

SỬ DỤNG NGUỒN TÀI LIỆU BÁO CHÍ NGUYÊN BẢN TRONG GIẢNG DẠY KỸ NĂNG ĐỌC TIẾNG ANH

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Sử dụng nguồn tài liệu báo chí nguyên bản trong giảng dạy kỹ năng đọc tiếng Anh là vấn đề thu hút sự quan tâm rất lớn của các nhà nghiên cứu. Tuy nhiên việc lựa chọn và ứng dụng các nguồn tài liệu này trong lớp học đọc tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ (EFL) vẫn chưa được quan tâm đúng mức. Mục đích của bài viết là xem xét tính giá trị của nguồn báo nguyên bản trong giảng dạy kỹ năng đọc, phân tích các quan điểm khác nhau về tài liệu đích thực tương ứng với các phong cách ngôn ngữ khác nhau, những đặc điểm ngôn ngữ, văn hoá, liên quan tới loại tài liệu này và ảnh hưởng của chúng đối với người học. Cùng với đó đề xuất các nguyên tắc lựa chọn tài liệu, tổ chức giảng dạy có tính tới các đặc thù tâm lý của sinh viên và đặc điểm ngôn ngữ văn hoá Việt Nam có thể ảnh hưởng đến việc nắm bắt các tài liệu này, giúp người học rèn luyện kỹ năng đọc hiểu tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: tài liệu nguyên bản, sử dụng bài báo, giảng dạy kỹ năng đọc, dạy và học tiếng Anh như ngoại ngữ.

Using authentic materials in teaching English reading skill has attracted considerable interest from researchers. However, scant attention has been drawn to the selection and application of such materials in EFL reading classes. The study aims at examining the values of authentic materials in teaching reading skill. It first analyzes various opinions on authentic materials in accordance with different language styles, and then investigates linguistic and cultural features of such materials and their effects on learners. It then recommends some principles to select materials and organize teaching activities to facilitate learning by taking into consideration their psychological characteristics and the cultural and linguistic features of Vietnamese language that may affect students' comprehension of these materials.

Key words: authentic materials, using newspapers, teaching reading, EFL teaching and learning.

USING ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS AS AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN EFL READING CLASSES

1. Introduction

English as a foreign language has received growing attention in Vietnam as a means of communication in both workplace and society (Trang & Baldauf Jr, 2007). This increasing interest and

popularity has inspired EFL learners in Vietnam to find ways to improve their use of English in real-life contexts as a means of both communication and information sharing. A number of English language research studies were conducted to identify and examine various methods for supporting EFL teachers and learners, and among the proposed methods identified,

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the use of authentic materials was found to be of great help in supporting both language and learning attitudes amongst students (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014; Harmer, 2008). After reviewing an extensive number of EFL research articles, it was noted that although there are a variety of different types of authentic materials available for use in an EFL teaching context, newspapers are often one of the most preferred resources chosen by EFL teachers in Middle Eastern and Asian contexts (Ali, 2013; Hong, 2007). These research articles note that newspapers are an appropriate teaching and learning resource because of their linguistic and cultural contents.

Whilst the use of newspapers as an authentic resource has been recommended by many EFL researchers as a reliable and effective method in EFL teaching, in Vietnam's tertiary education contexts, the use of newspapers is not a common practice. Moreover, there has been little discussion about how to apply English newspapers as an authentic resource in the EFL reading class. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research addressing this current practice, especially in the context of language teaching and learning in Vietnam. It is the intention of this research paper to contribute to this gap in our understanding of these issues.

2. Definition of authentic materials

Authenticity is not an emerging term in the field of language teaching and learning. In fact, the concept of 'authenticity' can be traced back as far as 1899 when Henry Sweet advocated its application as a teaching material (as cited in Gilmore,

2007). Later, the term was widely promoted with the development of the Communicative Language Teaching approach in the 1970s (Badger & MacDonald, 2010). An authentic approach to language teaching and learning is still widely applied to assist language students.

As an essential part of the authentic approach to teaching and learning languages, authentic materials have received much attention from researchers to investigate its meaning and usages in language classes. Firstly, the definitions of 'authentic materials' are open to different interpretations. According to Morrow (as cited in Mishan, 2005), authentic materials are produced 'by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a message of some sort' (p. 11). While Morrow defines authentic materials through their author and intention, Harmer (2008) and Peacock (1997) put a stronger emphasis on the targeted audience and purposes of authentic materials in which these real texts are designed for native speakers, not specifically for language learners. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) combine all three elements, stating authentic materials are designed by speakers of a language to others of the same language in order to complete communicative purposes. This paper will assume Liddicoat and Scarino (2013)'s definition because of its comprehensiveness.

After considering the above literature and the discussions of the definitions and meanings, it is the position of this research paper that authentic materials can be understood as any kind of materials taken from real-life language use, serving the need for language interaction among

people. Therefore, the source for authentic materials is infinite. They can come from spoken forms such as videos, songs or TV programs (Berardo, 2006). They can be realias such as menus, maps or tickets, or objects such as models, products or equipment. They can be in written forms such as magazines or newspapers. They may also originate from printed versions. In addition, the electronic or online sources of authentic materials have become very popular thanks to the development of technology.

3. The use of English newspapers as authentic materials in language classes

Newspapers have been regarded as one of the most effective resources for obtaining a wide range of information (Elmadwi & Shepherd, 2015). The in-depth coverage of various social, cultural and political incidents that are presented in newspapers, is of benefit to readers who wish to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world they live in. While printed materials date very quickly, online newspapers are always updated, easily accessed and provide visual stimulation (Berardo, 2006). As a commonly used source of authentic materials, newspaper articles, especially online newspaper articles, have long been used in language classes (Luque-Agulló & González-Fernández, 2012). The practice of using online newspapers, therefore, has been investigated by a number of researchers, providing valuable evidence into their effectiveness in EFL classes.

3.1. Effects of using English newspapers in language classes

A large and growing body of research

literature has discussed the advantages of using newspaper articles in language classrooms. For example, Beresova (2015) case study discusses the effectiveness of using journalistic authentic materials in developing the language acquisition skills and cultural awareness of English-major students. In this research, *The Guardian Weekly* newspaper is introduced to the class along with vocabulary and comprehension worksheets and questions that focused on developing different aspect of language learning.

In terms of developing their cultural awareness, Beresova's (2015) investigation identified that the students responded positively towards the authentic texts as a learning resource, mainly because of their interest in the topics covered, its relevance to the country of language origin, and also because of the wide range of topics offered in the newspaper that they could choose from compared to their course book. Beresova's (2015) analysis also found out that the students showed significant improvements in vocabulary learning of several researched aspects.

Hong (2007) conducted a study on the effectiveness of using *VOA News* articles along with audios to teach speaking skills to third-year English major students at Hong Duc University, Vietnam. The positive results of this research included the increased confidence of learners in speaking, improvement in vocabulary use, and elevated interests in speaking lessons.

Despite these established benefits, there are challenges that have been identified. Several recent studies have

found that using newspaper articles may be too challenging for language learners. As in the argument against the use of authentic materials generally, cultural bias and inappropriate topic choice have been identified as a weakness in reading newspapers, which some researchers claim limits the effectiveness of using newspapers in EFL classes (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Moreover, according to Al-Jarf (2008, p. 2), the 'syntactic complexity and semantic implicitness' of the language used, are among the major difficulties in processing news headlines and news articles by EFL learners. These limitations are also said to cause confusion and demotivation among EFL learners (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014). In response to these arguments, I believe it is important when considering the use of authentic materials, to pay close attention to the selection and implementation of English newspapers in the EFL lesson planning stage and that many of these issues can be addressed through the teaching process.

3.2. Selecting and implementing English newspapers in EFL reading classes

As a result of reviewing the research literature above, it is considered in this paper that newspapers are valuable sources of authentic materials and their use in the EFL classroom has the potential to help improve academic and communicative competencies among EFL learners in Vietnam. As a result of this position, and the criticisms discussed in the literature about the limitations and potential problems arising from using newspapers in this context, it is necessary

to discuss how to select and implement this resource in EFL reading classes.

In order to select the authentic materials, several sets of guidelines have been proposed. Nuttall (cited in Berardo, 2006) discusses three factors that need to be considered for the selection of appropriate newspaper articles including suitability, exploitability and readability. Suitability refers to the appropriateness of the selected topic and its relation to students' age, skill level, interest and knowledge of the subject matter. The exploitability deals with how the authentic texts are relevant to the aims, objectives and overall purpose of the lessons. Finally, the readability is considered the difficulty level of the texts in term of their structure, grammar, vocabulary and/or length. McDonough and Shaw (2012) use another four categories to guide the selection of materials in which it is necessary to refer to its usability, generalizability, adaptability and flexibility. Other samples of different criterion are also clearly explained in Reinders and Lewis (2006). However, no matter what checklist is applied, it is important to emphasize the pedagogical purposes of the materials and what students can learn from these samples of real-world language (Berardo, 2006).

After the selection of the texts, it is the tasks, or lesson plans, that need to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, it is vital to refer back to the essence of teaching reading in EFL classes, as well as the challenges posed in the use of newspapers. Reading lessons, with the use of newspapers, should follow the three stages of teaching reading in EFL: pre-

reading, while reading and post-reading. As EFL students are still immature in their language competence and background knowledge, pre-reading activities need to be designed to activate their know-how and fill up the linguistic and socio-cultural inadequacies. Teachers need to spend sufficient time to guide learners to understand the articles and help them perform tasks while reading. Finally, post-reading is a good chance to review the lessons and to check if the students have obtained what they need from the reading.

With regards to the characteristics of newspaper articles, there are four suggested components that can be exploited to design a reading lesson (Roberts, 2014). The first part is the organization of the authentic texts themselves. It can be posed as a challenge because newspaper texts, which often have very short paragraphs, are not necessarily linked clearly to the surrounding texts. In some cases, the links are not clear enough and the students are not aware that the first paragraph of a newspaper article usually sums up the whole story. Secondly, newspaper headlines can also be hard to decipher because they often use puns or cultural references. This is particularly true of tabloid newspapers, where the wording is often exaggerated to hook readers.

Thirdly, if students are going to work with news articles, they may need some help and training in understanding the features of the genre. For example, the headline is frequently confusing, but there is often a sub-headline to clarify the story or the first paragraph usually summarizes

the story. This first paragraph nearly always contains what journalists call the 5 Ws (who, what, when, where and why). Getting students to try and find the 5 Ws, just using the headline and first paragraph, is a way of leading them into the rest of the text, which usually just adds detail to these main points.

Another consideration is the use of idioms, especially in the tabloids. With a short article, students may be able to underline any idioms they find and look them up. They could then try and rewrite the article (or a section of it) without any idioms, putting the original idioms in a list below. If the students have read different texts, they could then swap and ask their partner to try and rewrite the article using the list of idioms given.

The comprehension tasks with the following components, therefore, need to be designed to help students demonstrate their understanding and teachers assist their students' reading progress. It may take time for teachers to design such tasks that suit learners' level and aims of the lesson. Especially in the context of Vietnam where the use of newspapers as an authentic learning sources is not commonly addressed in class setting, its applications needs to be thoroughly accentuated to utilize its effectiveness in EFL teaching and learning.

4. Conclusion

As a result of this research paper, newspaper articles have been shown to be an effective pedagogical resource in EFL classrooms. After reviewing many research projects conducted in non-English speaking countries, it is

determined that the use of English newspapers in EFL reading classes is appropriate for the overall aims of improving EFL students' engagement in reading classes, supporting EFL students' cultural understanding and awareness of the target language, and supporting EFL students' reading comprehension skills. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that more research on this authentic approach should be undertaken in the future so that the results can be generalized and applied in various language classrooms.

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