effect.

Let us start with a study conducted in Indonesia by Islam and Santoso (2018), who investigated the effectiveness of using authentic texts and non-authentic texts in the teaching of reading comprehension. In this study, 55 students from eighth grade participated in two groups: the experimental and the control. The researchers administered a pre-test and a post-test in the

first and the last sessions of the treatment; authentic texts (magazines, posts, descriptive and recount texts) were used for the experimental group, and non-authentic texts for the control one.

Thereafter, the researchers employed a reading comprehension test that included a multiple-choice test, and a Wh-Question test to measure the students' comprehension in both groups. The results showed a uniformity in students' reading comprehension prior to the treatment (pre-test), but after applying the post-test, the researchers found that the experimental group had a higher score than the control group. In other words, using authentic texts was more effective than non-authentic texts because students could identify the main ideas, provide supporting details, learn vocabulary related to the topic, learn pronunciation, recognize the meaning of words, and practice skimming and scanning.

Khoshbakht and Gorjian (2017) also explored the use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension to EFL learners. In this study, 50 Iranian females, aged 18 to 40, participated in two homogeneous groups established via the Oxford quick placement tests administered in order to measure learners' language ability. Authentic materials were applied in one group and non-authentic ones in the other. The researchers conducted a 12-session course starting with a pre-test that contained four pieces of text and 20 multiple-choice questions related to them, focusing on reading skills including skimming, scanning, vocabulary, and main ideas. Authentic online texts were used for the authentic-based group and the Top Notch 2 course book for the non-authentic based one. A post-test of reading comprehension was administered to gauge the learners' reading comprehension skills. The results indicated that the authentic-based group improved their reading comprehension because the authentic reading passages were interesting and motivated students to read on their own.

As against this, the authors found that there was no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test of the non-authentic group because, apparently, non-authentic materials did not improve learners' reading comprehension.

Apsari (2014) examined the use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension and obtained results that were different from the ones in the studies mentioned above. This study was a piece of experimental research involving 50 students in two groups that constituted the experimental and the control. The first group was provided with authentic materials, while the control group worked with non-authentic course materials. A pre-test and a post-test were administered to measure students' skills before and after the treatment.

Apsari (2014) used a test that consisted of five tasks: reading a passage, finding the closest meaning of five words in the text, identifying parts of speech, doing a cloze test and, finally, looking for synonyms of 10 words in the passage.

The study revealed that the use of authentic materials for the teaching of reading comprehension in comparison to non-authentic materials did not produce significantly better learning outcomes; nevertheless, the author concluded that both authentic and non-authentic materials needed to be employed in order to provide variety and sustain interest.

3.2 Authentic materials and the development of reading skills

The use of authentic materials seems to help students improve and develop their reading skills in class. Such materials can have a significant effect on how students learn English since authenticity implies that the language is used contextually and communicatively. As for the development of reading skills through using authentic materials, Aftab and Salahuddin (2015) demonstrated that students enjoyed being exposed to authentic materials as they found that these sources improved their reading skills. Similarly, Kusumawardani, Santosa, and

Roschsantiningsih (2018) showed in their study that students preferred reading authentic materials, which, in due course, increased their reading skills.

Aftab and Salahuddin (2015) examined what effects authentic texts had on Pakistani learners' ESL reading comprehension skills. The study involved a fairly large sample, namely, 154 female students of 6th and 7th grade from two private schools. They came from different social backgrounds and were aged 10 to 13. The researchers applied two pre-tests to establish a benchmark for the level of reading comprehension for each grade: a web-based flight schedule and a local magazine for the sixth grade while the seventh grade worked with a recipe page that included three recipes and a local newspaper.

Before the start of the research project, 43 students randomly selected from the total number answered a questionnaire with 6 closed-ended items plus an open-ended question so that the researchers could elicit the students' points of view about the use of various (authentic and non-authentic) reading texts in the classroom.

The students were then randomly divided into two, equal-sized groups of 77 female students each: these constituted the experimental and the control groups in order to investigate how the use of authentic materials affected their reading comprehension abilities. At this stage, the control group started using standard textbooks to learn reading comprehension while the experimental group used authentic texts (articles, menus, and letters) and then both groups did a post-test by answering some comprehension questions based on the pieces of texts employed.

The results showed that in phase 1, students had a positive attitude towards their course book texts because they appreciated that such texts improved their reading comprehension even though these materials were not similar to real-world texts. Additionally, they mentioned that they would like to read different kinds of authentic texts. In phase 2, the experimental group had

a higher performance as compared to the control group after the post-test. In the last phase, based on a questionnaire administered to 41 randomly selected participants of the experimental group, the authors established that students enjoyed authentic texts because these improved their reading skills as well as extended their knowledge. These kinds of materials were close to real life situations and their inclusion in their course was deemed to be well-justified.

A collaborative study involving teachers, researchers, and students was carried out by Kusumawardani, Santosa, and Roschsantiningsih (2018), who explored the use of authentic materials to teach reading at a junior school. This research was a case study with the participation of 8 students of eighth grade and an English teacher. The researchers observed her classes to obtain information regarding the use of authentic materials in reading classes. In the process of teaching reading, the teacher used authentic printed materials: for instance, texts and storybooks from the internet. The teacher also provided authentic reading materials from other media sources such as videos, pictures, brochures, and storybooks; the content of the texts was shared by the students and the process aided their reading comprehension skills. The researchers were somewhat unclear as to how the teacher's use of authentic materials improved the students' reading skills; however, these types of activities, which involved the use of authentic materials, encouraged students to read for pleasure and communication.

3.3 Reading strategies when using authentic materials

Reading strategies have become significant elements in the process of using authentic materials be it teaching or reading in other languages. A growing interest in reading strategies is shown by the rising number of studies on the topic. For instance, Watthanaboon and Rotchu (2017) revealed that undergraduate students enjoyed authentic materials whose content was simple and easy to understand. Gómez Rodriguez (2016) noted that his students applied a

number of learning strategies to understand authentic texts that they often found challenging owing to the complexity of their content. Moreno Blanco (2013) introduced a technological tool (a social network) that enabled the students to develop self-directed learning strategies while exploiting authentic reading materials. More data are stated in detail below.

Watthanaboon and Rotchu (2017) carried out a study regarding the adaptation of reading strategies through authentic materials in EFL classrooms. Thirty undergraduate students participated in this study with a quantitative approach. The researchers used the following instruments: a pre-test and a post-test before and after using authentic materials to compare learning achievement in reading comprehension, lesson plans, and authentic reading materials. They concluded that authentic materials helped students to recognize factual information, develop knowledge, and have a favorable attitude towards these useful materials adding that "teaching through authentic materials can stimulate motivation and learning" (p. 36).

Gómez Rodriguez (2016) conducted a study with respect to the use of learning strategies (LS) for the reading of authentic literary materials. In this case study, 15 pre-service EFL teachers participated: 8 females and 7 males, aged 18 to 22. The researcher applied three steps of awareness for learning strategies in the pedagogical intervention where participants used authentic reading materials (short stories). For data collection, questionnaires, journals/logs, and field notes were applied in order to get information on how participants handled authentic reading materials. The results showed that participants had problems with authentic reading materials due to the fact that it was their first experience with them, and the unknown words as well as the complexity of the sentences constituted a considerable challenge. However, they managed to create mental linkages, were able to summarize the main points of the authentic materials and used highlighting as an appropriate physical tool to support understanding.

Gómez Rodriguez noticed that the participants also used learning strategies such as translating words in order to understand the content, as well as analyzing and reasoning, which "allowed learners to have a better understanding and to achieve critical levels of interpretation when they discussed literary themes" (p. 62). Additionally, the author found that the participants also employed "social strategies such as *cooperating with others*, and *asking questions for clarification*" (p. 63), as well as other effective strategies in order to overcome the anxieties that might be involved in dealing with authentic literary language.

Moreno Blanco (2013) carried out a study whose aim was to improve English reading abilities in 9th graders through the use of authentic materials and the setting of reading tasks. Ten students with a pre-intermediate level of English participated in this investigation. The researcher used the following instruments: a pre-reading test to measure students' reading comprehension level, a pre-questionnaire to identify students' perceptions towards reading and the types of texts they liked to read, and an interview. The researcher also applied 6 units of authentic reading tasks uploaded to social network Edmodo (one unit per week), asked the students to write a journal in order to get data about their perceptions and feelings on working with reading tasks, a post-questionnaire that reflected the reading strategies as well as the students' perceptions of their reading comprehension level and their skills to work autonomously, and a post-reading test to compare students' performance before and after being exposed to reading authentic texts. The author revealed that the reading comprehension level of the students increased; authentic reading materials enhanced the motivation of the students since the texts were interesting and facilitated the acquisition of English; the students also employed self-directed learning strategies through the use of Edmodo. The students also used two learning strategies, which they applied to reading: exploiting their background knowledge and making inferences.

3.4 Attitudes and beliefs on the use of authentic materials

Teachers and students in the studies had certain attitudes and beliefs related to the use of authentic materials since they were part of the process of teaching-learning in the English classroom. Akbari and Razavi (2016) stated that teachers had a positive attitude when using authentic reading materials even though they did not always have easy access to technology. Similarly, Rusmawaty, Atmowardoyo, Hamra and Noni (2018) pointed out that the use of authentic materials improved the students' skills and brought about a positive attitude; even though, there were certain challenges when using such materials in class. Furthermore, AbdulHussein (2014) found that the combined use of both authentic and non-authentic materials improved reading comprehension and motivated students to read outside the classroom. Altogether, it seems that teachers have a positive attitude regarding the use of authentic materials, as the description of several studies below demonstrate.

Akbari and Razavi (2016) investigated teachers' perspectives on the use of authentic materials in the foreign language classroom; the data were gathered during a teacher training course. The study employed a quantitative method and included 57 female and male English teachers, whose experience in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) ranged from 9 to 29 years. The researchers administered a survey to find out about the teachers' attitudes and beliefs with regard to the use of authentic materials in their classes. It included items to collect information such as personal profile (years of experience, nationality, academic degree) and attitudes towards using authentic materials in class. After the completion of the teacher training course (TTC), another questionnaire was provided to the teachers, which consisted of multiple choice questions and also offered the opportunity to the respondents to make some comments.

The results of the study demonstrated that, overall, teachers had a positive attitude to the use of authentic materials. The teachers believed that authentic materials could improve students' skills because they represented "real" language. The authors found that authentic materials should mainly be used at advanced and intermediate levels, while such materials should not be used with beginners, because these texts usually contain complex grammatical and lexical features. Finally, the teachers involved in the study mentioned that, despite their teaching experience, they needed training in the use of authentic materials in class.

Rusmawaty, Atmowardoyo, Hamra and Noni (2018) investigated teachers' beliefs with respect to the use of authentic materials for teaching reading in EFL classrooms. Four teachers with more than 10 years of experience in English teaching participated in this case study. The researchers observed and recorded classes in order to probe the teachers' beliefs about authentic materials for reading. They conducted a pre-interview to get the teachers' views related to the use of authentic materials and a post-interview to verify the teachers' classroom activities with the obtained data of the pre-interview and to clarify activities that were not compatible with the teachers' beliefs.

The researchers also used field notes and worked with teaching documents prepared by the teachers. They found that printed authentic materials (newspapers, flyers, magazines, maps, brochures, and invitations) helped students to learn new vocabulary as they became engaged with real language. Some students' skills improved after using authentic reading materials: vocabulary knowledge, scanning-skimming reading strategies, and critical thinking had all become better. Furthermore, the authors noted some of the challenges identified by the teachers, such as: "(1) students' unfamiliarity to the topic, (2) cultural awareness introduction to students, and (3) lack of time searching, selecting, and modifying the materials" (p. 611).

AbdulHussein (2014) investigated EFL college teachers' and learners' attitudes towards using authentic reading materials in Misan, Irak. The study was carried out with the participation of the students from the third grade of a college in Misan and involved their teachers as well. The researcher used two questionnaires, which included passages from books, journals, and articles. The questionnaire contained a series of questions and prompts in order to get data about the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of authentic materials in their reading classes. The results of the study demonstrated that authentic texts were best used in classrooms in combination with course books because such an approach not only improved learners' reading comprehension, but it also increased the students' knowledge of vocabulary items and grammatical structures. The researcher concluded that teachers recommended the use of a variety of text types and up-to-date topics, daily world news, education, psychology, health, fashion, and sports. The consensus was that the use of such materials is effective, because students are exposed to real language and become motivated to read outside the classroom.

3.5 Motivation and reading interest related to authentic materials

On balance, the use of authentic materials seems to increase students' motivation and interest as they imply real and natural language. According to Marzban and Davaji (2015), students develop their motivation through curiosity, social reasons, the grades, and the reading texts. Kuşdemir and Bulut (2018) concluded that female students have more motivation and a higher level of reading comprehension in comparison to male students. Parmawati and Yugafiati (2017) also investigated this topic, and demonstrated that students show reading interest, self-confidence, and are not afraid of making mistakes when using authentic materials. In the same vein, Wilarsih, Marbun, and Bunau (2018) revealed that students are attracted to authentic reading materials and feel motivated to participate in class when using real language. In the

following section, a somewhat more detailed description of these studies will be provided in order to support the authors' findings.

Marzban and Davaji (2015) investigated the effect of authentic texts on motivation and reading comprehension of EFL students at an intermediate level of proficiency. The study was carried out involving 24 learners, 9 male and 15 female, aged 13 to 18. The participants were randomly divided into two groups: one group worked with simplified texts (course books) while the other worked with authentic texts (top 4 islands, earthquakes, global warming and health) plus a questionnaire to measure learners' motivation at the beginning and at the end of the course. The researchers used a placement test with 80 multiple choice items to determine the students' language proficiency level, which was retested as a post-test on the same students at the end of the course. A reading comprehension test with twenty items of three choices was also set to measure the students' level of reading comprehension. Further, a Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) with 18 items including 8 domains of reading motivation (reading efficacy, reading challenge, reading curiosity, reading involvement, importance of reading, reading word avoidance, social reasons for reading, and reading for grades) was also applied to measure reading motivation before and after using authentic texts.

Marzban and Davaji (2015) demonstrated that the authentic group achieved a higher level of reading comprehension than the group working with a simplified version of the authentic pieces of text. Additionally, there were positive changes in four domains of reading motivation. Reading curiosity increased to some extent, meaning that students became motivated to read about their favorite topics and new ones as well. Social reasons for reading increased because readers did not read only for themselves, but they also felt motivated to deliver the new

information from the texts they already read to other people. Finally, reading for grades decreased, but motivation for reading texts increased after using authentic texts.

Kuşdemir and Bulut (2018) examined the relationship between elementary school students' reading comprehension and reading motivation. In this piece of research 119 students from 4th grade participated. The researcher employed a survey to get personal information such as demographic data. Furthermore, a text-oriented reading motivation scale of 4 factors (reading difficulty, reading efficacy, reading-related effort/appreciation, and social dimension) with 22 items was used as well as two texts: a narrative text, and an informative text. Each text included a cloze test and some open-ended questions. The authors found that both female and male students were more successful when processing narrative texts than informative ones; the level of reading comprehension and reading motivation varied in gender in favor of the female students, namely, the female students' reading motivation increased after using narrative texts. The results also showed that an increase in the students' reading motivation positively affected their reading comprehension.

Another study carried out by Parmawati and Yugafiati (2017) with respect to the use of authentic materials with the aim of improving students' reading interest employed action research with students at a college in Indonesia. The authors conducted their research in two cycles. First, they observed and recorded the students during the reading process, starting from pre-reading activities with the use of an observation sheet that contained indicators which showed students' interest. Second, they used a questionnaire to find out the students' attitudes about the use of authentic materials in teaching reading. The researchers evaluated the students' comprehension skills according to six elements: main idea, facts, context, sequence, inference, and conclusion. They demonstrated that in the pre-research phase, the students had a low reading

level, difficulty to choose topics, themes, and the main idea of the text; moreover, the students did not know certain reading elements. Thereafter, the researchers employed authentic materials in Cycles 1 and 2. They found that in Cycle 1, students were active in doing the task and ready to share the ideas in their groups; they could interpret the text, but made mistakes in identifying the topic, theme and main idea of the text, and their reading level was still low. The classroom environment was joyful, which allowed students to work in groups and enjoy diverse activities. On the contrary, the authors found that in cycle 2, the students' reading interest improved, self-confidence and the ability to describe texts also increased. The atmosphere of the classroom was cheerful and relaxed, just as in Cycle 1, which allowed students to carry out the tasks in class in a comfortable and stress-free manner.

Lastly, Wilarsih, Marbun, and Bunau (2018) investigated the use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension of short functional texts in a similar manner. This study was carried out as a piece of action research, including 22 students of eighth grade, 12 males and 10 females. The participants were involved in two cycles of intervention. There was a set of three focus group meetings followed by two further sessions that included planning, implementation of action, observation, and reflection. The researcher used classroom observation, checklists, video recordings, and a written test at the end of the intervention to score the students. The findings demonstrated that the students improved their reading comprehension levels, understood detailed information, differentiated the kinds of short functional texts, and their vocabulary expanded after using authentic materials.

Wilarsih, Marbun, and Bunau also pointed out that the authentic materials engaged the students because they were attractive, colorful, and illustrative. The authors demonstrated that

the students took part in classroom discussions, shared ideas, and answered the teacher's questions enthusiastically after using authentic materials in class.

Overall, as demonstrated by the studies described above, it can be stated that the use of authentic materials is a valuable tool for the teaching of reading in English classrooms. The results in each study show that authentic materials help students learn the "real" language, which improves and increases their reading skills and often enhances their motivation for reading. The information gathered and presented above is significant because it is closely related to the use of authentic materials, constituting a worthwhile tool for the development of reading comprehension and the enhancement of students' motivation in EFL classes.

Chapter IV

Methodology

The present exploratory bibliographic research includes an analysis of 15 pieces of primary research studies published between 2013 and 2018 found in a number of academic journals that were electronically examined (see Appendix 1).

According to Norris and Ortega, "exploratory bibliographic research is the systematic secondary review of accumulated primary research studies" (2006, p. 4). Therefore, the criteria for the inclusion of the studies were: 1) research papers that explored the relationship between the use of authentic materials and the development of reading comprehension, reading skills, and the enhancement of motivation; and 2) studies which involved students and teachers of English as second or foreign language.

The primary databases used to conduct the research were Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Microsoft Academic. Key terms such as "authentic material," "how authentic material improves reading," "real material and reading comprehension," "experiments about reading comprehension," "authentic material to teach English", "reading real books to learn English," "English with authentic material", and "reading authentic materials" were used for the purposes of the search.

For the purposes of the present study, the following research questions were posited:

1. To what extent does the use of authentic materials improve the reading skills of EFL students?

2. How does the use of authentic materials increase the motivation of EFL students to read?

To answer the research questions, there was not any restriction related to the design of the studies. Thus, qualitative, quantitative, and/or mixed methods were considered in this research.

The bibliographic analysis of the studies published by various authors regarding the topic was carried out. For reference, detailed data about them were stated in Appendix 2.

Chapter V

Analysis

The 15 studies were arranged in five tables in order to present the following information: the year of publication, the type of investigation (research design), the results of the intervention, the types of authentic materials, and attitudes towards the latter.

Table 1	
Publication date of primary studies	
Year of publication	No. of studies
2018	5
2017	3
2016	2
2015	2
2014	2
2013	1
Note. Total number of studies=15	

Table 1 indicates that the 15 studies related to the use of authentic materials were published between the years of 2013 and 2018. It also highlights the fact that during the last two years of the period investigated (2017-2018), the number of publications related to the topic of the present research study, grew considerably and seem to have gained more interest.

Zazulak (2017) emphasizes that authentic materials are increasingly being used in English classes today:

> There are lots of resources available to English language teachers today: from textbooks to online teaching tools, they can all aid and enrich English lessons. Many teachers also introduce authentic English material into their lessons to expose learners to the language as it is spoken in the real world (para. 1).

Easier access as well as the realization that language should be taught as it is being used in real life may, therefore, be two of the main reasons why authentic materials are given more of an emphasis, especially in English as a Foreign Language contexts, where there is limited support for authentic input outside the English classroom.

Table 2		
Type of research and context		
Categories	No. of studies	%
Type of research		
Quantitative	6	(40)
Action research	3	(20)
Case study	3	(20)
Experimental	2	(13.33)
Mixed-method approach (quantitative-qualitative)	1	(6.66)
Context of the study		
Classroom	12	(80)
Computer lab	3	(20)
Note. Total number of studies=15		

Table 2 describes the types of research that the investigators employed and the context in which they carried out their research studies. The data show that 6 research papers used quantitative analyses, 3 pieces employed action research, 3 were case studies, 2 experimental studies, and 4 followed a mixed-method approach.

In addition, the majority of the researchers conducted their investigations in a classroom environment while some investigators (Khoshbakht & Gorjian 2017; Moreno Blanco 2013) worked in computer labs.

Table 3

Reading comprehension correlations

Categories	No. of studies	%
Reading comprehension and motivation	8	(53.33)
Reading comprehension and reading skills	5	(33.33)
Reading comprehension and learning strategies	2	(13.33)
Note. Total number of studies=15		

Table 3 indicates that the researchers carried out investigations which focused on reading comprehension and its relationship with motivation, but they also looked at reading skills and learning strategies with regard to the use of authentic materials. It seems that there has been a rise in research studies linking reading comprehension and motivation: more than half of the articles analyzed this aspect. One-third of the papers dealt with the relationship of reading comprehension and the possible improvement of reading skills. Finally, about one-tenth of the research projects examined the issue of how learning strategies can affect reading comprehension.

Table 4

Types of materials

Categories	No. Studies	%
Authentic materials used		
Texts/videos/images	12	(80)
Online texts	3	(20)
Non-authentic materials used alongside		
Course books / standard materials / simplified texts	7	(53.33)
Does not specify	8	(46.66)
Note. Total number of studies=15		

Table 4 indicates that most of the researchers used a variety of printed texts as well as videos and images downloaded from the Internet because these kinds of materials are easy to get hold of and take everywhere as well as to use at short notice. The authentic printed materials were magazines, newspapers, narrative and informative texts, and images. In addition, there are three researchers (Khoshbakht & Gorjian 2017; Kusumawardani, Santosa, & Roschsantiningsih 2018; and Moreno Blanco 2013), who used authentic online materials in real time, which allowed students to combine language and ICT at a higher level. According to Yasrida, Sutarsyah, and Sukirlan (2017), authentic texts "can make the teacher more creative in preparing the materials, which can attract the students' attention, so the students are not bored while the learning process" (para. 4). The richness of the sources used suggests that most teachers prefer to employ a variety of authentic materials to engage students in class.

For the purposes of the research projects, seven authors also applied non-authentic materials (e.g., course books and standard text books, simplified texts, etc.) in order to establish the utility and effectiveness of both kinds of materials. Eight investigators did not specify the kind of non-authentic materials that they probably used as standard teaching material.

Table 5

Main findings

Categories	
Reading comprehension:	Motivation and reading interest:
Identify main ideas and details	Reading curiosity
Scanning and skimming	Social reasons
New vocabulary	Reading beyond grades
Reading skills:	Attitudes and beliefs:
Expanded knowledge	Improvement of skills acknowledged
Improved skills	Engagement with "real" material
Enjoyment of authenticity	Increased critical thinking
Reading strategies:	Challenges:
Improved reasoning skills	Unfamiliarity with the topic
Mental linkages	Need for teacher training in the area
Analyzing skills	No time to find and present authentic materials

Note. Total number of studies=15

Table 5 points out the main findings of each category plus the challenges of using authentic materials. For example, regarding reading comprehension, students were found to be able to identify main ideas and details more easily. Their skimming and scanning skills improved and the acquisition of new vocabulary became more effective.

As for reading skills, it can be stated that students improved them as a result of using authentic materials. Students enjoyed of the authenticity of the materials and their knowledge expanded when they read the materials mentioned above. Regarding reading strategies, students enhanced their reasoning skills (critical thinking), created mental linkages while reading authentic texts, and developed analyzing skills.

In relation to motivation and reading interest, reading comprehension motivated students to read by natural curiosity, namely, they were keen on reading about new and/or favorite topics. Students also read for social reasons, for example, they read texts by themselves in order to communicate with others. Another significant finding is that students did not only read texts to get a good grade, but were happy to explore and enjoy a reading experience, a typical sign of intrinsic motivation.

Concerning attitudes and beliefs, because teachers and students recognized the use of authentic materials, the process improved reading skills as well as their critical thinking; in addition, students were engaged with the authentic materials due to their meaningful content.

The challenges of using authentic materials by the teachers were that students are not always familiar with topics that these kinds of materials contain. Teachers need training with the use of authentic materials in order to employ them with students in class. Furthermore, teachers do not often have the time to look up, find, and present authentic materials in class. With regard to this consideration, Berardo (2006) stresses that "often by having unlimited access in the work place, looking for materials costs nothing, only time" (p. 62). However, "time" can be an issue in under-resourced, large classes, and this is exactly the reason why teachers do not use authentic materials more often in class.

As regards attitudes towards the use of authentic materials, the following table summarizes how students and teachers felt about the usefulness of these authentic teaching / learning tools.

Table 6

Attitudes towards authentic materials

Categories	No. of studies	%
Good	14	(93.33)
Not good/not bad	1	(6.66)
Bad	0	(0)

Note. Total number of studies=15

Table 6 presents the data regarding the attitudes towards the use of authentic materials that were utilized in class. Most of the studies indicate that researchers, teachers, and students had a positive attitude and acceptance towards authentic materials because they were perceived as containing "real" language, which helped students develop their reading skills owing to the fact that they represented natural communication. The authentic materials were also an important tool which stimulated the students' motivation and encouraged them to read on their own. Only Apsari (2014) preferred using authentic and non-authentic materials in combination in order to offer variety and gauge interest in class since the researcher did not find convincing results about the exclusive use of authentic materials.

The 15 studies were also considered in order to identify those that may have had weaknesses either in the design or the carrying out of the intervention. For example, Kuşdemir and Bulut (2018) looked at the gender differences of how male and female students process reading materials. Although the research contains interesting information, the relationships described appear to be tenuous, and this may be perceived as a weakness of the study. Another one was written by Gómez Rodriguez (2016), from whose writing it does not transpire whether he is referring to Learning Strategies (LS) or Learning Styles (LS). Since both terms are abbreviated in the same manner (LS), the lack of this kind of clarity leads us to conclude that the evaluation of this specific study is not straightforward.

Chapter VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

On the whole, authentic materials have been acknowledged and embraced by teachers
and researchers, since these materials contain real language so that students can expand their
knowledge, widen their grasp of grammatical structures, and use relevant texts and topics.

The results of the present exploratory bibliographic research show that authentic
materials constitute a powerful tool in the teaching and learning of the English language. This is
because they contain 'real', natural language and serve the purposes of genuine communication.
The use of such materials can lead to several benefits: reading skills and reading comprehension
skills as well as the level of motivation and reading autonomy have all appear to have increased.
Other benefits include the acquisition of extended vocabulary, the improved processing of data,
and the employment of specific reading strategies that can, in the long run, support extensive
reading by students on their own.

Authentic materials are attractive for students, mainly, reading texts, since these kinds of
materials contain images, interesting and engaging content, and natural language, all of which
makes students learn, take advantage of, and be in touch with the English language as it is.
Authentic materials also motivate students to read for different reasons such as enjoyment, self-
education, and information.

However, there are challenges related to the use of authentic materials in class, for
instance, topics that are not familiar for students, teachers in need of training with authentic
materials to teach reading in English classes, and the lack of time to search and use authentic

reading texts in class. These are some of the factors that should be taken into account by teachers when attempting to employ authentic materials in English classes.

As for the limitations of the present piece of research, it is to be noted that the amount of research that was looked at and processed was necessarily limited both in time and scope. The time limit has been set between 2013 and 2018, which implies that articles, Master's and PhD theses outside this time window have not been critically reviewed. The bibliographic research was specifically looking at the use of authentic materials for the purposes of reading comprehension, even though authentic materials may be used for a number of other purposes.

6.2 Recommendations

Regarding further areas of research, having looked at the 15 definitive articles, it could be said that perhaps not sufficient attention has yet been paid to the use of authentic materials and their potential benefits. The growing number of studies in this area demonstrates that language teachers in general are more inclined to use these tools than before, but these instruments are still not exploited on an everyday basis in under-resourced classrooms that would characterize the situation in Ecuador. It is not impossible, though, that language teaching methodology will catch up with the latest trends like, for example, the flipped classroom as has been systematically reviewed (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2019). In this case, however, it is essential that the authentic materials handed out to the students for processing before they come back to class are engaging and informative.

The use of authentic materials, both for teachers and students, has been an important tool in order to teach and learn reading comprehension in English classes. As the internationally authored articles attest, few educational institutes use authentic materials systematically; therefore, the authorities of the Ecuadorian educational system should look for a methodical way

of incorporating these kinds of materials in class so that students use and adapt to them. This should be a policy priority because, based on the results presented in this bibliographic research, the use of authentic materials can help learners to become more successful in their English language acquisition. Moreover, the use of such materials can motivate learners to carry on with extensive reading as part of their personal development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of journals

- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

- English Language Teaching of the Canadian Center of Science of Education (CCSE)

- International Journal of Advanced Research (IJAR)

- International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research (IJSTR)

- Journal for the Study of English Linguistics

- Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Learning

- Journal of Learning and Development

- Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences

Appendix 2: List of primary studies for analysis

Author	Year	Article	Type of research
AbdulHussein, F. R.	2014	Investigating EFL college teachers' and learners' attitudes toward using authentic reading materials in Misan	Quantitative
Aftab, A., & Salahuddin, A.	2015	Authentic texts and Pakistani learners' ESL reading comprehension skills: A mixed-method study	Quantitative-qualitative
Akbari, O., & Razavi, A.	2016	Using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms: Teachers' perspectives in EFL classes	Quantitative
Apsari, Y.	2014	The use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension	Experimental
Gómez Rodríguez, L. F.	2016	Learning Strategies: A Means to Deal with the Reading of Authentic Texts in the EFL Classroom	Case study
Islam, S., & Santoso, E.	2018	The effectiveness of using authentic texts in the teaching reading comprehension	Experimental
Khoshbakht, F., & Gorjian, B.	2017	Using authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension to EFL learners	Quantitative

Kuşdemir, Y., & Bulut, P.	2018	The relationship between elementary school students' reading comprehension and reading motivation	Quantitative
Kusumawardani, R., Santosa, R., & Roschsantiningsih, D.	2018	Explore the use of authentic materials to teach reading for junior high school	Case study
Marzban, A., & Davaji, S.	2015	The effect of authentic texts on motivation and reading comprehension of EFL students at intermediate level of proficiency	Quantitative
Moreno Blanco, M. J.	2013	Improving English Reading Abilities in 9th Graders Through the Use of Authentic Materials and Reading Tasks	Action research
Parmawati, A., & Yugafiati, R.	2017	Using authentic material to improve students' reading interest (A classroom action research in the second semester students of Stkip Siliwangi Bandung)	Action research
Rusmawaty, D., Atmowardoyo, H., Hamra, A., & Noni, N.	2018	Teachers' beliefs of authentic materials for teaching reading in Indonesian EFL classrooms	Case study

Watthanaboon, S., & Rotchu, P.	2017	Adapting reading strategies through authentic materials in EFL classroom	Quantitative
Wilarsih, Y., Marbun, R., & Bunau, E.	2018	The use of authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension of short functional texts	Action research

Source: Data compiled by the author.