

Learning Through the Lens of Realia: Expanding Language Skills with Real-World Contexts

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Keywords	Abstract
Realia language learning vocabulary acquisition listening comprehension speaking fluency authentic materials	This study explores the effectiveness of using realia—authentic, real-world objects and materials—in enhancing language skills in second language acquisition. The research investigates how real-world contexts can expand vocabulary, improve listening comprehension, and foster fluency in speaking. Data were collected through pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, and student surveys, involving 30 language learners. Results indicate significant improvements across key language domains: a 20% increase in vocabulary usage, a 17% enhancement in listening comprehension, and a 12% boost in speaking fluency. Classroom interactions showed that realia stimulated greater student engagement, promoting more spontaneous language use and peer-to-peer communication. Survey responses revealed high levels of student satisfaction, with 85% of participants finding realia to be a useful tool in language learning. However, some learners faced challenges in relating unfamiliar objects to language concepts, highlighting the need for contextual support. The findings suggest that realia can effectively bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application, making language learning more relevant and meaningful. Future research should explore the long-term effects of realia and its applicability across diverse student populations to further validate its pedagogical value.

Introduction

In the dynamic world of language learning, connecting classroom knowledge with real-world experiences has become increasingly vital for fostering deeper understanding and enhancing practical communication skills. One powerful approach to bridge this gap is through the use of *realia*—authentic materials and objects from the real world that provide learners with tangible, context-rich opportunities to engage with language. From shopping receipts and menus to maps, advertisements, and social media posts, realia immerses students in the language as it is used in

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everyday life, giving them insight into cultural nuances and linguistic applications that textbooks alone cannot offer.

Language learning is a multifaceted process that involves not just mastering grammar and vocabulary, but also acquiring the ability to use the language in authentic contexts. Traditional language teaching methods have often relied on textbooks, exercises, and audio-visual materials, which, while useful, can sometimes fail to immerse students in the language as it is used in real life. In contrast, realia—authentic materials drawn from the culture of the target language—offers a way to expose learners to the language in real-world contexts, providing both linguistic and cultural insights that textbooks alone cannot provide (Vasilenko, 2016). These materials can include everyday objects, such as menus, newspapers, maps, or advertisements, as well as media such as films, music, or radio broadcasts, all of which reflect the dynamic and living nature of language use in society.

Research has demonstrated that realia offers numerous benefits in language education, including enhanced vocabulary retention, improved listening and speaking skills, and increased motivation. By engaging learners with materials that reflect real-world language usage, educators can help students bridge the gap between formal instruction and the practical, conversational use of language (Nunan, 2004). Realia also plays a crucial role in promoting intercultural competence, as it exposes learners to cultural references and practices that are integral to understanding the language (Byram, 2008). For instance, understanding the local context in which certain idiomatic expressions are used, or learning how cultural norms influence communication styles, can significantly enhance a learner's ability to communicate authentically in the target language.

The value of realia has been recognized by language educators and researchers across the globe. In their review of second language acquisition (SLA) strategies, Swaffar and Arens (2005) argue that the use of realia allows students to experience language in a way that promotes both cognitive and emotional engagement. Furthermore, authenticity—a key feature of realia—has been shown to motivate students by providing them with materials that are relevant and directly connected to their interests and everyday lives (Gilmore, 2007). This sense of relevance can increase student investment in the learning process, which is critical for fostering long-term language development.

While the integration of realia has been discussed widely in the literature, its implementation in the classroom is often dependent on teachers' creativity and resourcefulness. Teachers are tasked with selecting appropriate real-world materials that align with the learning objectives and the linguistic level of their students (Waring, 2011). As such, the practical challenges of using realia—such as access to resources, time constraints, and balancing language skills with cultural content—are important considerations when incorporating these materials into language instruction. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that the educational benefits of realia outweigh these challenges, making it a valuable tool for enhancing language acquisition.



In this article, we will explore the impact of realia on language learning, examining its role in vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking skills, and cultural competence (Babayev, 2023). Through a review of current literature and classroom case studies, we will demonstrate how realia can be effectively integrated into language teaching to provide learners with a richer, more authentic language experience.

This article explores how integrating realia into language instruction not only strengthens learners' vocabulary and grammar but also nurtures critical thinking and cultural awareness. By expanding language learning beyond the confines of the classroom, we aim to demonstrate how real-world contexts can transform language acquisition into an active, meaningful, and engaging experience. Through the lens of realia, students can gain the confidence and competence needed to navigate the complexities of communication in diverse, real-world settings.

Methods

This article draws on a mixed-methods approach to examine the effectiveness of realia in language learning, synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative research findings from a variety of studies. The research framework includes an in-depth review of academic literature, a collection of case studies from language classrooms, and an analysis of surveys and classroom observations. This combination allows for a holistic view of how realia can be integrated into language education and its potential impact on learners' proficiency across different language skills (Alisoy, 2024).

1. Literature Review

A significant portion of this article is based on a comprehensive literature review of studies that investigate the role of realia in language acquisition. Articles, books, and research papers published between 2010 and 2023 were selected to examine the trends, effectiveness, and practical application of realia in various language teaching contexts. The review specifically focuses on studies that address vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and cultural competence. Research was sourced from top-tier journals in the fields of applied linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), and foreign language pedagogy, such as *The Modern Language Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *Language Teaching Research*.

The literature was analyzed to identify:

Common methodologies used in studies involving realia (e.g., experimental, quasi-experimental, and case study approaches)

The specific types of realia most commonly used (e.g., newspapers, advertisements, cultural objects, and multimedia)

The outcomes related to vocabulary retention, learner engagement, and cultural understanding

Any challenges or limitations noted in the use of realia in language teaching



2. Case Studies and Classroom Observations

In addition to synthesizing published research, this article incorporates real-world case studies and classroom observations from language instructors who have integrated realia into their teaching. The case studies were chosen from a variety of educational settings, including elementary, secondary, and university-level language courses. These studies offer insights into how teachers select and use realia in different teaching contexts, as well as how students respond to these materials.

The following classroom settings were considered:

Primary Education: Case studies from elementary classrooms that focus on young learners, where teachers use visual aids, flashcards, and physical objects to introduce basic vocabulary and everyday expressions.

Secondary Education: Case studies from high school language programs that utilize more complex realia such as newspapers, product packaging, and social media content to engage learners in discussions about current events, trends, and cultural norms.

Higher Education: University-level case studies where realia like film clips, academic journals, and authentic travel materials (e.g., brochures, tourism websites) are used to build both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence in advanced language learners.

The case studies also include classroom observations, where teaching methodologies and student reactions were documented. In these observations, realia was assessed not just for its linguistic value, but also for its capacity to engage students and foster deeper cultural understanding. The analysis also focused on student motivation and the perceived relevance of the language being taught.

3. Surveys and Learner Feedback

To complement the case studies, this article examines survey data collected from language learners who have experienced instruction incorporating realia. The surveys were designed to assess students' attitudes toward realia and its impact on their motivation, language retention, and cultural awareness.

The surveys included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses, allowing learners to reflect on:

How often realia was used in their lessons

The types of realia they found most engaging or useful

Their perceptions of the relevance of realia to real-life language use



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How realia affected their confidence in using the language outside the classroom

In addition to surveys, informal student interviews were conducted to gain more nuanced insights into learners' experiences with realia. These interviews focused on how realia influenced students' speaking and listening skills, and whether exposure to authentic materials helped them feel more prepared to engage in real-world conversations (Naghiyeva, 2025).

4. Language Assessments

To measure the concrete impact of realia on language proficiency, this study draws on results from language assessments that evaluate vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking fluency. In many of the studies reviewed, learners who were exposed to realia showed measurable improvements in these areas compared to students who learned exclusively from textbooks or conventional methods (Zeynalova, 2025). Pre- and post-tests were administered in several of the studies to assess learners' gains in vocabulary retention and comprehension skills after participating in lessons that used real-world materials (Alisoy, 2024).

The assessments examined:

Vocabulary Retention: Tests focused on whether students could recall and use vocabulary they encountered in authentic materials. Realia-driven lessons often led to higher retention rates, as the vocabulary was used in context, making it more meaningful.

Listening Comprehension: Listening tests were used to evaluate how well learners understood real-world audio materials such as news broadcasts, interviews, or podcasts in the target language.

Speaking Fluency: Speaking assessments involved interactive tasks such as role-plays or debates, where students used realia to simulate real-life conversations (e.g., ordering food at a restaurant, shopping for groceries, etc.) (Ismayilli et al., 2025).

By comparing language proficiency outcomes between students who used realia and those who did not, this study provides concrete evidence of the effectiveness of realia in enhancing language skills.

5. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of realia in language teaching. The survey and assessment data were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the significance of realia's impact on language proficiency (e.g., paired t-tests for pre- and post-test comparisons). Qualitative data from classroom observations, learner feedback, and case studies were coded and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights related to the integration of realia in language instruction.



Thematic analysis of student feedback highlighted key benefits of realia, such as increased engagement, improved cultural understanding, and better application of language skills to real-life situations (Babayev, 2023). Similarly, analysis of the classroom observations provided insights into the specific ways teachers effectively used realia to support language learning objectives.

Results

The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of using realia—objects from the real world—as a tool for enhancing language acquisition and expanding linguistic skills. Data were collected through a combination of pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, and participant surveys. The integration of realia into language teaching was found to have significant positive effects on various aspects of language learning.

Participant Performance Improvement

Quantitative analysis of pre- and post-assessment scores demonstrated a significant improvement in language proficiency. On average, participants' test scores increased by 15% from pre-assessment to post-assessment. The most noticeable improvements were observed in vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and contextual usage of phrases. Specifically:

Vocabulary: Participants exhibited a 20% increase in their ability to identify and use newly learned vocabulary in context.

Comprehension: There was a 17% improvement in listening comprehension when real-world objects or scenarios were used in listening exercises.

Speaking Skills: Students were able to produce more contextually accurate responses, with a 12% increase in fluency during interactive speaking tasks.

Thematic Analysis of Classroom Interactions

Classroom observations revealed several key trends in the use of realia during lessons. Students were more engaged when real-world materials such as newspapers, menus, advertisements, and authentic videos were incorporated (Babayev, 2025). These materials appeared to stimulate curiosity and prompted higher-order thinking, as evidenced by increased student questions and the incorporation of target language into casual conversation. The use of realia also fostered more peer-to-peer interaction, with students frequently engaging in discussions about the objects or scenarios presented.

Survey Responses

In the post-study survey, 85% of participants indicated that they found realia to be an effective tool for learning. Respondents highlighted that tangible, real-world contexts helped them better understand cultural nuances and linguistic usage. The survey also revealed that 72% of students



felt more confident in using the language in real-life situations, citing the relevance and practicality of the activities.

Challenges

While the majority of students showed positive results, a small subset (12%) found it challenging to connect the real-world items to language learning, particularly when the objects were unfamiliar. These students expressed a need for additional guidance and context to fully understand how to integrate the realia into their language practice. This was particularly true for abstract concepts such as idiomatic expressions or advanced grammar structures.

Limitations

It should be noted that the study's results are based on a relatively small sample size ($n = 30$), and the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Further research with a larger, more diverse cohort is recommended to confirm the broader applicability of using realia in language acquisition.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence supporting the efficacy of realia as an educational tool for enhancing language learning. The significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking skills highlight the potential of real-world contexts to bridge the gap between theoretical language instruction and practical, contextual use (Naghiyeva, 2024).

Realia as a Catalyst for Language Acquisition

One of the most striking results of the study was the improvement in vocabulary retention and usage. The use of realia appears to foster a deeper, more meaningful connection to the language. Participants were not just memorizing words; they were using them in context, which likely contributed to their ability to recall and apply these terms more naturally in conversation. This aligns with the theories of language acquisition that emphasize the importance of context and interaction in language learning (Krashen, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). When students engage with real-world materials, they are exposed to language in authentic contexts, which helps them better understand how words and phrases function in everyday communication.

The 17% improvement in listening comprehension is also noteworthy, as it demonstrates how realia can facilitate exposure to authentic speech patterns, accents, and cultural nuances. By incorporating real-world videos, podcasts, or even advertisements, learners encounter the language as it is actually spoken, rather than in the simplified, decontextualized formats often used in traditional textbooks. This type of exposure not only helps students understand the language more effectively but also builds their confidence in processing authentic speech in real-life situations.



Enhancing Speaking Skills Through Interaction

Another important finding is the positive impact of realia on speaking skills. The study showed that students were able to produce more contextually accurate responses during speaking tasks, a key aspect of communicative competence. The interactive nature of realia—whether it was a physical object, an advertisement, or a real-life scenario—provided a platform for spontaneous conversation. This aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes authentic communication as the core of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The classroom observations further reinforced this, as students were more likely to initiate conversation and engage in peer-to-peer interactions when realia was incorporated into the lesson. This supports the view that realia can create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, encouraging students to use language in a way that mirrors real-world interactions. The tangible nature of realia also helps demystify abstract language concepts, making them more accessible and engaging for learners.

Addressing the Challenges

While the overall results are positive, it is important to acknowledge the challenges some students faced in connecting unfamiliar objects with language learning. This finding suggests that while realia can be a powerful tool, it is not without its limitations. For students who are less familiar with certain cultural contexts or who lack background knowledge of the objects used in the lessons, realia may initially cause confusion or frustration. This highlights the importance of scaffolding in instruction, where teachers provide sufficient context and guidance to help students make connections between the object and its linguistic significance.

Moreover, some advanced grammatical structures and abstract language use—such as idiomatic expressions—may not always be effectively represented by real-world objects. In these cases, additional teaching strategies, such as explicit instruction or contextualization through role-play or storytelling, may be necessary to ensure that students can grasp these more complex aspects of the language.

Implications for Language Teaching

The results of this study suggest that realia should be viewed as a complementary tool rather than a standalone solution in language instruction. Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of their lessons by carefully selecting real-world materials that align with the linguistic goals of the lesson and the cultural backgrounds of the learners. Moreover, it is crucial for teachers to provide sufficient context, explanations, and opportunities for practice to ensure that students can make meaningful connections between the realia and the language they are learning.

Given the positive feedback from participants, the study also suggests that incorporating realia could increase student motivation and engagement, factors that are critical to successful language



learning. Students reported feeling more confident using the language in real-life situations, a finding that underscores the potential of realia to increase the perceived relevance of language learning. This enhanced sense of relevance and practicality is particularly important in a world where language learners are increasingly seeking to use their skills in real-world contexts, such as travel, work, and intercultural communication.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights into the benefits of realia, it is not without limitations. As mentioned, the relatively small sample size and the homogeneity of the participants may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the sample size and include learners from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds to determine whether the benefits of realia are consistent across different groups.

Additionally, future research could explore the long-term impact of realia on language retention and fluency. While this study focused on immediate improvements in language skills, it would be beneficial to track how well these gains are maintained over time and whether realia continues to support language development in the long run (Babayev, 2022). Investigating the integration of realia with other language-learning strategies—such as task-based learning or technology-enhanced learning—could also provide further insights into its potential effectiveness.

Challenges:

Despite its numerous benefits, integrating realia into language classrooms can be challenging. Teachers must ensure that the materials they select are appropriate for the students' proficiency level and that they are not overwhelming (Babayev, 2021). Additionally, access to realia may be limited depending on the institution's resources or the geographic location of the learners. Nevertheless, with the advent of digital media, many of these challenges can be mitigated through online resources and multimedia tools.

Conclusion

This study underscores the significant role that realia can play in enhancing language learning by providing students with authentic, contextualized experiences. The results demonstrate that real-world materials improve vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking skills by creating more engaging and interactive learning environments. The positive feedback from participants suggests that realia increases the perceived relevance of language learning, motivating students to apply their skills in real-life contexts. However, the study also highlighted challenges for some learners, particularly those unfamiliar with certain cultural contexts or complex language structures. Therefore, while realia proves to be an effective tool, its success depends on careful integration, proper scaffolding, and teacher guidance. Future research could explore the long-term impact of realia on language retention and fluency, as well as its effectiveness across diverse



learner populations. Overall, realia offers a valuable strategy for creating more engaging and meaningful language learning experiences.

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