

*The use of non-authentic materials  
in fostering English reading comprehension*

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Abstract

The main goal of this research is to describe the impact that non-authentic reading materials have on literary skills, specifically reading comprehension. Two principal concepts are defined that deal with the purpose of this research. These are, firstly, non-authentic material, conceived of as a set of contextualized

materials designed by teachers for pedagogical purposes, taking into consideration students' reality, and, secondly, reading comprehension, which is understood as a process of extracting meaning from text. The present inquiry adopts the qualitative approach, the hermeneutic paradigm, and the case study method, since it deals with human behaviors aspects that cannot be quantified. Thus, the techniques used for gathering the data were interviews, documentary analysis and non-participant observations through project-based learning (PBL) activities. The participants were recruited from Institución Jesus Maria El Rosal, located in the commune five of Medellín, Columbia. The main findings indicate that when students were exposed to contextualized reading materials, their behavior, participation and motivation increased significantly. Besides, it was found that reading comprehension processes were improved while working with non- authentic materials.

*Keywords:* non-authentic materials; reading comprehension; education, realities; English

## 1. Introduction

As is well-known, English has become an important language around the world, being the global language required to communicate in many fields, such as economic, social, and political, among others. That is why, English instruction has acquired an important role in the curriculum of many schools in the world, in order to teach people how to communicate in different situations. Therefore, as will be made evident in the findings of the present study, it is crucial to highlight the importance of designing suitable instructional materials that must be connected with students' needs, realities, and interests. This will allow not only fostering target language skills but also improving reading by using texts which contain critical and meaningful content so that students can get engaged in constructing meaning, making connections and expanding their knowledge with appropriate and effective reading materials. The main objective of this research is to describe how, through the implementation of non-authentic reading materials, the processes of reading comprehension can be enhanced when students' realities are considered in the development and application of those didactic resources.

## 2. Theoretical framework

In view of the focus of the paper, this section is intended to define from different perspectives the main constructs of the present study, that is, non-authentic materials and reading comprehension in English. Furthermore, the concept of English as a

foreign language (EFL) will also be elaborated upon as language that is used by learners with the purpose of communicating in a context where English is neither commonly spoken, nor socially required to carry out everyday interactions (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 Concepts representing the theoretical framework in the present inquiry

First of all, it is well-known that the English language has considerably grown in importance due to globalization and all the processes it entails. Therefore, this language has become an important tool for progress with respect to social, cultural and economic matters in many countries. Besides, English is in constant demand and growing, and plenty of people around the world feel the need to communicate and express themselves through it with the intention of achieving very specific purposes. Thereby, according to the British Council (2013) English, has become the “language of communications, science, information technology, business, entertainment and diplomacy, it has increasingly become the operating system for the global conversation” (p. 5). That is why, English is considered a global language, a concept that is not always easy to explain given the wide variety of contexts in which it is taught and learned as well as vast cultural differences among these contexts.

On the other hand, English is not an exclusive property of one community, but it is definitely an international language, which serves a broad array of different communities and transcends traditional communal as well as cultural boundaries. By the same token, teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) does not seem to be such an easy business, although this matter has been studied, researched and analyzed for many years. As Vettorel and Lopriore (2013, p. 485) point out:

Given the major changes the English language has gone through over the last decades, and the subsequent theoretical and methodological challenges, one would expect to find clear guidelines included in the materials addressed to teachers (teacher guides, resource packs, web extensions, etc.).

In addition, among many findings, it has been revealed that second language performance, in particular speaking, is affected by many individual difference variables such as anxiety. In accordance with Gkonou (2011), "a significant and high correlation was found between classroom anxiety and speaking anxiety, thus indicating that the English language classroom context is a source of speaking anxiety" (p. 267). This means that, apart from the views that societies may have about the use of English as a native, second or foreign language, such use is also subject to individual variation. Moreover, English is constantly being adapted and molded by its users in the numerous emerging and speaking regions and communities in which it is employed on a daily basis. As Eckert et al. (2004, p. 116) explain, "the English language is subject of constant change which results in the continual production of new varieties of English."

The English language has been accepted as a medium of communication in many countries around the world. Thus, it has become in practice the lingua franca of the present time. As argued by Cifuentes et al. (2019), this language is adopted by people from all over the world who do not share their mother tongue in order to reach common understanding. Moreover, it has been incorporated as a mean of communication into daily lives because of the necessity of creating affordable linguistic codes in society. Therefore, it can both be developed autonomously as well as with the help of proficient interlocutors. In the words of Hawkins (2018, p. 462), "autonomous learning would enrich English language use in daily life, as it would do for English language program students as well."

The second concept to be discussed in this section is that of *non-authentic materials*. It refers to resources that are designed with instructional purposes in mind, such as flashcards, bulletin boards, short texts, worksheets, and so on. Materials of this kind help to strengthen specific language aspects and they can be made suitable for students with diverse learning styles such as visual, auditory, tactile, etc. It is important to realize as well that teachers must be aware of cultural issues, students' needs and preferences, a wide range of affective factors as well as different approaches to the learning process learning styles in order to motivate their students and encourage them to interact in the target language (Colorado & Ángel, 2011). Therefore, using non-authentic materials brings several positive aspects to language instruction on account of the fact that it is adapted, modified and suited to instructional purposes, it focuses on specific features of the target language, and takes account of how teachers are expected to teach. It is relevant to mention at this point that all non-authentic material should be

elaborated according to students' language proficiency so that they do not have to struggle while carrying out the activities they are expected to perform.

Additionally, non-authentic materials foster learning processes because they are easier, more comprehensible and carefully adapted to learners' needs. They are clearly focused on what students are expected to learn at a specific point, highlighting the most relevant issues with an eye to optimizing the learning of the targeted features. As Almi and Bentouzi (2014, p. 13) point out, "non-authentic materials are tools used by teachers in order to facilitate the learning of language. This sort of materials is proposed, revised and modified to serve pedagogical purposes. They include cassettes, videos, work books, photocopies, etc." In a similar vein, Aguirre and Bladimir (2019, p. 22) make the following comment:

Non-authentic materials are teaching materials which are made and designed for teaching purposes only. These materials are planned, designed, and produced based on the curriculum and policy in each country. These materials are usually in the form of textbooks. These textbooks are also built upon the learner's needs and ability.

On the basis of such characterizations, it can be seen that non-authentic materials can be seen as useful aids in the process of teaching a foreign language, not least because of their capacity to take account of cultural specificity as well as real-life experiences of students in a particular context. To quote from Segura (2018, p. 15), "non-authentic materials are determined by intentional actions to teach the foreign language. Examples of these materials are course books, worksheets, a reading to introduce a grammar item or a dialogue to exemplify speaking patterns." This said, teaching with the help of non-authentic materials brings with it a number of challenges since it is necessary to make them meaningful to students and ensure that the process is appropriate in a given context. On the one hand, "non-authentic materials expand students' background, vocabulary and other aspects related to language teaching. Conversely, non-authentic materials designed to explain specific topics or situations require specific methodological approaches and resources" (Ramírez, 2019, p. 16).

Moving on to the third construct tackled in the present study, reading comprehension is defined by the Research and Development Reading Study Group (2002) as an activity that occurs from interaction and engagement in the process of contracting meaning on the basis of decoding printed words and one's prior knowledge concerning a particular topic. In other words, reading comprehension is the process of obtaining and making significance from a written text. Woolley (2011) also states that reading comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text, rather than arriving at the meaning of isolated words or sentences. Thus, in spite of the wide diversity of definitions of reading comprehension,

this concept should be equated with the process of understanding, obtaining and constructing meaning as well as interpreting a text, which depends on a variety of situational factors.

Reading comprehension is a skill that can be developed from an early age and this should certainly be done given how complex the academic tasks can become later on. Accordingly, Amir (2019, p. 409) makes the following comment: "Reading comprehension is one of the main necessities of students. For example, in the first year of study, reading comprehension is stressed on the explanation of vocabulary in order to help students understand the whole reading passage and will be followed by answering the related questions in spoken or written forms." It should be emphasized here that, despite different points of view among specialists in the field of language teaching, reading is without doubt of paramount importance. Froiland and Davison (2019, p. 3) make the point that "reading comprehension is a mix of sentence comprehension, passage comprehension, reading rate, and reading words accurately within the context of passages." In addition, the ability to engage in reading comprehension, which constitutes a relevant category in communication, confirms whether a learner really understands reality through codes and/or pictures, since it not only entails understanding texts but also impacts students' performance in other academic contexts, those unrelated to learning an additional language as such. In the words of Razalli, Thomas, Mamat, and Yusuf (2018, p. 19): "Reading comprehension is a serious skill that is needed for attainment in school and beyond, yet many students are reading below grade level. Research has shown that poor reading ability has been associated with poor school performance in general, behavioral problems and poor mental health."

### 3. Design of the study

The sample involved in this research comprised students from the *Institución Educativa Jesús María – El Rosal*, which is located in the Castilla neighborhood and has a total of 1,600 students. The study focused on learners attending the 5th grade and used data from 45 participants, who were from 10 to 12 years of age, representing different social contexts, motivations and learning styles. The sample, which can be referred to as a simple random sample, included those fifth-graders who had difficulties in English classes, manifested by their indiscipline and low academic performance. It was this group that was selected to explore the impact of non-authentic reading materials. Detailed information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Description of the participants of the study

Educational institution	Grade	Section	Number of students	
Institución Educativa Jesús María - El Rosal	5th grade of elementary school	"A"	Female 26	Male 19
Total number of students			45	

This study adopted the qualitative approach, the hermeneutic paradigm and the case study method, mainly because it dealt with aspects of human behavior that cannot be easily quantified. In such a situation, it is important to fully comprehend and interpret the insights provided by the participants, which cannot be done solely on the basis of numerical analysis.

The qualitative approach is focused on the comprehension of the actions and behaviors of participants as they engage in them in everyday practice (Sosa, 2003). Consequently, the main aim of this inquiry was not measuring or probing a phenomenon but looking for the beliefs, experiences and interpretations of participants regarding the implementation of non-authentic materials for improving reading comprehension in the classroom. Thus, qualitative research, as defined by Srivastava and Thomson (2009), is "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or a human problem" (p. 73). The application of the qualitative perspective in the present study allowed addressing in an appropriate way the issues under investigation. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out that the qualitative approach entails an interpretive or hermeneutic process: "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). Such an approach was needed to fully understand the reception and impact of non-authentic materials in English classes.

When it comes to hermeneutic or interpretive paradigm, it is important to highlight that many social issues or situations have a deeper meaning for people experiencing them, which can only be arrived at by means of careful interpretation. Zahrai (2017, pp. 101-102) explains this in the following way:

The main mechanism of comprehending reality under the hermeneutic paradigm is interpretation, which in a particular context enables the individual to signify reality and assign new meanings to it. In the process of semiotization, there occurs conceptualization of reality; it may be both passive representation and reinterpretation.

Since the study was framed by the hermeneutic paradigm, it is necessary to define a hermeneutic concept, which is understood as the process of comprehension and understanding an action, not only in terms of its historical but

also cultural and social aspects. In addition, Stefano (2016) asserts that “hermeneutics allows to look at education as a possibility rather than a necessity, ensuring respect to the weakest and the difference. The hermeneutic paradigm is thus a strategy for critical emancipation and for conscientization” (p. 63).

The research project implemented the hermeneutical paradigm, because the purpose was to interpret a specific phenomenon, in an educational scenario, such that the participants experienced in their natural context. Wicaksana (2018) comments: “The hermeneutic paradigm is an intellectual tradition that bases itself on something that is behind something factual, real or visible. The perspective plurality of interpretation in turn provides a wealth of meaning” (p. 11). In effect, by adopting this paradigm it was possible to obtain in-depth understanding of the issue under investigation, that is, the use of non-authentic reading materials.

When it comes to the research method, or the strategy used to obtain answers to the research questions and to achieving the objectives of the investigation, the case study was used, because this empirical investigation focused on the particularity of a single case (i.e., a particular group of students) to determine how implementation of non-authentic materials influenced participants’ English reading comprehension. According to Dumez (2015), “the case study is often presented as a ‘holistic’ exercise, based on the study of a singularity, a kind of systemic reality in which the whole and its parts have close and interdependent relationships” (p. 51). In effect, this study involved the observation of changes and outcomes related to the use of non-authentic reading materials, as an educational proposal to improve reading comprehension. Accordingly, the case study method allowed the researchers to focus on a singular phenomenon in the context where the research took place. In the words of Gog (2015), “case study is usually classified as a qualitative method by highlighting the in-depth understanding acquired predominantly by qualitative methods” (p. 37). As a consequence, such an approach allowed the researchers to get insights into the instructional processes and gain greater awareness of these processes.

Taking into account the purpose of the present research, which is focused on making sense of the impact of non-authentic material on improving reading comprehension in English classes, the qualitative approach, the hermeneutic paradigm and the case study method prove to be perfect choices for better understanding the impact of non-authentic materials and thus achieving the objectives set.

In order to gauge the impact of using non-authentic reading materials, such materials were used with the participants in the form of specially designed activities as part of project-based learning (PBL) for the period of one month. Thus, the learners had frequent opportunities to interact with the materials and to employ reading strategies. The techniques of data collection used in this study were qualitative in nature and involved an interview with the teacher,



non-participant observations and analysis of participants' written production, thus ensuring methodological triangulation. The semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information about the materials that the teacher used in class. Systematic non-participant observation offered insights into how the classes under investigation proceeded as well as into the effect of non-authentic materials. The learners' written production was also analyzed with the purpose of determining the reading comprehension processes taking place. Table 2 provides a summary of the data-collection techniques used.

Table 2 Relationships between objectives, data-collection techniques and participants

Objectives	Techniques for the study	Participants
To identify the educational materials that teacher uses in English classes	Non-participant observation and interview (semi-structured)	Teacher
To determine how reading comprehension developed	Analysis of written learners' production	Students
To establish the impact of using non-authentic reading materials	Non-participant observation	Students

The collected data were subjected to qualitative analysis which consisted in identification of recurring themes regarding the materials used, the effect of non-authentic reading materials as well as the development of reading processes. The results were then interpreted and compared with those of previous empirical investigations.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

When it comes the interview conducted with the teacher, which was carried out in order to identify the educational materials used in English classes, it was found that she designed and selected pedagogic materials taking into account students' needs and learning styles in order to create the most favorable learning environment. As she stated in the interview: "Through the process, I try to identify students' learning styles, needs and wants in order to bring materials that favor students' learning processes." This comment shows that the teacher believed that an optimal way of selecting and using educational materials in the classroom involves focusing first and foremost on students' preferences and strengths, as this may allow learners to make the most of the learning process. Additionally, she pointed out: "I think that checking your students' abilities is one of the pedagogical foundations in contemporary education, because before planning your classes, it is necessary to have a basis from which the learning process can start".

The teacher's comments demonstrated something of paramount importance with respect to educational processes, especially when it comes to foreign language

pedagogy. This is because one of the principles of good lesson planning is to have some foundations on which such planning can be based. In fact, for teachers to be successful in meeting the envisaged instructional objectives, they must possess solid pedagogical and conceptual knowledge regarding different approaches and methods. Hence, teaching is not just a matter of being proficient in a specific discipline, in this case a foreign language, but having the capacity to learn and implement new strategies in the classroom for the benefit of students, obviously also taking into account their needs and previous knowledge. Zaman (2018, p. 4) makes the following comment: "Good instruction needs to consider student's previous knowledge, his or her mental ability and the complexity of the transition between the macroscopic, sub-microscopic and symbolic domains. Other factors, which should not be ignored, are a student's motivation."

It is well known that materials used in the classroom play a fundamental role in pedagogical processes, because the input they contains impacts and shapes comprehension and understanding of the concepts being introduced or discussed. Moreover, the choice of such materials may have an impact on students' motivation and engagement. Therefore, materials applied in language classes should be meaningful and interesting for students, and this is attained when their contents and the topics they touch upon are related to students' realities and needs. With respect to this issue, the teacher made the following comment: "I think that motivation is the key of education; I mean, when a teacher knows how to motivate students, half of his or her job is already done".

The teacher who participated in this study seemed to be particularly concerned about the difficulty of motivating learners in the classroom. However, effective teaching has to go beyond just motivating students so that they more engaged in classroom activities. In fact, when the goals of a lesson are not clearly specified, the feeling of motivation may achieve little more than producing the feeling of happiness and allowing learners to have some fun. As a consequence, sometimes when after this initial phase, teachers wish to move on to more concrete issues and set more demanding academic tasks, students are reluctant to do so because they would rather keep playing. The teacher offered the following evaluation of her motivational practices in the classroom:

I always motivate my students, because that's the way I teach. I've gotten good results and parents always tell me that their kids learn so much because of my methodology. Sometimes they are simple games and students have a lot of fun, but I have noticed that many times they want to keep playing without paying attention to the rest of the class.

On the other hand, when materials used by teachers are taken from a different educational context, this might sometimes interfere with the learning process and make it more difficult because learners may not be particularly attracted to

them or they see them as disconnected from their lives. The reasons for such a situation might include reliance on topics that are not familiar to them, behaviors that they find alien, or tasks and activities to which they are not accustomed. The following excerpt from the interview illustrates some of these problems: "Sometimes, my students' parents or caretakers tell me that their kids start to work on the books provided by the school, but after a while they prefer to use other resources, such that they can understand more easily." According to the teacher, this is a constant problem that parents and caretakers tend to raise school meetings, as they would like to see more correspondence between the contents presented in the materials for teaching English and the Colombian reality. Such problems are evident in the following comment:

Parents and caretakers usually tell me that their kids get easily bored with the activities they have to perform in the books provided by the institution; they are recommended by a prestigious university for teaching English but it seems that good methodological proposals are not enough when talking about effective materials for teaching a foreign language in a specific context.

With respect to such considerations, Sidik (2018, p. 99) asserts the following: "The result is that learners are not adequately exposed to the target language in their social lives. In this situation, the classroom environment plays an important role in providing the required knowledge and skills in using language for communication." This does not mean that instructional materials intended for other contexts should not be used but, rather, that it is necessary to adapt them and to use them to intentionally achieve specific pedagogical purposes. Thus, when using materials of this kind, teachers should always ask themselves about the purpose of employing them. The participating teacher seemed to understand this and argued in the interview: "Having different resources from which I can obtain instructional materials, I try to readapt what I found taking into consideration the local context as well as students' learning styles and social backgrounds."

Such an approach is necessary not only to improve communicative skills in the classroom, but also to prepare students for interactions in a variety of out-of-class situations, also such that involve interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. For this reason, careful adaptation of educational resources is imperative in the Colombian context. As Dakin (2001, p. 7) points out, "Teachers adapt authentic materials for different classroom uses, depending on their students' age and English language proficiency." In other words, it is extremely important that teachers are aware of their students' characteristics so that they can choose, adapt or design instructional materials to be used in the classroom in the hope of making foreign language instruction more effective. If this is not the case, students might not find the materials attractive, engaging or reflective

of their reality, which might result in reduced motivation and make instruction much less effective.

Table 3 shows an excerpt from the observation protocol that was filled out by one of the researchers as part of non-participant observations in classes in which the teacher used non-authentic materials in the course of the study. Such non-participant observation allowed exploring relationships between the declarations made by the teacher and her actual classroom practices. In effect, it was possible to determine whether and to what extent her descriptions of her use of non-authentic reading materials were reflected in what transpired during English classes.

Table 3 An excerpt from the non-participant observation protocol used during the study

Activities	The lack of this indicator was observed	It was observed a few times	It was observed sometimes	It was observed frequently	It was observed always
Students react positively according to the design of activities. Active participation by students is observed when performing academic tasks. Students understand the topics because they reflect their reality. The material is contextualized, which makes students feel connected with it. Audiovisual technology is used to immerse students into the English language learning.					

When the teacher was asked to design a set of PBL activities incorporating non-authentic reading materials, she was requested to include in them some of the problems, difficulties and issues that students had to face in their daily lives, related, for example, to violence, misuse of social media, low academic performance, unwillingness to participate in classroom activities, etc. Such topics were embedded in the non-authentic materials and the accompanying worksheets, giving students opportunities to approach them in a critical manner and discuss them. In fact, the students reacted very positively to the implementation of these resources, manifesting their interest through active participation. This can be attributed to the fact that the contents belonged to their realities, which made it easier for them to comprehend and make sense of the presented topics, not only because the texts were contextualized and based on their living world but also because they felt connected with the material itself.

In addition, one of the resources used by the teacher while developing the activities were audiovisual technologies which aimed to provide students

with abundant exposure to the target language. In the interview, the teacher offered the following opinion: "Visual materials are the most frequently implemented source of input for fifth-grade students, because they are familiar with such materials in their daily lives." Besides, an advantage of using these instructional aids is that students can improve their listening and speaking skills. As Pisarenko (2017, p. 15) observes on the basis of a study conducted in Russia, "Use of audiovisual technologies in foreign language training leads to quantitative increase knowledge acquisition factor that is expressed in qualitative increase of level of students' communicative competence in foreign language." Taking into consideration what it was achieved through the application of non-authentic materials in all the activities, the use of audio-visual technologies fostered the learning and teaching process on account of the fact that reading comprehension was not developed in a traditional way. Likewise, the inclusion of information and computer technology enabled supporting the audio with images, which caught their attention, increased their motivation and made teaching more effective.

Despite the positive effects of the use of audiovisual materials, reflected in the students' motivation and engagement, it was necessary to implement tasks requiring learners to deploy their reading and writing skills based on such materials seen in order to foster the development of communicative competence. It was also clear that such activities needed to have transparent and relevant goals so that the students would be willing to perform them. The teacher was fully aware of this as she commented in the interview: "It is not enough to use materials just because they are connected with students' reality; they must also have clear pedagogical purposes." However, the analysis of the students' written language production showed that the materials designed for the class focused excessively on linguistic features and did not really give the students a chance to use the kind of language they would need to face the problematic situations they faced in their daily lives. In this connection, Duarte and Escobar (2008) state the following: "In order to have more suitable materials, teachers may resort to the creation and design of materials. This may help greatly to overcome many students' learning problems by providing more familiar situations and more appropriate activities according to their needs" (p. 64). As was mentioned above, the pedagogical purpose has to be taken made explicit at the time of designing teaching resources. This is precisely the point made by Colorado and Ánge (2011), who found in their study that while materials used in teaching foreign languages can be of any type, what matters is that they aid the attainment of the objectives and requirements set as well as taking into account motivational factors. Therefore, when implementing any educational materials, it is crucial to bear in mind the educational objectives we would like our students to achieve.

When it comes to reading comprehension, the analysis of written output showed that the classes included different activities in which students were asked to identify as well as relate images to short sentences, focusing on the comprehension of everyday activities in the classroom, such as: *How do you say...?*, *Can I go to the bathroom?*, *I have a question...*, and expressions which allowed learners to communicate classroom-based situations. However, students' opportunities for reading comprehension and interaction considerably increased when they the non-authentic materials included contexts related to their problems and realities. In such situations, learners were observed to be more responsive to the resourced used and participate in class activities more willingly. This is because the focus was not so much on language-related issues but also on encouraging critical thinking and expressing one's own opinions. As Wasik (2001, p. 243) notes, "book reading and related activities can promote the development of language and literacy skills in young children." For this reason, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of designing meaningful texts that not only not only serve academic purposes but also present contents that enables learners to give some thought to their attitudes and behaviors concerning specific issues and situations. In fact, the non-participant observations demonstrated that whenever reading comprehension was based on problematic issues that the students had to face in their own lives, they participated more actively and their responses were more appropriate. This indicates once again that when classroom activities are grounded in learners' realities and topics with which they are familiar, they were perceived as having greater value and relevance for students, which ensured greater participation as well as involvement in general. Charoenchai and Carmeesak (2017, p. 212) comment on the basis of their own research: "As monitoring strategies, existing linguistic knowledge could help readers understand meanings of each sentence in the text, and they could more clearly understand the text if they have previous knowledge about it."

In other words, well-designed and carefully applied non-authentic reading materials that took account of the local context and the problems that students had to confront translated into greater motivation and more active participation in class. The reason for this was probably that the students saw such materials as having more significance for them and they appreciated the fact that they did not only have to answer questions included in different activities but actually concentrate on things that were meaningful to the, and related to their everyday experiences. In addition, when reading and talking about such issues, they were given a chance to develop their critical skills which are important not only in language learning but in other subjects and walks of life as well.

Reading comprehension skills should be developed with the help of a wide variety of resources and activities that that include different topics but cater to different learning styles as well. This means that they should involve not

only written texts but also symbols and images. In the case of the classes under investigation in the present study, a good balance of the reading comprehension activities based on non-authentic materials was observed. This is not always the case with coursebooks, however, as the exercises they contain may not always be appropriate for the purpose of developing reading comprehension skills. For example, in the Venezuelan contexts, Zapata (2011) found that although the English coursebooks used in the classroom were of high quality, they have to be complemented with other resources because the activities aimed at the development of reading comprehension skills were insufficient. For this reason, teachers must be aware of the strategies used in class to promote reading comprehension in the students as well as the instructional materials that best help the attainment of educational purposes.

## 5. Conclusions

According to these results, it is evident that instructional materials brought to the classroom must be adjusted to students' local context, needs, interests and educational objectives. Therefore, teachers must be aware of their learners' realities so that they can develop or adjust materials intended to attain specific pedagogic purposes, keeping in mind that such materials should also motivate students, facilitate the learning process and allow going beyond mere understanding of content. It is important to generate critical thinking in learners with the purpose of encouraging them to find solutions to the everyday problems they face both inside and outside the school.

At the same time, it is clear that designing instructional materials is not an easy task as it requires considerable time and effort. Besides, for such materials to be appropriate, they must reflect the characteristics described above, be contextualized and trigger students' interest. Consider what was mentioned above, the context and students' interest. When teachers start creating their own materials in many cases they tend to only focus on the language itself, leaving aside those issues that can help facilitate learning process as such as well as and develop critical thinking. In other words, when developing instructional materials, teachers do not only need to remember about relevant topics but also strike a balance between what is taught at a linguistic level, the conveyance of meaning, and the use of those meanings to allow critical thinking as well as meaningful communication. This indicates that in many situations there is a need to use non-authentic materials as only in this way is it possible to attain these goals.

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