

*Effectiveness of Real-Life based Passages on the Development of Reading Comprehension in tenth Grade Students at the “National Institute of Palacaguina Rodolfo Castillo” during the first semester 2017.*

María Zoneyda Calderón Dávila<sup>1</sup>

Kenia Elizabeth González Olivas<sup>2</sup>

Mariel Omara Sánchez Talavera<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT**

Reading comprehension can be really challenging to master, especially for learners of English as a second language (ESL). The goal of reading is to derive meaning and comprehend what we read. The focus of this study was on whether or not learners exposed to real-life based passages would improve their reading comprehension by learning with authentic materials as opposed to passages from textbooks. In order to achieve this goal, twelve students from a government-run secondary school were selected as participants. The school is located in the city of Palacaguina, Department of Madriz, Nicaragua. The study was carried out over three weeks (6 visits). The data for this research was gathered through observation guides, interviews to the students and an interview that was directly applied to the teacher. The results reflected that the use of real-life based passages as one type of authentic materials is of great significance to the personal and cognitive development of learners of a second language. It has been proved that the use of authentic materials along with engaging teaching strategies will result in significant learning of the language, particularly in the enhancement of the reading skill.

**KEY TERMS:** effectiveness, reading comprehension, passages, real life, authentic material.

---

<sup>1</sup> Egresada de Ciencias de la Educación con mención en Inglés. UNAM- Managua, FAREM- Estelí. Correo electrónico: calderonm31@yahoo.com.

<sup>2</sup> Egresada de Ciencias de la Educación con mención en Inglés. UNAM- Managua, FAREM- Estelí. Correo electrónico: kenelygonzalez711@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Egresada de Ciencias de la Educación con mención en Inglés. UNAM- Managua, FAREM- Estelí. Correo electrónico: sancheztalaveram@gmail.com

## **INTRODUCTION**

This research is focused on the effectiveness of using authentic materials to improve reading comprehension in tenth grade students. These kinds of materials have proven to make students feel motivated and interested in the English class. Authentic passages could make the content easier to understand and therefore have a positive effect in their learning process.

As part of the scope of this research, we have created some authentic materials for the English class that is real-life based passages, whose primary sources of information were real people, interviewed and recorded on three different topics. In this document, we present the passages that were created based on interviews and how these passages were integrated into lesson plans in conjunction with motivational strategies for the development of reading comprehension in real English classes.

The main objective to fulfill with this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the real-life passages for the development of reading comprehension in tenth-grade students at the National Institute “Rodolfo Castillo” during the first semester 2017.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **English as a Second Language ESL**

As an essential piece of our language experience, readings can be of great value to foreign language teaching which can propel language learning. According to Richard Lane (2009), the English language is now closer to being the world's second language than any other since the dominance of Latin in Western civilization. Today, English is the official or first language most popular around the world.

The best estimates are that 50,000,000 primary school students and 75,000,000 secondary school students are currently studying English as a second language. To this can be added millions more who are studying English at the adult and college/university levels. Learning a new language takes time and dedication. Once learners make it, being fluent in a second language offers numerous benefits and opportunities. Learning a second language is exciting and beneficial at all ages. It offers practical, intellectual and many aspirational benefits.

## **Reading**

According to Mikulecky (2008), “Reading is a conscious and unconscious thinking process. The reader applies many strategies to reconstruct the meaning that the author is assumed to have intended. The reader does this by comparing information in the text to his or her background knowledge and prior experience”.

Reading is a number of interactive processes between the reader and the text, in which readers use their knowledge to build, to create, and to construct meaning. Reading means different things to different people, for some it is recognizing written words, while for others it is an opportunity to teach pronunciation and practice speaking. However reading always has a purpose. It 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. The reason for reading depends very much on the purpose for reading.

## **Reading Comprehension**

According to Wallace (2001), most of reading process can be seen mostly as a cognitive activity. Besides, it gives greater prominence to the students’ “ affective in engaging themselves into the text. Regarding the cognitive process and students’ engagement to the text, the terms of reading comprehension become a vital component in reading process. “Reading comprehension can be described as a complex process which needs readers active thinking in constructing meaning to get deep understanding to the concepts and information displayed from the text”.

## **Authentic Materials**

According to Calpro (2007), authentic materials are print, video, and audio materials students encounter in their daily lives, such as change-of address forms, job applications, menus, voice mail messages, radio programs, and videos. Authentic materials are not created specifically to be used in the classroom, but they make excellent learning tools for students precisely because they are authentic.

## **The Use Of Authentic Reading Materials In The Classroom**

One of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to “expose” the learner to as much real language as possible. Even if the classroom is not a “real-life”

situation, authentic materials do have a very important place within it. It has been argued that by taking a text out of its original context, it loses its authenticity: “As soon as texts, whatever their original purpose, are brought into classrooms for pedagogic purposes they have, arguably, lost authenticity.” (Wallace C. , 2000) Even if true, the learner is still exposed to real discourse and not the artificial language of course textbooks, which tend not to contain any incidental or improper examples.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted during the first semester of the 2017 school year. Because of the nature of the data to be gathered, this research worked following a qualitative design. We aimed to analyze the perspectives and points of view of the participants in the selected sample regarding authentic reading passages and evaluate our results with the existent literature on the topic. The methodology was addressed to an educational range, tenth grade of secondary school. The universe of this research was of 163 students of the afternoon shift, at the “National Institute of Palacaguina Rodolfo Castillo” high school, in the first semester 2017, in the municipality of Palacaguina, Department of Madriz. The population was composed of 32 students of tenth grade “C” the afternoon shift. The sample was taken by convenience because we chose students with better performance in the English class. The sample was formed by 12 students of tenth grade “C” at National institute of Palacaguina Rodolfo Castillo, representing 32 students of the total population and an English teacher. In order to evaluate the teaching process and the effectiveness of real-life based passages, the following interviews were applied:

1-The first interview was made out of 12 questions targeted to the English teacher. This was done in order to know more about his experience teaching reading to the students in the class.

2-A second interview was carried out and aimed at the students. This interview included 12 questions based on the two main variables in the study: English reading comprehension and authentic passages.

## **Data Collection**

In this research we applied two types of instruments: interviews and an observation guide, so that we do not restrict the views of participant. Data collection was with a few open-ended questions that we design.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

What is the effectiveness of Real-Life based Passages for the Development of Reading Comprehension?

Alderson (2000) defines reading as "...an enjoyable, intense, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed." "Authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people." (Gauriento, 2001) In order to test the effectiveness of passages based on real life experiences, we followed three research guideline questions:

1. What is the best approach to create authentic reading materials based on real-life experiences for the development of reading comprehension?

Three interesting themes were selected: a love story, a miracle and how to overcome obstacles. The information for the creation of the stories was collected through interviews with the participation of three particular persons for its later writing. It took us three days to record the stories.

In order to make the first interview, we traveled to the municipality of "Yalí, Jinotega" where a local English teacher offered us an interview about the topic "Overcoming obstacles". The second interview was carried out with a shop owner called. Ali told us his story and we entitled this passage "Ali is in love". One of the main difficulties for Ali's interview was that initially he did not let us record him, but once we convinced him, he agreed to participate and be recorded. As for the last story, we decided to interview an evangelic pastor. She told us about a miracle that happened to her son. When she was sharing her testimony, she felt sad because she remembered all the difficulties they had gone through, so she had some difficulties to speak.

2. How to implement real-life based passages in English classes as a motivational strategy to enhance reading?

Prior to the application of the three stories in the classroom, we worked in the making of a strategic and methodological plan in which the level of authenticity of the stories had to be reflected and put into practice. The plans focused on reading comprehension and creative activities, apart from meaningful interactions among the students.

To execute the plans, we had two sessions of classes with a sample of twelve students. In every plan, we included different activities such as: fast reading, identifying the grammatical structure, cutting up and rearranging the story, story recreation, responding key question and discussing questions. Lastly, we asked some follow-up questions to evaluate our own performance during the class.

3. How effective are real-life based passages for the development of reading comprehension?

To estimate the level of effectiveness of our work, we made use of observation guides and interviews that were applied to the students. The questions on these instruments were taken from on our research variables. Next, we will describe in detail the results of these instruments.

Student's Interview and observation

During the application of the classes, we realized that passages based on real life situations definitely impact the reader and help them connect with the experiences lived by the author, because every life experience can easily become a real story that can be reproduced as a learning material in the English class.

Westwood (2008) states that besides using prior knowledge, students should have good word recognition skills and implement some reading strategies such as identifying main ideas, making connections, questioning, inferring, and predicting who asserted that a good reader is considered to be actively engage with the text and use comprehension strategies. Most students specially senior high school are not familiar with authentic reading, for this reason the teacher affirms that the use of these will evidently be compared or associated with their own life, independently have or not have enough vocabulary students are able to comprehend the context according to the methodological strategy implemented by the teacher, and the ability to relate.

The observation guide for our study measured a series of variables that are relevant for evaluating the effectiveness of the passages. During the classes, we could witness the level of motivation and interest shown by the students for the content of the readings. From the first moment we explained that the class was based on real life stories, they started to make questions about their content.

Out of the 12 students that participated in the class, at least 10 of them felt identified with the characters in the reading and in turn were able to relate the content with other similar stories they had previously heard. It was evident that the students were able to identify the main ideas, comprehend what they were reading, engage in meaningful participation and develop the assigned exercises with the help of the teacher.

We applied a written interview at the end of the last class for the purpose of confirming the results of our observation regarding reading comprehension. This instrument was a great tool to get an idea of the motivation and interest of the students towards the materials.

In general, students expressed their willingness to continue learning with these types of stories. They said that the stories were appealing and caused a positive impact on them by making them more willing to learn and read more. In addition, they said that it was easier to understand and complete the exercises contained in the passages, which included grammatical structures, comprehension questions, use of verbs and reading strategies.

During this study, we realized that reading comprehension is a complex and challenging process that relies a lot on the materials and teaching strategies carried out during the class. Reading has to do with ability to understand what is said in the text, to extract the main ideas, as well as in interpreting and giving value to the information expressed in the text.

Many high school students have serious difficulties understanding the texts they read. Reading comprehension requires skills and competencies that are rarely taught to the students. The lack of reading comprehension skills imposes limitations to the students that have a serious impact in their professional careers later in life. (Gutiérrez, Trujillo Obando, & Merlo Castillo, The effectiveness of short stories as an strategy to teach reading comprehension, 2017)

## Teacher's Interview

As part of this research, an interview was applied to the English teacher. She affirms that students are highly motivated when presented stories based on real life experiences and the majority of them show interest in knowing the content. The content of the passages evokes curiosity and besides some of the students can relate to the characters in the readings. Likewise, the English teacher considers that only a part of the students are able to analyze and interpret the message contained in the reading, because their comprehension depends on the vocabulary that they have been taught in previous classes and the one they have learned by themselves. With that said, the students' self-taught knowledge and their interest towards the class are extremely important for improving their reading skill.

Undoubtedly, it can be said that the use of authentic materials based in real life passages are of great significance to the personal and cognitive development of learners of a second language. It has been proved in this study that the use of authentic materials along with engaging teaching strategies will result in significant learning of the language, particularly in the enhancement of the reading skill.

## **Conclusion**

It is necessary for our educational system to form efficient readers who feel enthusiastic and committed to reading and find meaning to what they read. As teachers and researchers, we made use of authentic material to motive students to read about topics that would grab their attention.

We conclude that the effectiveness of the real-life based passages proposed in this research will depend on the interest, ingenuity and creativity with which they are used by teachers and anyone who joins the noble task of rescuing interest and liking for reading in our students, teenagers and young people. Its use allows us to carry out productive activities that attract attention by engaging the students in interesting tasks.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Belard, S. (2006). The Use of Authentic Material in The Teaching of Reading. The Reading Matrix, 63.

Bowes., C. (3 de junio de 2016). Bilingüismo y Tecnología. Recuperado el 26 de junio de 2017, de The four language skill and thir involment in learning english.: <http://www.bilinguismoytecnologia.com/en/las-cuatro-habilidades-del-lenguaje-y-su-implicacion-en-el-aprendizaje-del-ingles/>

Brinkmann, S. (2014). Interviews. SAGE Publications.

CALPRO. (2007). Professional Development based on Authentic Material. American Institute for researches.

Dawani, S. (2006). Understanding the four basic language skills. Obtenido de Education Director: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Gates, P., & Soler., J. (2001.). Taking Literacy Skill Home. Focus on Basics., 19-22.

Gauriento, M. (2001). Text and Task Authenticity in the EFL. Classroom in ELT. Washington. D.C.: Oxford.

Gutiérrez, G. L., Trujillo Obando, E. F., & Merlo Castillo, C. M. (12 de January de 2017). The effectiveness of short stories as an strategy to teach reading comprehension. 24. Estelí, Nicaragua.

Gutiérrez, G. L., Trujillo Obando, E. F., & Merlo Castillo, C. M. (12. de January de 2017.). The effectiveness of short stories as an strategy to teach reading comprehension. 24. Estelí., Nicaragua.