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Research Article**International vs. Domestic Materials and Reading Comprehension Achievement: Evidence from EFL Learners'****¹Najme Khajvand*****²Ramin Rahimy**

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of international vs. domestic materials on Iranian pre-Intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension achievement. The main question this study tried to answer was whether there would be any difference between the means of the two participant groups in a reading comprehension achievement post-test if the groups were taught with two different teaching materials. To investigate the answer to the question, 30 Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners were selected from among a population of 100 through administering the institute proficiency test with the criteria of at least 1 standard deviation below to 1 standard deviation over the mean. Then, they were divided into two fifteen-member groups, one the experimental and the other, the control group of the study. A pretest of reading comprehension was administered to the groups. During a 10-session treatment, the participants in the experimental group received teaching reading comprehension through international material practice, while the participants in the control group received teaching reading comprehension through domestic material practice. The two groups participated in the posttest of reading comprehension achievement and the means of the two groups' posttests underwent comparison via



applying an “independent-samples” T-test. The results indicated that the participants’ reading comprehension in the experimental group had a slight outperform over the control group as a result of a different treatment.

Key Words

International Materials, Domestic Materials, Reading Comprehension



1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on reading instruction in primary, secondary and higher education (Lei 2010). Reading comprehension is the heart and goal of the reading skill, since the purpose of all reading is to gather meaning from orthography. Thus, any sort of reading can be said to have association with related materials without which a significant part of the comprehension process will be missed since no meaning will be conveyed in the absence of “text” which the representative of the materials. Many writers claim that international materials motivate learners because they are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials that are materials designed for *pedagogical* purposes. Similarly, Wilkins (1976, p.79) talked about authentic materials as being materials which were originally directed at a native-speaking audience.

Domestic materials are designed for learning purposes and the language used in them is artificial. The difference between pedagogical and authentic materials is that authentic materials are some pieces of real language by real speakers or writers for real setting to convey real messages (Maroko, 2010). Biber (1995) indicates that one of the characteristics of authentic materials is that they can boost learner's motivation and capture learner's attention (cited in Maroko, 2010). Al Azri et al. (2014) believe that authentic materials result in bringing learners closer to the culture of the target language.

While Kilickaya (2004) and Kim (2000) think that authentic materials can be used only with upper intermediate and advanced language learners, that is, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, at B1 and C1 levels, other methodologists (McNeill, 1994; Miller, 2005) believe that it can also be introduced to lower level language learners. This can be justified by the flexibility of language tasks, which could be successfully adapted to learners at any level, including beginners. Thus, for example, Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggest that beginners in learning foreign languages may even use newspaper reports as authentic language material. Authentic materials help the students bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world. Many students enroll in school to learn or improve a language-related task, such as helping a child with homework or speaking English at work. As Nunan put it, (2001, p. 212) authentic materials help students learn and use the foreign language more indicative.

Authentic texts or materials are seemingly believed to be beneficial to the language learning process, but what is less agreed is when authentic materials should be introduced and how they should be used in an EFL classroom. The central theme of this study will evaluate the extent to which authentic materials or non-authentic (domestic) materials are useful in teaching reading comprehension on Iranian Pre-Intermediate EFL learners.



2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is defined as the level of understanding of a text/message. This understanding comes from the interaction between the words that are written and how they trigger knowledge outside the text/message. It is a common problem that most high school students fail to read adequately in the foreign language. Very commonly, high school students' reading comprehension seems at a lower level and students read with less understanding than their teachers might expect them to have.

An important part of learning a foreign language is mastering learning. Mastering the fundamentals of learning not only can help language learners in learning vocabulary, acquiring basic structures, and improving the necessary linguistic and communication skills, but also help the learners to be in active control of their own learning processes.

An Examination of Second Language Reading Research and Implications for English Language Teaching Practices was done by Carrie Hill about what teachers can do to improve reading comprehension. Several different views have sought to accurately define L2 reading comprehension. A thorough literature review reveals that it is clear that there is no one kind of comprehension when it comes to reading.

Brantmeier (2003), claimed that there "is not one true comprehension, but a range of comprehension" (p. 4). Day and Park (2005), on the other hand, discussed reading comprehension in terms of several different types. In their research, they classified reading comprehension into six different modes of comprehension that can work together in parallel and/or in a linear fashion. Literal Comprehension is described as the "understanding of the straightforward meaning of the text" (Day & Park, 2005, p. 62), this means that any answers to questions coming from a text would be explicitly outlined in the reading. An example of this would be discovering specific vocabulary items and/or their meanings within a text.

Authentic vs. Non-authentic Materials

Reading tasks should provide learners with a high level of independence when reading in a foreign language in a real life context, which in turn means, using actual authentic materials. Larsen-Freeman (2000, p.129) states that one of the characteristics of communicative language teaching is using authentic materials.

The use of authentic materials in EFL classes is not new, because teachers started using them in the 1970s as a result of the spread of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Martinez (2002), defines authentic materials as the materials which are prepared for native speakers and not designed to be



used for teaching purposes. Kilickaya (2004) has another definition for authentic materials, which is "exposure to real language and use in its own community."

Young (1993) points out that a majority of the college students in her study tend to respond more favorably to an authentic passage than to the other three edited ones. Authentic materials must be used in accordance with students' ability (Baird, 2004). The text should be used to serve its original purpose as if it is used outside the classroom. For example, if students are working with health brochures, they must look for information they need, rather than a list of new words chosen by the teacher

(Jacobson, Degener, & Purcell-Gates, 2003). In this respect, Taylor (1994) states that "authenticity is not a characteristic of a text in itself: it is a feature of a text in a particular context. Therefore, a text can only be truly authentic in the context for which it was originally written."

The main advantages of using authentic materials are :

- They have a positive effect on learner motivation.
- They provide authentic cultural information.
- They provide exposure to real language.
- They relate more closely to learners' needs.
- They support a more creative approach to teaching.

Non-authentic texts present us with certain features which indicate us their artificiality such as well formed sentences all the time, unvaried language (the use of a certain tense or vocabulary); in fact, on most occasions some materials are not created for the sake of reading in itself, but for teaching a specific structure or vocabulary item. On some instances, such lack of real-like texts may provoke the reader's incapacity to face real texts, such as a newspaper, a map, or an advertisement. However, there are many teachers that tend to reject authentic materials, mainly because learners won't be able to understand them properly, the vocabulary will be too difficult and the structure will be "convulsed and the style will finish them off" (Harmer, 1998).

Theoretical Framework

This study receives impetus as its theoretical framework from at least two studies in the field: first, Soliman (2013) and second, Barekat & Nobakhti (2014). These have been discussed here in details. Most definitions of authenticity in the classroom can be reduced to the idea of something not created for use by language



learners. In general, although textbooks can contain authentic materials, they are not authentic. On the other hand, we consider a local newspaper, menu, or bus schedule as being authentic; the language is natural and generally more applicable to the needs and interests of our students. This is one of the great strengths of exposing students to authentic materials: Outside the classroom, they continue learning as they encounter additional authentic materials.

Studies point to the fact that reading comprehension forms the basis for the learning process. According to Pretorius (2002), reading is a powerful learning tool, a means of constructing meaning and acquiring new knowledge. Moreover, reading is the cornerstone of instruction for all learners regardless of their ability level because it sets the foundation for future progress and success in virtually all other facets of life (Scott 2010; Luckner & Handley 2008). Young (1993) points out that a majority of the college students in her study tend to respond more favorably to an authentic passage than to the other three edited ones.

Most teachers have a year to apply not only effective methods and approaches but also influential materials. They insist that if the learners are determined to become involved in real world with real materials they should adopt using authentic materials which scaffold learning. A lot of research has been done to prove the impact of authentic and non-authentic materials. Barekat & Nobakhti. (2014) reveal the effect of authentic and inauthentic materials in cultural awareness of learners' listening comprehension ability at intermediate level. Soliman (2013) discloses the results of a quantitative method that investigates EFL teachers' attitudes towards authentic materials in Libya. The outcomes indicate, in addition to other elements, learners' progress in learning an EFL depends on teachers' attitudes towards authentic materials too. I-Cheng et al. (2011) quote the consequences of a questionnaire that learners agree aural authentic materials increase their motivation because they can be aware of daily life and cultural values of the target community.

Non-authentic texts present us with certain features which indicate us their artificiality such as well formed sentences all the time, unvaried language (the use of a certain tense or vocabulary); in fact, on most occasions some materials are not created for the sake of reading in itself, but for teaching a specific structure or vocabulary item. On some instances, such lack of real-like texts may provoke the reader's incapacity to face real texts, such as a newspaper, a map, or an advertisement. However, there are many teachers that tend to reject authentic materials, mainly because learners won't be able to understand them properly, the vocabulary will be too difficult and the structure will be "convulsed and the style will finish them off" (Harmer, 1998). Then, certain teachers claim that different text types should be employed according to the purpose, that is to say: special texts for teaching grammar and vocabulary, and real-like ones for the reading skill in itself.



A major disadvantage of the use of authentic materials in material design is that they often use difficult language, unneeded vocabulary and complex sentence structure (Richards, 2001).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Learners who read without comprehending what they read have fewer chances of succeeding academically than learners who read with comprehension. Reading is an important skill to develop in second language acquisition. Reading plays an important role in learning a new language. The role that reading comprehension plays in the process of learning is widely Documented (Shanakan, Callison, Carriere, Duke, Pearson, Torgesen, *et al.* 2010; Luckner & Handley 2008; Coleman 2003).

Unfortunately, common readers, especially young learners, do not have a good reading comprehension in understanding English passages well and effectively. There are several problems appear in the field of education. First, students usually find difficulties in comprehending the text if they do not know a lot of the words in the text. This statement is supported by Harmer (2005, p.203), he said, if the readers do not know half of the words in a text, they will have great difficulty in understanding the text as a whole. Second, the condition is going worse because teaching reading activity which is usually conducted by teacher is sometimes still unsuitable. The teachers do not introduce appropriate activities and strategies in learning reading to the students; and Iranian EFL learners are not exceptions. As an instance from among numerous investigations in the field, Hekmatshoar & Rahimy (2021) investigated the designation of tailored curriculum on the basis of ESP learners' needs and teachers' views. They concluded that the implementation of their tailored program, which was based on learner-needs-analysis, could enhance the effectiveness of the English for General Purposes (EGP) course, compared to the standard one.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

On the basis of the problem stated here as well as the related literature reviewed, the current study sought to investigate answer to the following question:

“Do international vs. domestic materials have any effect on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension achievement?”

Accordingly, this study hypothesized that in terms of the reading comprehension skill as for the EFL) learners, international and domestic materials may not represent significant difference. Thus, the hypothesis of the study is stated as a null one as follows:

“H0: International vs. domestic materials does not have any effect on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension achievement.



3. METHODOLOGY

This study followed a two-group pretest-posttest design. For the first step 30 Iranian EFL learners out of 100 Iranian EFL learners were selected from Shokouh Institute of Chalous via administering the institute proficiency test with the criteria of at least 1 standard deviation below to 1 standard deviation over the mean. For the second step, they were divided into two groups: one experimental (N=15), and one control group (N=15).

Then, the participants in each group were given a pre-test of reading comprehension which took approximately 20 minutes to complete (plus another 10 minutes for handing out papers, giving directions and collecting them). It was a true/false reading comprehension test adopted from www.esl-lounge.com. It contained two reading comprehension passages: the first one consisted of 414 words with 10 False/True items. The second one included 237 words with 10 False/True items too. The reliability of the test was estimated ($r=0.69$) via running a KR-21. For ethical considerations, the participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and would not affect their marks. All required information was given to the participants before administering the test.

The posttest of the study was designed with the same characteristics as the pretest to avoid performance errors. It also contained two reading comprehension passages: the first one consisted of 245 words with 10 False/True items. The second one included 481 words with 10 False/True items too. The reliability of the test was estimated ($r=0.71$) via running a KR-21.

The treatment materials of this course were both domestic material and international material. The students of the experimental group received teaching reading by the passages from the book "Elementary Steps of Understanding" by Hill (2000) as an international material, while the students in the control group received teaching reading by reading passages of the 2nd and 3rd grade of secondary Iranian English school books as a domestic material.

The data obtained through English language reading comprehension tests and general Proficiency test. The collected data analyzed by SPSS version 16. The independent Sample t-test used to compare the mean scores of each of the two groups in reading comprehension test. The results was supposed to be supported by calculating Paired-Sample T-test between the pretest and posttest of each group.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS



The descriptive analysis of the obtained data has been summarized in tables 4.1 and 4.2 below:

Table 1. Descriptive analysis results of the Ind. Samples T-test of the study

	Materials	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading	International	15	16.0667	2.54858	0.65804
	Domestic	15	14.4000	2.94715	0.76095

As indicated in table (1) the number of participants were 15 in each, the experimental group (N=15) and the control group (N=15). The mean of the experimental group that used international materials practice in reading was shown to be 16.0667 as compared to the mean of the control group that used domestic materials practice that was 14.4000.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis results of the Paired-Sample T-test of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PosttestEX	16.0667	15	2.54858	0.65804
	PretestEX	13.6667	15	3.03942	0.78478
Pair 2	PosttestCON	14.4000	15	2.94715	0.76095
	PretestCON	14.8000	15	3.54965	0.91652

As indicated in table (2) the number of participants were 15 in the experimental group and the control group (N=15). The mean of the pretest scores for pair 1 was shown to be 13.6667, as compared to the posttest scores for pair 1 which was 16.0667 that shows participants in experimental group had a little progress during the treatment and the mean of the pretest scores for pair 2 was shown to be 14.8000, as compared to the posttest scores of pair 2 which was 14.4000.

Inferential Analysis of the Data

The results of the inferential analysis of the data have presented in tables (3) and (4.) below:

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test results of the study



		t-test for Equality of Means (Critical T=2.048)		
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading	Equal variances assumed	1.657	28	0.0109
	Equal variances not assumed	1.657	27.429	0.0109

As indicated in table (3), the T-value of the study calculated equal variances assumed of reading comprehension achievement that was 1.657 (tobs= 1.657) and the degree of freedom was 28 (df=28). And the T-value of the study calculated the equal variances not assumed that was 1.657 (tobs=1.657) and the degree of freedom was 27.429 (df=27.429). In both observed T was less than critical T (critical T=2.048) that shows the hypothesis is supported and level of significance in both was less than 0.05 so the effect of variable was shown correctly.

Table 4. Paired Sample t-test results of the study

		Paired Differences (critical T=2.145)				
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PosttestEX - PretestEX	1.54919	0.40000	1.9.000	14	0.000
Pair 2	PosttestCON - PretestCON	1.18322	0.30551	1.309	14	0.021

According to table 4.4, in pair one, the experimental group had a slight progress after the treatment (t = 1.9.000), but in pair 2, the control group had no progress after using the domestic material (t = 1.309). The hypothesis of the study stating that the international vs. domestic materials have no effect on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension achievement was supported. Although the degree of difference between the means of the two participant groups obtained from administering the reading comprehension posttests of the study was not significant, it could depict that international materials might play a more effective role which of course need further investigations. However on the whole, the hypothesis was supported because the observed T was less than critical T.

The main concern of this study was to test the assumption that, whether reading materials practices can bring any difference on the improvement of reading comprehension achievement of Iranian EFL learners. This investigation provided support for international vs. domestic materials that have no effect on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension achievement, although the experimental group had a little progress on the posttest but it was not a significant improvement on the learners' reading comprehension so the hypothesis of the study is supported and also because the observed T was less than



critical T. A number of advocates of international material encompass Freeman and Holden (1986), Swaffar (1985), and King (1990), pointed out that international material could reduce learner motivation because they are too difficult (Williams 1983, Morrison, 1989 and Gilmore, 2007).

Looking through English as a foreign/ second language EFL /ESL literature, the researcher found a large body of references encouraging the idea of exploiting international materials in the process of language teaching. Such strong and positive attitudes toward using such materials could be attributed to the many advantages in improving and developing learners, language proficiency. Moreover international materials work on intensifying and developing learners, second language motivation. Additionally, there has been an endless argument from many researchers and scholars to integrate international materials because of its potentials in bridging the enormous gap between classrooms used materials and the real world. A significant aim of incorporating international materials is enhancing students L2 communicative competence. There is an urgent need to prepare EFL learners for real life communications at the current time than three decades ago.

Kilickaya (2004) believes that, using international materials increase and develop learners' motivation because such materials offer students a feeling that they are learning the real language. McNeil (1994) agrees with Kilickaya (2004) and believes in that, international materials grant learners such a sense. Otte (2006) indicated that student motivation develops through using such materials in language teaching. Thanjaro, (2000) as well, observed an improvement in learners' self-satisfaction and motivation after using international materials inside classroom.

The most common criticism which against teacher made or domestic materials is to do with their quality. At the surface level, domestic materials may seem ragged and unprofessional next to those produced by professionals. Some other problems are lack of experience and lack of clear instructions and poor choice of text.

Based on the finding of this research, the following pedagogical implications might be presented. Reading provides the foundation for successful literacy (Lane & Mercer, 1999). Sources of reading difficulties for many readers can be biological, instructional, or even environmental (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, as cited in Coiro, 2003). All readers who experience reading difficulties have comprehension problems for one reason or another. For many children, these comprehension problems might arise because of inaccurate or inefficient decoding and word recognition processes. For others, comprehension problems might be the result of deficiencies in language, cognitive, or reasoning processes. Moreover, attentional and motivational



factors also affect comprehension. This is because some readers could comprehend simple words and sentences but have difficulty understanding longer texts (Laing & Kamhi, 2002).

Miller (2003) has made a comparison between international and domestic materials, there are three comparisons; first, international materials are produced for real life communication purposes for example a newspaper article, which may contain false starts and incomplete sentences that may bring ambiguity to the students' understanding. For example, the title of the newspaper article usually is an incomplete phrase that can bring different connotations if it is read in different enunciation and word stress. However, international materials are useful in improving the communicative aspects of the language which can develop the students' motivation in using the targeted language outside the classroom. On the other hand, Miller believes that, domestic materials are products specially designed for learning purposes and the language used in them, are artificial. The sentences in the texts are grammatically correct, leaving the students with no mistake or ambiguity in understanding the subject matter. Thus, domestic materials are very useful in teaching grammar.

Gilmore's definition of international materials is similar to Morrow's (1977, cited by Gilmore, p. 98), both believe that, international materials contain 'real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort'. The texts generally produced by native speakers could be comprehended rather effortlessly by native speakers. Gilmore also believes that, international materials had been used for language learning several decades ago and have regained their popularity due to the rise of the communicative approach (Gilmore, 2007).

5. CONCLUSION

The study showed that reading is important in the learning context not only because it affords readers independent access to information in an increasingly information-driven society, but more importantly because it is a powerful learning tool, a means of constructing meaning and acquiring new knowledge. Students need to be good readers in order to be able to "read to learn". If students have not properly mastered this learning tool, then their potential for success in the learning context is handicapped from the start.



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