
【研究論文】

Benefits of Extensive Reading of Authentic Materials for Beginner English Learners: An Applied Linguistic Analysis

英語初級者を対象としたオーセンティック教材多読の効用：応用言語学的分析

井上 信恵
Nobue INOUE

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the efficacy of extensive reading of authentic materials by beginner English learners. Accordingly, a qualitative case study, one of the most commonly used research methods in applied linguistics, was conducted with a CEFR A2 level English learner. As the participant was planning to study abroad, she selected authentic materials related to her interests, including brochures and websites published by her prospective host institution. Data collected from the participant's reflective journal and semi-structured interviews were analyzed through content analysis, another common research method in applied linguistics. Key findings involved two main themes: "The participant was motivated to learn English and improved her English." (Theme 1) and "The participant's perceptions of extensive reading of authentic materials were positive because the activity helped her develop subject-specific knowledge." (Theme 2). These results suggest that extensive reading of authentic materials would benefit beginner English learners in terms of general improvement in English and development of knowledge specific to their interests.

Keywords: authentic materials, extensive reading, English beginners, authentic materials for English beginners, applied linguistics research

本研究の目的は、英語初級者へのオーセンティック教材多読の効用性を調査することであり、CEFR A2レベルの英語学習者を対象として、応用言語学において最も普及している研究手法の一つである質的ケーススタディを実施した。オーセンティック教材には、当該学習者が参加予定の留学プログラムを提供する教育機関による、パンフレットやウェブサイトが選択された。データは当該学習者の振り返り日誌と半構造化面接によって回収し、応用言語学で普及している研究手法である内容分析によってデータ分析を行ったところ、2つの結果が明らかとなった。「当該学習者は英語学習への意欲を高め、英語力を向上させた」、及び「当該学習者はオーセンティック教材の多読によって自身の興味に関連する知識を深めたため、好意的な見解を見せた」である。これらの結果から、オーセンティック教材の多読は英語力向上、及び興味に関連した知識定着という観点から、英語初級学

習者に有益であることが示唆された。

キーワード: オーセンティック教材、多読、英語初級者、英語初級者のためのオーセンティック教材、応用言語学研究

Authentic materials, i.e., those that are not originally developed for pedagogical purposes, are believed to enhance students' general skills and to build confidence through exposure to practical and natural examples of language use (Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Shepherd, n.d.). Understanding authentic materials would also motivate students, who would come to feel they had 'conquered' a real text (Shepherd, n.d.). Harmer (2007) thus suggested that teachers should encourage students to read authentic texts as much as possible to succeed in the reading activity (Harmer, 2007). In other words, it is important for teachers to encourage students to read extensively rather than intensively because the volume of reading that learners undertake is the best indicator of their improvement (Harmer, 2007).¹

Reading is also believed to be useful for general language acquisition, including vocabulary development and improvement in writing (Harmer, 2007). Although reading is classified as a receptive skill in terms of the manner in which language is used (Richards & Schmidt, 2013), the fact that reading is receptive does not indicate that it is passive (Thornbury, 2006). Rather, reading is an active, or even interactive process, which employs a range of cognitive skills, including decoding words and syntax, and drawing upon discourse and schematic knowledge as well as on immediate contextual information (Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Thornbury, 2006). These findings suggest that reading authentic materials extensively would help students to improve their overall language skills.

Authentic materials, however, could be quite challenging for language learners, raising the potential for frustration if students are unable to understand assigned texts (Stanley, n.d.). Consequently, beginners would likely be limited to read relatively simple materials, such as menus, timetables, and signs (Harmer, 2007; Shepherd, n.d.). Given that teachers should allow students to select materials that are interesting to them to promote engagement (Harmer, 2007; Stanley, n.d.), students who are restricted to reading similar types of simple materials might lose interest in reading authentic texts. Indeed, motivation is a pivotal determinant of success or failure in second language learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Thornbury, 2006), and increasing students' motivation to read is fundamental to the success of extensive reading (Stanley, n.d.). In this regard, teachers of beginner students may encounter challenges in incorporating

1 In language teaching, intensive reading refers to detailed focus on the construction of shorter texts, which may be determined by students' majors, while extensive reading allows learners to choose longer texts depending on their interests with more focus on pleasure (Harmer, 2007; Stanley, n.d.; Thornbury, 2006; Vaezi, n.d.).

authentic materials into an extensive reading program.

Nevertheless, it is believed that students can still deal with material above their own ability level, provided that their teacher's assistance is available (Harmer, 2007). While extensive reading is often treated as an out of class activity, the learning location does not necessarily distinguish it from intensive reading, which is often done in classrooms (Harmer, 2007). Thus, it is possible that beginner students could manage and completely benefit from authentic materials, selected according to interest, through extensive reading with the support of teachers.

Therefore, this paper investigates the scope of impact of extensive reading of authentic materials on the development of the English language skills of novice students.

Methods

Participant

The single participant in this study was a female fourth-year student enrolled at a private university in Japan. As she was planning to study in the U.K. for approximately six months, she attended the university's study abroad preparatory seminar to improve her English skills before her departure. Her CEFR level was A2 at the start of the seminar.

Materials

Two data collection methods were employed for triangulation purposes (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2004; Riazi, 2016): the participant's reflective journal and semi-structured interviews.

Study Design

To understand the participant's perceptions and draw applicable conclusions, a qualitative case study was adopted (Kumar, 2014; Moule & Goodman, 2009; Riazi, 2016). This is a commonly used research method in applied linguistics (Dörnyei, 2007; Riazi, 2016.)

Procedure

The participant first selected authentic materials relevant to the study abroad program she was planning to attend, such as brochures and a website published by the host institution. She read two to three pages per week during the six months from April to September 2019, while attending the study abroad preparatory seminar. As these materials were challenging for her, she was allowed to ask any questions concerning them at the seminar. Additionally, she was asked to summarize the assigned texts in Japanese to ascertain if she actually understood them and was engaging in reading activities, such as reading aloud and slash reading, to reinforce

understanding.

The participant wrote in her reflective journal after each seminar session (17 entries) in Japanese, and she attended semi-structured interviews before and after studying abroad (two interviews). Interviews were conducted entirely in Japanese and audio-recorded for later transcription. Both the reflective journal and transcriptions were translated from Japanese to English for analysis. The data were subjected to content analysis, a qualitative research method typically employed in applied linguistics (Dörnyei, 2007). The procedures for content analysis employed in this study were based on Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017).

Results

As illustrated in Table 1, two major themes were identified from the three sources (the reflective journal (RJ), the first semi-structured interview (SSI-1), and the second semi-structured interview (SSI-2)).

Table 1
Two Themes with Codes and Categories

Codes	Categories	Themes
Lacking vocab, Want to learn vocab, Want to read, Need to study English	Motivation to learn English	1. The participant was motivated to learn English and improved her English.
Accustomed to reading, Guessing vocab, Improved vocab, Improved reading, Improved listening	Improvement of English	
Learned about host institution, Learned about British culture	Development of knowledge	2. The participant's perceptions of extensive reading of authentic materials were positive because the activity helped her develop knowledge related to her interests.
Enjoyable, Good, Useful	Positive perceptions	

Theme 1

The results indicate that extensive reading of authentic materials motivated the participant to learn English and improved her English.

More specifically, the participant indicated that she was motivated to learn English because, while reading materials she realized that she was lacking vocabulary: "...I'm lacking vocabulary to understand texts, so I want to learn words everyday and I hope to read English more smoothly by reading a lot of English texts" (RJ). She also acknowledged the necessity of studying English: "I've come to think that I truly need to study English very hard...I've found that English is much harder than I expected" (SSI-1).

Furthermore, she mentioned that she "got used to reading English texts" (RJ), thanks to the

extensive reading activity. In particular, she reported that her ability to guess vocabulary in context became refined over time, leading to an improved vocabulary overall:

“By reading a lot of English texts and focusing on reading, I really feel that I’ve become able to read English without using a dictionary...While looking at a vocabulary book, I just feel like memorizing words and end up having trouble remembering what they mean when I actually encounter them in the text, but while reading a text, I encounter the same words in different texts multiple times and I came to guess the meaning from the context, so I think I was able to learn English words naturally” (SSI-1).

Consequently, she stated that her reading skills had improved: “Considering the fact that I’ve become able to read English in such a short time, I think this is thanks to the fact that I was given a lot of assignments to read extensively at home” (SSI-1), and “I had to read an English textbook while studying abroad, and I was able to read and understand it without difficulties thanks to the fact that I practiced a lot of reading before my departure” (SSI-2). She also reported a marked improvement in her listening skills: “I now sometimes understand a movie without subtitles...I couldn’t understand a movie at all before doing extensive reading, and now I can understand them even a little, so I guess that my English has improved by reading a lot” (SSI-1).

Theme 2

The results indicate that the participant had a positive perception of reading authentic materials extensively because she had developed knowledge relevant to her interests.

Initially, the participant explained that reading a lot of authentic materials helped her develop knowledge prior to studying abroad:

“...I was also able to learn more about the host institution before my departure...By reading its brochure, for example, I was able to imagine what kind of study abroad life I would have and what kind of lessons I would take there...Because I read about the host institution a lot, while studying English, I was also able to obtain information necessary for my studying abroad before my departure...” (SSI-1).

Moreover, the participant explained that she “was able to learn British culture in English” (RJ) by reading materials published by the host institution.

Consequently, it was found that the participant’s perceptions of the activity were quite

positive. She felt that reading authentic materials was “enjoyable” (RJ). Specifically, she mentioned, “...It was very good to be able to learn about the host institution while studying English...it was very useful for my preparation for studying abroad...” (SSI-1); and “...I developed knowledge by reading materials related to my studying abroad, and that knowledge became useful during my stay in the U.K...For example, when the staff explained at the orientation, I was able to understand what they meant instantly” (SSI-2).

Discussion

The two themes identified suggest that reading authentic materials extensively would be beneficial for English learners, as it would help them increase their motivation to learn English, improve their English, and develop subject-specific knowledge while studying English.

Theme 1 indicates that those who engage in extensive reading of authentic materials will be more motivated to learn English, as suggested by Shepherd (n.d), while helping them improve their English, which is in line with Richards & Schmidt (2013), Harmer (2007), and Shepherd (n.d.). In other words, this underscores the concept that extensive reading of authentic materials is effective for English learners due to its positive effects on motivation for developing their English skills (Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Thornbury, 2006).

Moreover, Theme 2 indicates that reading authentic materials extensively can be favorable for English learners, as they thereby develop knowledge relevant to their interests. The participant of this study selected authentic materials concerning her study abroad program, such as the host institution’s brochures. Thanks to the extensive reading of these materials, she enhanced her knowledge regarding studying abroad, which was particularly useful during her time in the U.K. Indeed, multiple authors recommend a reading activity for those studying abroad (e.g., Cox, 1996; Kitao, 1993; Sachau, Brasher, & Fee, 2010). Considering that authentic materials are likely to reflect the distinct variety of situations students will face in an English-speaking environment (Shepherd, n.d.), authentic materials ought to help encourage and motivate students who are planning to study abroad.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of extensive reading of authentic materials for beginner English students. Even though authentic materials may be difficult for beginner learners, it is suggested that their efforts to read these texts can be facilitated by the assistance of a teacher.

To fulfill the research objectives, the study employed a qualitative case study and content analysis, common research methods in applied linguistics. The case study investigated a CEFR

A2 level female participant, who selected authentic materials relevant to her planned study abroad program in the U.K., including the host institution's brochures and website. As the materials were challenging for her, she had access to the assistance of a relevant teacher in the context of a preparatory seminar for students intending to study abroad.

Two themes were identified: "The participant was motivated to learn English and improved her English." (Theme 1) and "The participant's perceptions of extensive reading of authentic materials were positive because the activity helped her develop subject-specific knowledge." (Theme 2). These findings suggest that extensive reading of authentic materials is beneficial for beginner English learners in terms of their improvement in English and development of knowledge relevant to their interests. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that teachers incorporate extensive reading in their beginner level English classes.

Although these findings suggest that extensive reading is effective for beginner students, three major limitations merit consideration. First, the two themes identified did not allow conclusions to be drawn on the role of teachers in supporting extensive reading activity. Thus, it is unclear if the teacher's support for extensive reading impacted the participant's perceptions. Future studies might involve comparisons of extensive reading with and without a teacher's assistance. Second, the data were collected from a single participant. Due to the characteristics of the participant, this study focused solely on authentic materials relevant to studying abroad. Therefore, future studies could collect data from a wider range of participants with a variety of interests. Finally, content analysis may be a subjective approach (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017), and the data could be open to alternative interpretations. Future studies might involve reanalyzing the same data and/or having multiple researchers analyze the data to obtain more objective interpretations.

References

- Cox, T. B. (1996). Pre-departure training for short study abroad programs. *The Annual Report of Researches of Soai University*, 12(2), 67–88. Retrieved from <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1074/00000933/>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Retrieved from <https://play.google.com/books>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Erlingsson, C., & Brysiewicz, P. (2017). A hands-on guide to doing content analysis. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 7(3), 93–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.afjem.2017.08.001>
- Harmer, J. (2007). *How to teach English*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Kitao, S. K. (1993). Preparation for and results of a short-term overseas study program in the United States. *Bulletin of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture*, 10, 107–118. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED370381>
- Kumar, R. (2014) *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (4th ed.). Retrieved from <https://play.google.com/books>

- Moule, P., & Goodman, M. (2009). *Nursing research: An introduction*. Retrieved from <https://play.google.com/books>
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2004). *Nursing research: Principles and methods* (7th ed.). Retrieved from https://books.google.co.jp/books?id=5g6VttYWnjUC&dq=nursing+research+principles+and+methods&lr=&source=gbs_navlinks_s
- Riazi, A. M. (2016). *The Routledge encyclopedia of research methods in applied linguistics*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. W. (2013). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Sachau, D., Brasher, N., & Fee, S. (2010). Three models for short-term study abroad. *Journal of Management Education*, 34(5), 645–670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562909340880>
- Shepherd, S. (n.d.). *Using authentic materials*. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/using-authentic-materials>
- Stanley, G. (n.d.). *Extensive reading*. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/using-authentic-materials>
- Thornbury, S. (2006). *An A-Z of ELT*. Oxford: Macmillan.
- Vaezi, S. (n.d.). *Theories of reading 2*. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/theories-reading-2>