

THE “BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT” MAGAZINE AS AN AUTHENTIC RESOURCE FOR DEVELOPING ENGLISH READING SKILLS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Employing authentic materials to develop reading skills often leads to difficulty in selecting authentic texts. A variety of researchers point out that the selection of authentic materials is challenging and time-consuming, as it requires choosing a suitable, readable, and exploitable text. Tackling this issue can make the selection process brief and increase the implementation of authentic texts for reading purposes in the ESL classroom. This paper aims to analyze the Business Spotlight magazine as a source of reading texts; consider the benefits of this periodical and how it can facilitate the selection of materials; offer a set of designed reading activities based on an article taken from the Business Spotlight magazine, and investigate ESL university students' attitude towards the article. The research methodology comprises the theoretical analysis and generalization of scientific literature highlighting the significant factors that contribute to the productive implementation of reading authentic texts. The main tool used to measure third-year university students' attitudes towards the authentic article was a set of designed activities and a follow-up questionnaire based on a Likert scale. The questionnaire aimed to assess the article according to the main factors of choosing authentic materials, including suitability of the content, readability, exploitability, and presentation. The main findings indicate that the authentic article met students' needs, with information likely to be applied beyond the classroom. Structurally and grammatically, it was not overly demanding. The article effectively enhanced

reading, listening, and speaking skills through tailored activities, fostering student motivation and enjoyment in the learning process. Consequently, the Business Spotlight magazine presents a diverse range of authentic articles reporting news from English-speaking countries. These articles are crafted at various language levels, streamlining the selection process for educators who need not adapt the texts themselves. Business Spotlight articles can be employed at different language levels and for various teaching purposes.

Keywords: *authentic materials, foreign language magazine, reading activities, reading skills, selection of authentic materials.*

Problem statement. English textbooks have always prevailed as teaching aids in the classroom. They are useful guides to acquire and practice necessary vocabulary, and grammar structures or improve receptive and productive speech skills. However, English textbooks have shown some limitations such as outdated vocabulary items, unnatural language patterns, or superficial audio materials. As a result, teachers preferred employing authentic textbooks, as they proved to be much more effective in English teaching. The main benefit of authentic English teaching textbooks is that they are authored by native speakers, presenting the language as it is spoken. Authentic textbooks reflect the true nature of English and present examples of the language use. Furthermore, the content is up-to-date which makes learning motivating and exciting.

In the meantime, some researchers have started calling authentic textbooks adapted materials due to several reasons [10]. Important justifications for this notion of ‘adapted’ include standardized speech, activities for revising new words and grammar, as well as reading and audio materials that serve the purpose of revision [10: 142]. Therefore, there is a necessity to extend the boundaries of authentic English teaching textbooks by employing authentic resources such as English magazines, newspapers, or YouTube videos. The style of these resources differs from the colloquial speech; however, the articles can be useful input material that creates opportunities for vocabulary enhancement, improving reading subskills, involving students’ interests, therefore, motivation, and on that basis even speaking skills practice.

Recent research and publications. Many scholars have investigated the influence of authentic reading materials on students’ language skills. V. Ryandani, J. Nurkamto, and T. Sarosa [8] analyze the impact of authentic reading materials on students’ reading

motivation. According to the results of the case study, authentic materials improve motivation because of students' task orientation, tolerance of ambiguity, and need for achievement. However, researchers point out some challenges, that authentic materials pose, such as a time-consuming selection process and a lack of vocabulary mastery.

S.A. Berardo [2] confirms the positive impact of authentic reading materials on students' motivation to read outside the classroom. Additionally, he justifies the importance of using authentic materials because of their context, which reflects changes in language usage and allows for the creation of a wide range of activities that can be modified according to students' language levels.

Waheeb S. Albiladi [1] studies students' perceptions of the advantages and difficulties of utilizing authentic materials in reading classes. The author concludes that despite the rather challenging selective process, the use of authentic materials leads to academic and social benefits, such as developing cultural awareness and bringing a sense of authenticity to the classroom.

D. Rusmawaty, H. Atmowardoyo, A. Hamra, and N. Noni [7] investigate teachers' perceptions of authentic materials for teaching reading. According to the main findings, teachers utilize print and auditory authentic materials, which prove beneficial for vocabulary enrichment, scanning-skimming reading strategy, and critical thinking. However, teachers also face challenges such as selecting and modifying materials, students' ignorance of the topic, and a lack of cultural awareness.

A. Nowlan and C. Samuel [5] discuss the importance of text selection and provide examples of activities that can be used before and after an authentic text, justifying their purpose. The researchers acknowledge the positive impact of authentic texts on students' motivation and how they create opportunities to interact with various forms of English.

The aim of this article is to analyze the use of the "Business Spotlight" magazine as a resource for authentic reading texts; to demonstrate that the magazine can facilitate the material selection process; to offer a set of activities based on articles from the magazine that were integrated into ESL classroom; and to investigate students' attitudes toward the article taken from "Business Spotlight" [9].

Presentation of the main research material. In reviewing articles on the use of authentic materials to improve reading skills and their main findings, we observed a common issue: the selection of authentic texts, which is often challenging and time-consuming. Moreover, authentic materials may require adaptation to suit specific language levels. To streamline the selection process, we propose considering the Business Spotlight magazine.

The Business Spotlight magazine [9] is designed to help learners improve their English skills autonomously. It features up-to-date news, reports, interviews, and exercises, enabling students to stay updated with the latest news in English-speaking countries and learn useful vocabulary highlighted in the articles. Another benefit is that each article is written at one of three language levels: A2, B1-B2, and C1-C2, allowing teachers to focus on the required level and analyze news accordingly. English proficiency levels are aligned with the Common European Framework of References for Languages. Furthermore, articles are available in both American and British English, with American English marked as US. Some articles also include audio resources accessible on the magazine's website. Considering these benefits, the selection process can become enjoyable and time-saving. Additionally, teachers can encourage students to engage with the magazine outside the classroom, promoting autonomous learning.

Creating meaningful reading activities entails integrating other language skills with reading. Therefore, reading activities for magazine articles should encompass reading, listening, writing, and speaking [3: 124]. Consequently, we have developed a set of activities for authentic articles comprising various exercises such as making and confirming predictions, summarizing, questioning, and clarifying, allowing students to practice diverse reading skills. Through the designed set of activities and the accompanying questionnaire, we aim to determine if articles from the magazine are suitable as authentic materials for use in the ESL classroom.

The set of activities we propose for working with authentic texts is based on the stages outlined by A. Nowlan and C. Samuell [5: 56-57]. These researchers recommend following the standard sequence of reading activities: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. Pre-reading activities aim to activate students' schemata and facilitate comprehension of the article, generating students' interest in the article. While-reading activities create opportunities to practice reading skills,

and post-reading activities are essential for assimilating and reinforcing the knowledge students have gained [5: 56-57].

Stage 1. Pre-reading

Activity 1. Activating schemata

Purpose: activate students' background knowledge and generate interest in the topic.

Mode: group work.

Instructions: work in groups of three and discuss the questions. Choose one student to report back the main ideas.

- Look at the pictures. What do you see?
- How is the person in the pictures feeling? What could cause such feelings?
- How often do you feel as the person in the pictures? Why?



Picture 1. Pictures representing embarrassment taken from Business Spotlight [9]

Рисунок 1. Зображення, що представляють збентеження, взяті з Business Spotlight [9]

Activity 2. Making predictions

Purpose: activate students' background knowledge and enhance motivation to read the article.

Mode: group work.

Instruction: work in groups of 4. Read the title of the article and brainstorm how you have dealt with embarrassing situations. Choose one student to report back to class.

The title is "How to Deal with Embarrassing Situations".

Stage 2. While-reading

Activity 3. Reading for gist.

Purpose: practice skimming and verify students' predictions (Step 1); clarify the meaning of unknown words and facilitate comprehension (Steps 2, 3, 4).

Mode: group work.

Instructions:

Step 1: Read the article and discuss if there are any similar tips to those your group has mentioned.

Step 2. Skim the article and underline any words you don't know.

Step 3. What words have you underlined? (The teacher records the words students name on the blackboard).

Step 4. Can anyone explain the meaning of the words on the blackboard? (The teacher attempts to elicit answers; for words students cannot explain, the teacher provides explanations).

Activity 4. *Reading for specific information.*

Purpose: practice scanning and comprehending specific facts of the article.

Mode: individual work, pair work, class work.

Instructions:

Step 1. Work individually. Read the series of statements. Two statements are correct, and two contain spelling or content errors. Circle the incorrect statements.

Step 2. Work in pairs. Compare your answers and correct the incorrect statements.

Step 3. Discuss as a class: Which sentences were incorrect? What improvements were made?

a) - Humor is one of the ways to deal with embarrassing situations at work.

- Confronting embarrassing situations is not suitable in a work environment.

- Acknowledging and giving credit to a colleague for their contribution to a project is a sign of leadership and confidence.

- Taking credit for someone else's work without acknowledging their contribution is a good strategy to boost your reputation in the workplace.

b) - When you are caught off guard and unprepared to give an update on a project, admit your lack of knowledge and request time to prepare.

- Taking a moment to stay calm and collecting your thoughts can be a helpful strategy when unexpectedly you are asked to provide an update on a project.

- Acknowledging a brief break can be an acceptable approach when caught spending a short time on non-work-related activities at work.
- Trying to hide the fact that you are wasting time at work is a more effective strategy than being honest about it when caught.
- c) - Apologizing without overdoing it is a good way to smooth things over.
 - Acknowledging and addressing a mistake, such as introducing someone with the wrong name promotes honesty.
 - Embracing and laughing off embarrassing moments is not effective in leaving a lasting impression.
 - Checking your appearance before situations where you are visible, such as online calls, is a practical suggestion to avoid potential embarrassment.

Answer key: a) T; F; T; F; b) F; T; T; F; c) F; T; F; T.

Activity 5. *Answering comprehension questions.*

Purpose: check students' comprehension of the article and practice speaking skills.

Mode: group work.

Instructions: Work in pairs. Answer the questions referring to the article.

Comprehension questions:

- 1) What situations are inevitable in life?
- 2) How do people behave when feeling awkward?
- 3) Which common advice do all scenarios present?
- 4) What is considered suspicious if one is caught doing non-work-related activities?
- 5) What solutions are beneficial if one is put on the spot not expecting it?
- 6) How do celebrities deal with embarrassing situations?

Stage 4. Post-reading

Activity 6. *Roleplaying short dialogues.*

Purpose: practice using essential phrases and strategies displayed in the article to deal with embarrassing situations; practice speaking spontaneously.

Mode: pair work.

Instructions:

Step 1. Review the essential phrases and strategies to deal with embarrassing situations.

ESSENTIAL PHRASES**Admitting the problem**

- This is really embarrassing.
- I feel very awkward.
- I'm rather red-faced.

Using humour

- And for my next trick... (after doing something clumsily)
- I'm not like this at home!
- I'll get my coat, shall I? (pretending to leave)

Exchanging embarrassing stories

- What was your most embarrassing moment at work?
- Can you top that?
- Have you ever done anything like that?

Apologizing quickly

- (I'm) Sorry about that.
- Apologies!
- I am such an idiot! I'm (so) sorry.

Talking about embarrassment

- It's best to confront the situation.
- Don't dwell on what happened.
- He overstepped the mark.

Picture 2. Strategies for dealing with embarrassing situations taken from Business Spotlight [9]

Рисунок 2. Стратегії вирішення незручних ситуацій, взяті з Business Spotlight [9]

Step 2. Work in pairs. Roleplay the following situations employing the given strategies. Swap your roles each time.

Situation 1.

Student A: You are giving a presentation and have a technical problem. (Strategy: admitting the problem).

Student B: Respond to your partner's words. (Strategy: exchanging embarrassing stories).

Situation 2.

Student A: You are wearing your sweater inside out. (Strategy: using humor).

Student B: Respond to your partner's words.

Situation 3.

Student A: You have called your colleague by the wrong name. (Strategy: apologizing quickly).

Student B: Respond to your partner's words.

After designing the set of activities, we implemented them in the ESL classroom to analyze students' attitudes toward the article. We chose a Likert scale to measure students' attitudes towards that authentic article from Business Spotlight. Likert scale questionnaires offer several advantages: data can be collected quickly from numerous participants, providing a reliable estimate, and the data can be contrasted, compared, and combined with other information-collecting tools [4: 2].

The questionnaire consists of 8 statements and 5 options for each statement: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The statements are based on factors suggested by Nuttall to consider before choosing authentic materials: suitability of content, exploitability, and readability [6]. Presentation was an additional factor included in the questionnaire.

The findings from the questionnaire completed by third-year university students revealed that 68% (21) of students strongly agree and 32% (10) agree that the article “How to deal with embarrassing situations” was interesting. 55% (17) of students agree and 39% (12) strongly agree that they will use the information in the article outside the classroom. 48% (15) of students strongly agree and 39% (12) agree that they developed their speaking skills by exploiting the article, with only 13% (4) undecided. 45% (14) strongly disagree and 42% (13) disagree that the text was too difficult, with 10% (3) undecided and one student finding it complex. 53% (16) of students disagree and 37% (11) strongly disagree that the text was too demanding structurally. 52% (16) disagree and 39% (12) strongly disagree that they couldn’t comprehend the text because of too much new vocabulary. 45% (14) of students strongly agree and 42% (13) agree that the text looked visually “attractive”. 52% (16) of students agree and 42% (13) strongly agree that they wanted to read the article after seeing the title.

The findings indicate that, according to the participants’ view, the authentic article was suitable for students’ needs and the activities were beneficial for students’ speaking skills. Moreover, the article conforms to readability rules, as it wasn’t complex to work on or structurally demanding. Finally, the article grabbed students’ attention and they wanted to read it.

Conclusion. Authentic materials have gained significant popularity and have been utilized for diverse teaching purposes. However, the main challenge in employing authentic materials lies in the selection process. Many research papers emphasize that selecting appropriate authentic texts is time-consuming, especially if modifications are required. Considering these challenges, we suggest selecting authentic articles from the Business Spotlight magazine [9]. The magazine reports news from various English-speaking countries, and the articles are labeled according to English proficiency levels. Moreover, the articles are already modified, reducing the time spent on selection and adaptation.

The design of a set of activities aimed to assess students' attitudes toward the authentic articles from Business Spotlight by engaging them in various activities and determining whether they adhere to the criteria of choosing authentic materials. Analyzing students' responses to the questionnaire, we can conclude that the article content was suitable, and it could be effectively utilized to develop reading and speaking skills, as well as enrich vocabulary range. The text was visually appealing and not overly difficult, motivating students to read more. However, since only third-year university students shared their attitudes toward the authentic article from the magazine, we suggest conducting further studies by comparing their responses with those of English teachers. We believe English teachers can provide a more objective assessment of the article and the magazine.

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**ЖУРНАЛ «BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT» ЯК ДЖЕРЕЛО
АВТЕНТИЧНИХ МАТЕРІАЛІВ ДЛЯ РОЗВИТКУ НАВИЧОК
ЧИТАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ СТУДЕНТІВ ЗАКЛАДІВ
ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ**

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Використання автентичних матеріалів для розвитку навичок читання часто призводить до труднощів у виборі автентичних текстів. Дослідження вказують на те, що процес відбору автентичних матеріалів є складним і трудомістким, оскільки вимагає вибору відповідного, зрозумілого та доцільного для використання тексту. Журнал “Business Spotlight” може

зробити процес відбору автентичних матеріалів коротким, а також збільшити використання автентичних текстів для вдосконалення навичок читання англійською мовою студентів закладів вищої освіти. Метою цієї статті є аналіз журналу «Business Spotlight» як джерела автентичних текстів для читання; визначення переваг журналу у виборі автентичних матеріалів; розроблення комплексу вправ для розвитку навичок читання англійською мовою на основі статті з журналу «Business Spotlight» та інтегрування розроблених вправ у процес вивчення англійської мови; дослідження думки студентів щодо використання автентичної статті з журналу «Business Spotlight». Методологія дослідження полягає в теоретичному аналізі та узагальненні наукової літератури з виокремленням суттєвих факторів, що сприяють продуктивній реалізації читання автентичних текстів. Основними інструментами вимірювання ставлення третьокурсників до автентичної статті та доречності її використання для вивчення англійської мови був комплекс розроблених вправ та анкета, створена за шкалою Лайкерта. Анкета мала на меті оцінити статтю за основними факторами вибору матеріалів: доцільність змісту, зрозумілість, зручність використання та подання тексту. Результати опитування вказують на те, що лексичні та граматичні структури у статті не викликали труднощів у студентів. Виконання комплексу вправ, побудованого на матеріалі автентичної статті, сприяли розвитку навичок читання, аудіювання та усного мовлення англійською мовою. У результаті студенти були вмотивовані змістом статті та розробленими завданнями, а процес навчання приносив задоволення. Таким чином, журнал «Business Spotlight» пропонує різноманітні автентичні статті, які повідомляють про новини в англійськомовних країнах. Кожна стаття журналу написана відповідно до одного з трьох мовних рівнів. Також автентичні статті можна використовувати для розвитку різних видів читання та розширення словникового запасу студентів.

Ключові слова: автентичні матеріали, відбір автентичних матеріалів, ініціативний журнал, навички читання.

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