

Learning Language Beyond the Classroom: Reading English Newspapers in University Dormitories and Developing English Language Skills¹

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Abstract

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) beyond the classroom is challenging in non-native English-speaking developing countries with limited resources. However, learning English beyond the classroom occurs in an informal way to support language learning for many autonomous or independent adult learners. This paper explores the habit of reading English newspapers among residential students at a university as an autonomous English language learning process outside of the classroom. Adopting a sequential explanatory mixed-method approach, data was collected from 150 residential students at the University of Dhaka who participated in the survey, followed by interviews with 15 students. The findings show that most of the participants read English newspapers as autonomous learners, considering the material value of English. They considered developing English skills through the habit of reading English newspapers likely to help them in the future, particularly in career preparation and getting the desired job and academic excellence. This reading habit and English language learning have been interpreted through the theoretical lens of learning autonomy, Bourdieu's habitus, and cultural capital. The study also identified some challenges in developing the habits of reading English newspapers for residential learners and suggestions for overcoming the obstacles and enabling their reading habits as an autonomous learning process for university learners.

Resumen

Aprender inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) fuera del aula es un desafío en países en desarrollo donde no se habla inglés como lengua materna y los recursos son limitados. Sin embargo, el aprendizaje de inglés fuera del aula se produce de manera informal para apoyar el aprendizaje del idioma para muchos estudiantes adultos autónomos o independientes. Este artículo explora el hábito de leer periódicos en inglés entre los estudiantes residentes de una universidad como un proceso de aprendizaje autónomo del idioma inglés fuera del aula. Adoptando un enfoque de método mixto explicativo secuencial, se recopiló información de 150 estudiantes residentes de la Universidad de Dhaka que participaron en la encuesta, seguido de entrevistas con 15 estudiantes. Los hallazgos muestran que la mayoría de los participantes leen periódicos en inglés como estudiantes autónomos, considerando el valor material del inglés. Consideraron que desarrollar habilidades en inglés a través del hábito de leer periódicos en inglés probablemente los ayudaría en el futuro, particularmente en la preparación profesional y en la obtención del trabajo deseado y la excelencia académica. Este hábito de lectura y el aprendizaje del idioma inglés se han interpretado a través de la lente teórica de la autonomía de aprendizaje, el habitus de Bourdieu y el capital cultural. El estudio también identificó algunos desafíos en el desarrollo de los hábitos de lectura de periódicos en inglés para estudiantes residenciales y sugerencias para superar los obstáculos y permitir sus hábitos de lectura como un proceso de aprendizaje autónomo para los estudiantes universitarios.

Introduction

For decades, English language teaching and learning have been a crucial issue in non-native English-speaking contexts. Languages are not only learned in language classrooms; they can be learned at any time and in any place (Hyland, 2004; Inozu et al., 2010; Pickard, 1995). Existing literature includes two aspects of English language teaching: inside and outside the classroom (Richards, 2015) or beyond the classroom (Benson, 2011). Beyond and out-of-class learning (both terms used interchangeably in this paper) is considerably broader than classroom learning. These terms refer to non-prescribed tasks that learners engage in on their own informally beyond the classroom to enhance their understanding of a subject. Benson (2011) contends that this method corresponds more closely to self-instructed, non-instructed, independent, and autonomous forms of naturalistic language acquisition, rather than a structured, teacher-led pedagogical framework. Historically, and even today, much emphasis has been placed on classroom-based language learning. As a result, language policy, curriculum design, material development, teacher development, and research are centered on classroom-based instruction (Richards, 2015). Outside of the

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classroom, little attention has been paid to English language learning (e.g., Benson, 2011; 2017; Inozu et al., 2010; Kuure, 2011; Lai & Zheng, 2018; Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Richards, 2015).

Therefore, there is a reason to believe that out-of-class learning is less effective than classroom learning. Instead, existing research shows that language learning outside of the classroom is critical to the theory and practice of autonomy and life-long language learning (Inozu et al., 2010). For example, Inozu et al. studied the features of a group of Turkish university students' out-of-class language learning experiences and their impact on language acquisition and personal development. The results revealed that most students valued out-of-class language training and employed a variety of materials and activities to improve their English outside of class. Kuure (2011) describes a case study of a Finnish English language learner's practice beyond school, technology-mediated, multimodal language learning. According to the findings, online computer games and their activities may provide key affordances for language learning. Benson (2017) proposes that the interaction between self-access, the classroom, and out-of-class learning should be viewed from an environmental perspective. The concept of "language learning environments" is suggested as a framework for examining the challenges of self-access planning and administration. Adopting a mixed method of research with a survey and interviews, Lai and Zheng (2018) conducted a study in Hong Kong that looked at a group of university foreign language learners' self-directed usage of mobile devices for language learning outside of the classroom. Personalization, authenticity, and connectedness were recognized as three characteristics of language learning in informal environments with mobile devices. The findings imply that mobile devices should be encouraged to be more diverse. Most language teachers would also agree that combining classroom and out-of-class study is the best way for learners to learn a language (Benson, 2011).

However, there are limited studies on the effectiveness of language acquisition outside the classroom compared to studies on the effectiveness of instruction. It is assumed that the main reason for not paying much research attention beyond the classroom is that out-of-class learning processes are often 'invisible' to classroom teachers. By contrast, the majority of language learning researchers and readers are classroom teachers (Benson, 2011). Several studies indicate that extensive reading significantly impacts learning language and improves competencies (Cho & Krashen, 2019; Goctu, 2016; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Suk, 2017). Against this backdrop, this mixed method research explored discursive features of reading newspapers beyond the classrooms, i.e., in residential halls at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh, and how reading newspapers develops the English language skills of learners.

The University of Dhaka, also known as Dhaka University (DU), is Bangladesh's first and oldest public university, it started its academic history in 1921 during British colonization, and the year 2021 commemorates its first century. DU is considered the number one and flagship university in the country. As of 2021, it has roughly 37,018 students enrolled, taught by 1,992 faculty members. The university's administrative, academic, and residential management are modeled by Oxford University. The university is considered a perfect blend of the ancient Paris model (i.e., Oxford and Cambridge) and the current Paris model (European and American universities). The university has 13 colleges, 83 departments, 13 institutions, 56 research centers and bureaus, and a medical center. Moreover, the university has 19 residential halls for the students (14 for male students and 5 for females). Additionally, there are four specialized hostels (two for males and two for females). There is another specialized hall for international students, visiting scholars, and researchers.

Along with other essential facilities, each hall and hostel has at least one allocated room to allow the residential students to read newspapers and magazines. The respective hall/hostel administrations bear all related costs, and the students do not have to pay anything for the newspapers and magazines. In these newspaper reading rooms, both Bengali and English national dailies are supplied—usually the popular ones with higher circulations. Many of these dormitories also subscribe to some weekly, fortnightly, or monthly magazines. The dailies are usually preserved in this room until the fresh newspapers arrive early in the morning the next day to replace the old ones. Furthermore, there are ample opportunities for the students to study the newspapers in groups or practice them for several purposes (for instance, for the hall's debating club or language club) or predominantly to develop language skills. Therefore, the university's residential students have opportunities to build up the habit of reading English newspapers and gradually develop their language skills.

Until now, there have been several studies on the impact of reading and/or reading newspapers on the development of language skills (Abbas et al., 2020; Ahmmed, 2016; Mahir et al., 2016; Mittal, 2014), and most studies tend to be limited within a specific institution(s). However, focusing on an institute's residential

students for this purpose remains unclear. Hence, it has not yet been established whether the habit of reading English newspapers amongst these residential students has any specific trend or trait. What motivates them to read English newspapers? Consequently, detecting the impact on the student's language skills has not been dealt with in depth. As the students are directly benefitted from the newspaper reading facilities provided by the dormitories, any positive association might be helpful. Therefore, there is still a need to know to what extent these facilities and circumstances are helpful in their language skill development. Therefore, this paper addresses the following two research questions:

1. What are the current trends in reading English newspapers by residential students at the University of Dhaka?
2. How does their habit of reading English newspapers beyond the classroom contribute to their language development?

Literature Review

Learning beyond the class and student autonomy

Literature suggests that learning language beyond the classroom is closely associated with learner autonomy, which refers to "interdependent learning in classrooms and beyond" (Smith, 2008, p. 1). Holec (1981) first defined autonomy as "taking charge of one's learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (p. 3). The concept of learner autonomy was primarily associated with adult education beginning in the early 1980s. Autonomous learning is thought to be more personal and focused, resulting in better learning outcomes. According to Benson (2001), there are five principles for achieving autonomous learning: a) active involvement by students in their own learning; b) providing options and resources; c) offering choices and decision-making opportunities; d) supporting learners; e) encouraging reflection. Little (2006) argued that learners' autonomous learning behavior is associated with an affective dimension. Thanasoulas (2000) suggests that this psychological characteristic of autonomous learners helps them to take "a proactive role in the learning process, generating ideas and availing themselves of learning opportunities rather than simply reacting to various stimuli of the teacher" (p. 2), while Gao (2012) writes that autonomous learners rely on social support systems other than their teachers, such as parental support with various strategies, enormous material investment and others include peer collaboration and interaction (Palfreyman, 2011; Peeters & Mynard, 2019). Built on the insight described above of learners' autonomy, we will see how students' autonomy helps them learn a language through reading English newspapers in the residential hall, which is beyond their classroom.

Reading newspapers and developing English language skills

Learning English is a process of skill development in which the learners are supposed to attain four particular skills. The key focus, therefore, is to find out how reading (English) newspapers improves one's expertise in the language of interest. Several studies have delved into the relationship between reading newspapers and developing English language skills. Based on a questionnaire survey in India, Nagashetti and Kenchakkanavar (2015) affirmed that the habit of reading newspapers improves communication skills, changes the way of life, increases general knowledge, and develops language abilities. According to Hoa, as cited in Manasrah and Al-Khawaldeh (2014), students who read newspapers in a foreign language can improve their skills in that language. Cho and Krashen (2019) also reported positive and significant correlations between pleasure reading in the English language and the development of language skills.

Going further, some researchers underscored how reading newspapers helps develop particular language skills and components, e.g., reading, writing, and vocabulary. The effectiveness of using English newspapers in the classroom to improve pre-intermediate level students' reading comprehension skills was investigated by Khorshed and Rassoul (2018). To determine the effect of using English newspapers on students' reading comprehension, the study used a quasi-experimental method. A written evaluation was used to gauge the students' capacity for reading and understanding a newspaper. Results showed that using English newspapers in the classroom enhanced students' comprehension scores on reading assessments. The study also discovered that using English newspapers in the classroom benefited students' vocabulary and grammar. In the context of Malaysia, Thiagarajah and Razali (2021) claimed that newspapers were one of the most beneficial and promising resources that were easily accessible for instructors and students as a motivating medium for encouraging and challenging them to learn English and expand their vocabulary. Zeng and Wang (2022) looked at the function of reading English newspapers in college English education in a study they did in China. The researchers suggested that college students could increase their general

English competence by taking English newspaper reading classes. Using examples, they argued that it could aid pupils in amassing regular and genuine words and phrases, enhancing their English reading proficiency and level, and gaining a wider viewpoint.

Likewise, Sultana (2016), in a mixed-method research, showed that reading English newspapers can be quite helpful for developing English reading skills. Suk (2017) also found that enthusiastic and pleasurable reading helps improve reading comprehension, reading rate, and vocabulary acquisition. Another study by Goctu (2016) stated that such reading significantly improves comprehension of texts and Manasrah and Al-Khawaldeh (2014) pointed out that using English newspapers at the tertiary education level can effectively develop English language skills and enrich vocabulary. Mittal (2014) also suggested that reading newspapers can be very helpful for people who learn English by enriching their vocabulary, improving reading speed, making learning attractive, and learning without much cost. A study by Ahmmed (2016) suggested that reading, writing, and vocabulary could be improved through reading newspapers which can be considered as supplementary material to textbooks for students pursuing higher education degrees. Akdemir et al. (2012) suggested using newspaper articles in various foreign language courses as speaking materials.

Some of the studies explored the reading newspaper habits of the learners, such as hours spent on reading newspapers, the purpose of reading newspapers, and the focus of reading newspapers. As Nagashetti and Kenchakkanavar (2015) reported, the students in their study spent two to three hours reading newspapers daily. However, Majumder and Hasan's (2013) study revealed that their university students for the most part, spent less than one-hour a day reading newspapers.

How reading newspapers can help foster engagement in studies as well as the development of critical thinking skills is documented in the study by Singatullova et al. (2017), who looked at the possibility of reading news articles as a motivational aid for students with nonlinguistic majors. They suggested that reading news items might encourage academic engagement and the growth of critical thinking abilities and that reading news items could improve global knowledge and raise awareness of current events. They gave tips for using newspaper articles as motivational tools, including scheduling time to read them, looking for items pertinent to the student's major, and engaging in peer discussion. Finally, suggestions were made on how to use newspaper stories as a tool for introspection and personal development.

In explaining the purpose of reading newspapers, a study by Kumar et al. (2011) reported that students mostly read newspapers to get information and to improve their general knowledge. Majumder and Hasan (2013) also found that the students predominantly read newspapers to improve their general knowledge. A recent Wathore (2018) study indicated that students read newspapers to acquire information and prepare for competitive examinations. Kumar et al. (2011) found that most students like to read editorial sections in a newspaper and they also preferred the sports and politics sections. Likewise, a study by Majumder and Hasan (2013) concentrated on the students of a private university in Bangladesh and argued that the students mostly preferred to read news on sports and entertainment. Nonetheless, Nagashetti and Kenchakkanavar (2015) pointed out that most students prioritized political and social issues and sports in a newspaper over other sections. Wathore (2018) found that the students were most interested in the editorial sections. Some other studies report that reading newspapers requires support, particularly for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Asher, as cited in Alhatmi (2019), described the use of a dictionary while reading as a "gateway to independent learning" (p. 140). Lin et al. (2017) also reported that dictionaries facilitate the reading process and gradually enrich the reader's vocabulary.

The aforementioned existing literature suggests that regular newspaper reading can have a positive impact on the development of a wide range of language skills. However, there is some criticism of this approach. For example, Abeyweera (2021) reviewed the existing articles with the goal of examining how reading a specific news column called "political gossips" affected the English vocabulary of adult learners in the context of Sri Lanka. The review showed that while reading a specific news column in the newspaper did increase vocabulary for adult learners, doing so also presented challenges in understanding and using the new words in a future situation. Another criticism of reading English newspapers for developing English language skills is that since difficult linguistic features are frequently present in authentic English news articles, low-proficiency students could find it difficult to truly comprehend the content (Pan, 2014). One more criticism of reading newspapers associated with language development is that reading English newspapers does not improve students' writing skills. Amelia and Muthim (2021) employed a quasi-experimental design to examine how reading newspapers affects students' overall English achievement, focusing specifically on their writing skills. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in writing achievement between students who were taught using newspapers and those who were not. Moreover, an earlier study

by Barnhurst and Wartella (1991) shows that reading newspapers in the USA was boring for young adults because newspapers dealt with contexts unrelated to their lives. Therefore, while reading English newspapers can be a useful tool for improving English language skills, it is important to consider the criticism when it is decided to use reading newspapers as a tool and strategy for developing the learners' English language skills.

Reading newspapers and Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital

Based on the above literature, it is clear that reading newspapers is a social action, practice, or habit that can facilitate language learning. The notion of habit is associated with Bourdieu's (1977) sociological notion of habitus, a system of social disposition internalized in daily behaviors (Hong & Zhao, 2015). Habitus is conditioned by one's position in the social structure (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus refers to "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (p. 72). More specifically, habitus is a set of embodied dispositions that serve as principles for structuring representations. Its consistency shapes internal attitudes, values, perceptions, and dispositions (Mu, 2014). Furthermore, in Bourdieu's words, habitus can be defined as "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (p. 86). Habitus allows us to investigate the relationship between practices and identities (Pahl, 2008).

Again, according to Bourdieu (as cited in Shin, 2014) linguistic habitus is a subset of class habitus that provides speakers with an understanding of the social value of their utterances. Shin (2014) also examines how social class, language education, and language learning are related in the setting of the global economy by drawing on Bourdieu's (1984, 1991) concept of habitus. The article makes use of Early Study Abroad (ESA) as an illustration to show how Korean middle-class families invest in a class-based consumption of Korean language and culture to fight the racial and linguistic stigmatisation they encounter in the local setting and to measure their level of global cosmopolitanism. Shin argued that the linguistic (and social) investment of different second language (L2) learners is often mediated by habit concerning anticipated profit (or sanction). Shin also claims that habitus in L2 learners' situated social and educational fields converge to influence the formation of more individualized habitus, which governs how they learn English and what challenges they may face. Capital is associated with Bourdieu's habitus, which refers to "the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 114). Bourdieu (1997) proposes three types of capital. First, there is economic capital, which is easily convertible; second, there is social capital, which is made up of "social obligations" or "connections"; and finally, there is cultural capital, which can be embodied (internalized and intangible), objectified (cultural products), and institutionalized (officially accredited). Economic and cultural capital is considered the most important forms of capital. People's practices or actions—their behavioral repertoire—result from habitus and cultural capital interacting within the context of a specific field (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Using Bourdieu's social theoretical lenses or following Bourdieu's sociological notion of habitus as a theoretical tool, this article also investigates how habitus (as logics of practices) (Bourdieu, 1990) of newspaper reading plays a role in language learning and identity formation that they desire, and how their habitus interplay with capital. In other words, this paper has explored the reading habits of DU residential students and how their newspaper reading habits develop their language skills, which can be used as capital for material gain.

Methods

The study approach

Reading newspapers outside of the classroom and English language learning is a complex phenomenon that frequently necessitates using multiple data types to make sense of research problems. In this study, a mixed-methods design with qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2008) was used to better understand how reading newspapers improves students' English language skills. The process was guided by pragmatism which acknowledges both singular and multiple realities and views knowledge as both constructed and based on reality based on some objective, some subjective, and some a mixture of the two (Feilzer, 2010). People learn about reality by examining both objective and subjective evidence. By aligning with these views, an exploratory sequential mixed-method study was adopted and surveys followed by in-depth interviews were chosen as methods of data collection.

Participants and methods of data collection

The population of the study was all the residential students at the University of Dhaka (DU). However, a total of 150 residential students from nine dormitory halls at the University of Dhaka participated in this study. The participants of this study were sampled through a cluster random sampling technique. Those participants were sampled who usually read newspapers in hall newspaper reading rooms and were available in their dormitory rooms at the time of the survey. Although the survey questionnaire was distributed among a large number of residential students at DU, only one-third of the students responded and returned the filled-out questionnaire to the researchers. The demographic information indicated that the survey participants included 8% of the first-year students, 23% second-year, 28% third-year, 17% fourth-year, and 11.5% master's residential students. In addition, 12.5% of students were found who earned their master's degree at least three months previously were still residing in the hall due to a lack of employment (although this is officially forbidden, it is a regular practice in male halls of DU). However, no data from former students who had finished more than a year previously was collected.

To deeply understand the phenomenon, the researchers conducted 15 interviews with the students who expressed interest in participating in in-depth interviews. These participants were conveniently selected from the survey group. They were current students of different years, ten male and five female. There were two first-year, two second-year, three third-year, three fourth-year, and five master's students.

Along with surveys and interviews, the researchers' personal experiences as residential students in some of those dormitories, as well as their reading habits in the halls, were occasionally used as data sources.

Before conducting the survey and interviews, informed consent was collected from the participants. The researchers verbally explained the purpose of the study, its data protection, and the confidentiality of participants' identities. Moreover, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and they would not be under any obligation to take part in the study. The participants who were convinced by the researchers' explanation participated in the study.

Instruments

Two separate but similar instruments were developed based on the literature review. For surveys, closed-ended questions with a Likert scale were used, whereas, for interviews, open-ended questions were used. The questions in the questionnaire and interviews focused on the students' English newspaper reading habits, their relevant practices for understanding the text better, and the purpose of their reading. The participants were also asked to evaluate their comprehension of the texts they read, their vocabulary improvement, and their language skills development. Both tools were piloted before being executed in the research field. The language of the survey items was English, but interviews were conducted in Bangla to get in-depth data from the participants.

Data analysis

After collecting data, all the data including both quantitative and qualitative were systematically processed and analyzed. The quantitative data collected through the survey were cleaned and entered into an Excel document and analyzed descriptively with tables. By contrast, the qualitative data were transcribed and translated into English. All qualitative data was closely read and re-read to understand any hidden meaning in the data. The data were then coded using a pre-coded coding frame. For the purpose of ensuring intercoder reliability, as outlined by O'Connor and Joffe (2020), two coders independently coded the data, consulting the original transcriptions as needed. Based on the codes, subthemes were developed. A cross-method triangulation or validation of findings was also used (Ahmed & Sil, 2012). In this sense, in analyzing data, deductive analysis or theory-driven thematic analysis was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study. First, it presents the students' reading practices; then, it illustrates how this practice helps them develop their English language skills which can be used for material gain. In analyzing and presenting data, a divergence approach was followed, where quantitative data were analyzed and presented first, followed by qualitative data to complement one another.

Students' newspaper reading habits

Options	Response	Percentage
Started recently (1-6 months)	18	12.00%
6 months to 1 year	21	14.00%
1 year to 2 years	46	30.67%
2 years to 3 years	52	34.67%
More than 3 years	13	8.67%
Total	150	100

Table 1: Length of time students had been reading English newspapers

According to the survey, a majority of the students, roughly three-quarters (n=111, 74%), reported that they had been reading English newspapers for at least one year. Almost one-third of them (n=46, 31%) had done so for more than one year but less than two years, whereas slightly more than one-third (n=52, 35%) of the participants had been reading them for two to three years. Significantly, one-quarter of the students (n=39, 26%) had started read newspapers very recently (one year or less), while a few others (n=13, 9%) reported that they had been reading for more than three years. These findings suggest that most students had been reading newspapers for one to three years. Findings further showed that senior students had had a longer reading habit than junior students. Our qualitative data reveals that when students become more senior, they understood the importance of reading newspapers more. Accordingly, they spent more time reading newspapers:

As a student in my first year, I hardly read newspapers in the hall. Now I have started reading newspapers for different reasons. I often visit the hall newspaper room and try to read English along with Bangla newspapers. I see many of my friends are also doing so.

Options	Response	Percentage
Every day	81	54.00%
A few times a week	53	35.33%
Once a week	13	8.67%
A few times a month	2	1.33%
Rarely	1	0.67%
Total	150	100

Table 2: The frequency of reading English newspapers

More than half of the participants (n=81, 54%) claimed that they read English newspapers daily, while a little more than one-third (n=53, 35%) did not or could not read daily, but did so several times a week. The rest of the students (n=15, 10%) of the total read them at least once a week or a few times a month, while an insignificant number of participants (n=1, 0.67%) rarely read any. The participants who could not read English newspapers daily gave various reasons in the interviews, including academic pressure, political pressure, and having to work. However, some participants said that they loved reading Bangla newspapers, so reading English newspapers daily was unnecessary. One first-year student said:

Reading newspapers has been my habit for a long time. But now that I'm in the hall, I can't manage to do it. We have class pressure, assignment pressure, and financial pressure. On top of that, I need to attend the guestroom⁶ for political engagement. Otherwise, I cannot stay in the hall.

Options	Response	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	59	39.33%
1-2 hours	77	51.33%
3 or more hours	14	9.33%
Total	150	100

Table 3: Time (in hours) spent reading English newspapers at one sitting.

The survey shows that more than half of the students (51.33%) spent one or two hours reading English newspapers while a fewer students spent less than one hour (39.33%). It was also found that 9% (n=14) of the participants read for three or more hours. Our demographic information shows that students spent more time reading English newspapers in their final year.

⁶ 'Guestroom' refers to a practice of political coercion employed by the student wing of the ruling party at the University of Dhaka. This group has been accused of pressuring students, particularly male students, to participate in obligatory partisan activities in dormitory guestrooms by leveraging informal authority over dormitory seat assignments. At the time of this research, this practice was in operation. This systemic manipulation persisted, arguably due to a lack of proactive intervention by university officials, who have not consistently addressed the issue despite its potential impact on student autonomy. This practice is claimed to have been abolished recently (2024) following a nationwide student movement against the ruling party.

Options	Response	Percentage
One	103	68.67%
Two	32	21.33%
Three	11	7.33%
More than three	4	2.67%
Total	150	100

Table 4: The number of English newspapers read in a day

More than two-thirds (n=103, 69%) of the students read one newspaper a day, whereas around a third (n=32, 21%) read two newspapers. Only 10% of the total (n=15) read three or more newspapers in a single day.

Options	Response	Percentage
<i>The Daily Star</i>	128	85.33%
<i>The Daily Observer</i>	58	38.67%
<i>The Independent</i>	35	23.33%
<i>The Bangladesh Today</i>	27	18.00%
<i>Dhaka Tribune</i>	24	16.00%
<i>New Age</i>	23	15.33%
<i>Daily Sun</i>	14	9.33%
<i>Financial Express</i>	9	6.00%
Other	3	2.00%
Total Respondents	150	

Table 5: The English newspaper(s) usually read (Checkbox)

The survey shows that most students (n=128, 85%) read *The Daily Star*. The second most read English daily was *The Daily Observer*, which had roughly half (n=58, 39%) of *The Daily Star*'s readers. The other dailies were read by a small number of readers with none of them making up more than 23% of the total. In explaining the reason for choosing the *Daily Star* as the most popular English newspaper in the interview, two of the students mentioned a program of providing free copies of *The Daily Star* (in collaboration with Mutual Trust Bank Limited) to select 1000 residential students of University of Dhaka for a year, which partially explains one of the several possible reasons behind such popularity of this particular newspaper amongst the students.

Options	Response	Percentage
Editorial (including Op-Ed/sub-editorial)	113	75.33%
Politics	61	40.67%
Sports	64	42.67%
International	46	30.67%
Business	15	10.00%
Entertainment	28	18.67%
Other	6	4.00%
Total Respondents	150	

Table 6: The section/contents usually read in an English newspaper (Multiple answers)

The survey further revealed that most of the students (n=113, 75%) typically read the Editorial section in an English newspaper, whereas Sports (n=64, 43%) and Politics (n=61, 41%) were listed about the same number of readers. Almost one-third of the participants (n=46, 31%) read the International section, while the Entertainment, Business, and other sections (for instance, Education, Letters to the Editor) were read by only 19%, 10%, and 4% of students respectively. Participants reported that the sections they usually read were closely associated with their interests. They found the critical analysis of a burning issue in Op-ED. One of the masters degree students said:

I like reading editorials and subeditorials. Though it is difficult to read and takes time to finish, I enjoy reading them because they have critical and detailed analysis, which is useful for my upcoming job preparation, particularly on written tests.

Options	Response	Percentage
Very Frequently (80% to 100%)	17	11.33%
Frequently (60% to 80%)	28	18.67%
Occasionally (40% to 60%)	14	9.33%
Rarely (20% to 40%)	25	16.67%
Very Rarely (1% to 20%)	27	18.00%
Never (0%)	39	26.00%
Total	150	100

Table 7: The frequency of discussions with friends on recent affairs from English newspaper

As found in the survey, nearly two-thirds of the students (n=91, 61%) rarely, very rarely, or never had any discussions with peer groups on recent affairs that they read in the English newspapers. However, almost one-third (n=45, 30%) of the participants reported engaging in such discussions either very frequently or frequently, whereas others (n=14, 9%) took part only occasionally.

The interview participants (n=5) suggested that participating in such discussions with peer groups could be influential in developing language skills. However, one participant who had been living in a residential hall for more than four years stated that he had never seen students arrange such discussions on the university campus.

Options	Response	Percentage
Always (75% to 100%)	16	10.67%
Usually (50% to 75%)	22	14.67%
Sometimes (25% to 50%)	51	34.00%
Rarely (1% to 25%)	33	22.00%
Never (0%)	28	18.67%
Always (75% to 100%)	16	10.67%
Total	150	100

Table 8: The frequency of taking notes while reading English newspaper

Another fact found in the survey showed that most students did not take notes while reading English newspapers. Only one-fourth (n=38, 25%) of the students generally took notes—some always and some usually. Students who sometimes took notes were one-third of the total (n=51, 34%). The remaining participants (n=61, 40%) either never or rarely take notes. Some (n=3) interview participants recommended note-taking habits as an effective way to practice and remember linguistic and other components gained from reading.

Options	Response	Percentage
For job preparation	95	63.33%
To enrich vocabularies	93	62.00%
To develop English reading habit	37	24.67%
As a hobby	31	20.67%
For academic excellence	24	16.00%
For GRE/GMAT/IELTS/TOEFL or any other standardized test	18	12.00%
To learn exclusive features only available in English newspapers	6	4.00%
As reading English is more comfortable for me	3	2.00%
Other	2	1.33%
Total Respondents	150	

Table 9: The reasons for reading English newspaper (Checkbox)

The survey shows that students read newspapers for various reasons. It was found that about two-thirds of the students read English newspapers to prepare themselves for job-related competitive examinations (n=95, 63%) and enrich their vocabularies (n=93, 62%). A considerable number of students read intending to develop English reading habits (n=37, 25%), while others (n=31, 21%) consider it their hobby. Students who want to improve academic performances through growing this habit are (n=24, 16%) of the total. A few readers (n=18, 12%) target getting good scores in GRE, IELTS, or standardized tests. There are also a negligible number of students who prioritize learning exclusive features only available in English newspapers (n=6, 4%), and/or consider themselves to be more comfortable in reading the news in English (n=3, 2%), and/or some other minor factors (n=2, 1%).

A participant in his interview reported that many students do not consider reading newspapers an interesting habit or hobby. He said, "They [the students] just consider it a preparation tool for getting a job."

Options	Response	Percentage
Good (60% to 80%)	61	40.67%
Acceptable (40% to 60%)	53	35.33%
Very Good (80% to 100%)	26	17.33%
Poor (20% to 40%)	5	3.33%
Very Poor (1% to 20%)	5	3.33%
Total	150	100

Table 10: The comprehension level of reading English newspaper

According to the survey, most participants think they are efficient enough to comprehend what they read in the English newspapers, as more than half of them (n=87, 58%) consider their comprehension level to be good or very good. Only 7% of the students (n=10) think their understanding level is either poor or very

poor. The rest of the students, making up one-third of the total (n=53, 35%), reported their level as acceptable.

Interview participants (n=6) suggested that reading English newspapers improves comprehension. Participant-5 stated it to be helpful in “understanding long sentences and complex meanings”. Participant-12 said, “The habit strengthens my reading skill. I was not very good at reading English before, but it has changed over time. I really can feel that there is much improvement.”

Impact on English language skills development

Options	Response	Percentage
Very High	66	44.00%
Above Average	59	39.33%
Average	21	14.00%
Below Average	3	2.00%
Very Low	1	0.67%
Total	150	100

Table 11: How effective is the habit (of reading English newspapers) in developing your language skills?

According to the survey, about 83% (n=125) of the students reported that the habit of reading English newspapers had either a *very high* or *above average* effect on developing their language skills, while only around 3% (n=4) of the total considered the impact to be *below average* or *average*. The rest, 14% of the participants (n=21), considered the effect *average*.

Some (n=5) interview participants believed that focusing on forming a habit of reading English newspapers helped them develop language skills. Two other opinions were that the habit was also helpful for learning grammar. For instance, Participant 14 said, “I do not pay much attention to grammar, but subconsciously it helps improve my knowledge and sense of grammar.” They also mentioned learning new sentence patterns/styles (n=2).

Options	Response	Percentage
Very High	63	42.00%
Above Average	42	28.00%
Average	36	24.00%
Below Average	7	4.67%
Very Low	2	1.33%
Total	150	100

Table 12: The impact of reading newspapers on developing reading skills

The survey showed that more than two-thirds of the students (n=105, 70%) acknowledged the habit’s impact as *very high* or *above average* on their reading skills. One-third of the total (n=36, 24%) considered the effect *average*, while another 6% (n=9) thought the effect was either *below average* or *average*.

In the interviews, it was found that (n=3) reading English newspapers helped increase reading speed. Reading other documents and materials also had become more accessible by reading newspapers. As Participant-13 said,

As I developed the habit of reading newspapers, I eventually discovered that other reading materials, like academic books or storybooks, were also easy for me. Though I do not read that many storybooks, I feel privileged when I try to read any journal articles or academic reference books.

Options	Response	Percentage
Very High	26	17.33%
Above Average	34	22.67%
Average	76	50.67%
Below Average	11	7.33%
Very Low	3	2.00%
Total	150	100

Table 13: The impact of reading newspapers on developing writing skills

Regarding writing skills, the survey indicated that slightly more than half of the students (n=76, 51%) considered the habit’s effect to be *average*. Another 40% of the participants (n=60) recognized the impact to be *very high* or *above average*. Only 9% of them (n=14) thought that the it had *below average* or *very low* effects on their writing skills.

Some participants (n=4) in the interview said that reading English newspaper had improved their formal writing styles. Talking of the effect on writing skills, participant-13 said,

When I try to read an English newspaper, I find several words that appear frequently. After reading for a while, or some days, the words become a part of my vocabulary. So, when I write something, I try to use those words. At least I have that capability in writing.

Options	Response	Percentage
Very High	22	14.67%
Above Average	19	12.67%
Average	31	20.67%
Below Average	26	17.33%
Very Low	52	34.67%
Total	150	100

Table 14: The impact of reading newspapers on developing speaking skills

According to the survey, more than half of the participants (n=78, 52%) viewed the habit as having *below average* or *very low* impact on their speaking skills. On the other hand, a considerable number of students (n=41, 27%) thought that the habit had a *very high* or *above average* effect. Additionally, around 21% of others (n=31) it had an *average* impact. One of the participants said:

It is challenging to say how my reading skills are developing my speaking skills. However, in my speaking, particularly in my academic presentation, I use some of the vocabulary or sentence patterns that I remember from reading English newspapers.

Options	Response	Percentage
Very High	56	37.33%
Above Average	38	25.33%
Average	29	19.33%
Below Average	19	12.67%
Very Low	8	5.33%
Total	150	100

Table 15: The impact of reading newspapers on developing English vocabulary

As found in the survey, more than one-third (n=56, 37%) of the students considered the impact of reading English newspapers on the development of their vocabulary to be *very high*, and one-fourth of the participants (n=38, 25%) considered it to be *average*, whereas a few of them (n=29, 19%) stated the impact as *above average*. On the other hand, 18% of the students felt it had *below average* or *very low* impact.

Some participants (n=5) in the interview thought that reading English newspapers daily was the reason behind their enriched vocabulary. They *considered* it an opportunity to practice their existing vocabulary or learning new words. Some other respondents (n=12) said they learnt about the practical use of newly learned words by *reading* English newspapers.

Facilities, challenges, and suggestions

Options	Response	Percentage
Very High	73	48.67%
Above Average	46	30.67%
Average	23	15.33%
Below Average	3	2.00%
Very Low	5	3.33%
Total	150	100

Table 16: Evaluation of the facilities in the newspaper room in the hall

According to the survey, almost half (n=73, 49%) of the students considered the facilities in newspaper reading rooms in their respective residential halls to be *very high*, where nearly one-third of them (n=46, 31%) viewed it as *above-average*. Fifteen percent of others (n=23) thought that the facilities were *average*, while only 5% of students (n=8) claimed the resources and provisions were *below average* or *very low*. In interviews, participants reported that the number of newspapers in his reading room was not sufficient. One participant explained that more than 2000 students were in his hall. Many of them did not have residence permits anymore, and many of them were not even students but rather given shelter by the student organizations of the political parties. However, as all of them wanted to read the limited number of newspapers, the regular residential students sometimes could not have the opportunity to read the newspapers.

In the interviews, participants further reported several challenges, including a lack of language practice based on reading newspapers and a demotivation to discuss worthy topics. The participants (n=3) said that the opportunity to discuss what they learned from the newspaper was minimal on the campus. Participant-9 said,

Here (at the university), we use English only for our academic and job purposes, so there are limitations to practice. When I talk to my friends, I do not use English, which I think is very important to carry on learning from newspapers. As I do not get the chance to practice much, I eventually forget many words or phrases that I have learned.

Moreover, Participant-10 argued that students were not interested in discussing any topic from English newspapers. Some others (n=2) reported that English newspapers in Bangladesh have many more pages, causing them to lose interest in reading the whole newspaper. Participant-5 found phrases and sentences used in Bangladeshi English newspapers “difficult” for him.

A significant number of participants in the interview (n=4) considered regularity in reading to be the key to getting the most out of this activity. Some participants (n=2) thought that the students should summarise what they read. Two participants thought reading should be pleasurable and more fruitful for language skills development. Some others (n=2) suggested arranging English debates based on the topics of the newspapers. Other participants (n=2) emphasized reading international newspapers. Participant 2 said,

The students should try reading international English newspapers like The Guardian, The New York Times, etc. This practice has not been very popular among us, but it should be.

Some participants (n=2) said that newspapers should be more straightforward in terms of the use of language. Participant-6 suggested that newspaper owners could publish a different version of the newspaper in an easier and simpler language for the Bengali-speaking students. Two participants thought that helping each other in reading and understanding the texts could be a first step. Participant-3 said,

There are a lot of students here (at the university). You will always find someone willing to assist you. My roommates and classmates help me out. When I do not comprehend a term or sentence, one of my roommates comes in handy.

Discussion

In this article, reading English newspapers as a means of learning English outside the classroom for higher education students living in university dormitories was examined. Having provided a theoretical discussion on language learning beyond the classroom, the main goal was to examine how Dhaka University residential students engaged themselves in developing their English language skills in dormitories outside the classroom. Other universities and their residential students were not included in this study. Based on the data presented in this paper, several observations can be made: First, the length of the reading habits of the students was connected to their length of their stay at the university. The more senior they become, the more they engage themselves in reading newspapers because they can more easily understand the necessity of doing it for their future career goals. As the data shows, many students read newspapers for job preparation, which becomes more vital the closer they are to graduation. Having more understanding of the necessity of reading newspapers for career purposes, they engage themselves in reading newspapers, particularly in English. This indicates the first principle of autonomous learning given by Benson (2001), who argues that in autonomous learning, students are actively involved in their own learning. This principle applies to this study too, where students spontaneously read newspapers for their own desire and purpose—not direct imposed by anyone.

Second, we have underscored that their job requirements guide their reading newspapers. That means what they should read in the newspaper is associated with local job recruitment. Our observation of job recruitment examinations indicates that the recruiters select suitable new staff or employees for their organization through two phases of examinations: one phase is a preliminary examination, and the other one is a written examination. In the preliminary examination, they usually set a test that includes multiple choice questions on general English, Bangla, mathematics, and general knowledge (local and international affairs). On the other hand, in phase two, for qualified candidates in the preliminary examination, the recruiters arranged a written examination where they set questions on writing a critical essay in English on national and international affairs to check their linguistic ability in English with critical understanding skills. According to the data presented in this article, students mostly read newspaper editorials, which helped them develop their English language skills as well as an in-depth critical understanding of current events. Moreover, they also read recent affairs, political affairs, sports, international affairs, and business news as a means of job preparation. This finding and interpretation are aligned with Benson’s (2001), another autonomous learning principle that suggests offering choices and decision-making opportunities to learners.

Students' awareness of the job recruitment process in the country and its association with different aspects and levels of knowledge checking process guide students' meaningful choices and decision-making of reading newspapers is part of the process of autonomization (Murphy, 2008). Along with jobs or career preparation, as seen in the findings, students were keen to focus on their mental health and tried to find entertainment in newspapers. Accordingly, it was found that a good number of students read the entertainment pages along with sports, which is also a source of entertainment for many cricket and football fans simultaneously developing their language skills. Furthermore, they discussed recent events to varying degrees with other friends as a collaborative peer learning process (Peeters & Mynard, 2019). This mutual peer sharing supports each other (Palfreyman, 2011) in their autonomous learning (Benson, 2001).

The above finding is also discussed through the lens of Bourdieu's cultural capital. As we explained above, cultural capital is the accumulation of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that can be used to demonstrate cultural competence. The knowledge and skills a learner acquires through reading newspapers are their cultural capital. They desire to capitalize on this cultural capital for their material gain, such as academic benefits or preparation for a job. However, it is challenging for learners in a country with an economic crisis and limited resources for foreign language learning. The study suggests that students learn English through reading newspapers for various instrumental and personal hopes and desires, such as career aspiration, academic excellence, personal hobbies, or comfortableness, because English is considered a language of hope (Reynolds, 2006), and it is so probably for those with the right amount of necessary capital, as English is considered as economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1991) for them.

Our third observation is that students' reading is limited to a couple of English dailies. There might be two reasons: one is the popularity of the newspapers, and the other is the limited economic ability of the residential students. Accordingly, the circulation of the English dailies, the *Daily Star* is the most popular newspaper in the country, followed by the *Daily Observer* and other English dailies. Hence, the management of all dormitories desires and practices keeping one or two copies of the above daily in all dormitories of the university. However, the daily copy is very limited compared to the number of students in the dormitories. As a result, despite having a desire to read daily, all students do not get access to reading those newspapers at their preferred time. Some students take the initiative to keep some newspapers in their rooms and split the cost with other roommates. In that case, they usually prefer the English daily, which is the *Daily Star*, because of its popularity among the readers. However, it was found that all students do not have the ability to keep daily journals in their rooms individually or share the cost with others. The key reason is their socioeconomic ability. Observation indicates that the students who reside in university dormitories come from rural areas of the country, and most of them come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Hence, it was not possible for them to buy newspapers for reading and try to get access to them by going to the hall newspaper room. This indicates Benson's (2001) autonomous learning principle of providing options and resources. Students complained about limited English daily resources in the hall reading room that worked as a barrier to reading newspapers. Hall authorities need to consider this and need to provide more daily resources to promote learners' autonomy and learning opportunities in residential halls. This opportunity would help to develop learners' linguistic capital. Learners who lack this capital in today's world may interpret it as a language of false hope or hopelessness (Hamid, 2016).

While their primary purpose for reading English dailies is employment desire, it also helps them develop their language skills through their reading habit. It reflects Benson's (2001) encouraging reflection on autonomous learning that might benefit their progress (Carey et al., 2017) and contribute to lasting learning outcomes (Ryan & Ryan 2013). If we look at it from Bourdieu's habitus lens, we can say that habit formation or habitus is a part of the learning process. As students practice reading English daily, it helps them develop their language skills. However, it does not help all language skills equally. As they are reading newspapers, it obviously develops their reading skills, vocabulary, sentence constructions, and the ability to present an argument through language. It does not significantly improve listening and speaking abilities. It is difficult, but not impossible, to directly gain listening or speaking skills via textual media. According to Akdemir et al. (2012), students in higher education can enhance their foreign language speaking abilities with the use of newspaper articles; however, this is not occurring due to students' general apathy. Alternatively, language study outside the classroom has not yet gained widespread popularity among Bangladeshi university students.

Beyond the students' personal and professional desires, they see additional variables as impediments to the language-learning process. They believe that the dormitory might have been made more student-friendly

and that its overall facilities are inadequate. A problem develops as the quantity of newspapers is minimal and students are increasingly interested in certain publications.

Conclusion

This article examines English language learning outside of the classroom. Here, students' halls have been used as an out-of-the-classroom for language learning, and reading newspapers has been used to learn the language. Here, students read English newspapers as an autonomous learning process. They read newspapers for their opportunities and benefits. The findings reflected in this paper have a policy and pedagogical implications. As reading English newspapers supports developing language learning outside of the classroom, it is an opportunity for Dhaka University residential students to address the limitations of classroom-based English language learning (Nunan & Richard, 2015). In the classroom, students have little autonomy, whereas reading English newspapers in dormitories is fully autonomous learning. It provides a self-motivating, authentic language learning experience. As a result, when developing language learning policy and pedagogy, teachers and policymakers must provide ample opportunities for learners to engage in autonomous language learning beyond the classroom. Reading newspapers could be one of the pedagogical tools for language learning along with other different kinds of reading, including critical reading (e.g., reading for analysis), reading for pleasure (e.g., sports and entertainment), or reading for information (e.g., politics, international, and business). Reading can be done both in and out of the classroom through the autonomy of the learners.

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Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire

[Your responses will be recorded only for research purposes and confidentiality will be strictly maintained]

SECTION I: PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: Sex:

Department: Session of Honours:

Residential Hall:

SECTION II: PARTICIPANT'S HABIT

- 1) How long have you been reading English newspapers regularly?
 - o Started recently (1-6 months)
 - o 6 months to 1 year
 - o 1 year to 2 years
 - o 2 years to 3 years
 - o More than 3 years
- 2) How often do you read English newspaper?
 - o Every day
 - o A few times a week
 - o About once a week
 - o A few times a month
 - o Rarely
- 3) How much time do you spend on reading English newspaper a day?
 - o Less than 1 hour
 - o 1-2 hours
 - o 2-3 hours
 - o More than 3 hours
- 4) How many English newspapers do you read in a day?
 - o One
 - o Two
 - o Three
 - o More than three
- 5) Which English newspaper do you usually read? (You may choose more than one answer)
 - Daily Sun
 - The Independent
 - The Daily Observer
 - The Bangladesh Today
 - Dhaka Tribune
 - The Daily Star
 - Financial Express
 - New Age
 - Other online or offline newspapers (please specify):
- 6) Which sections do you usually read in an English newspaper? (You may choose more than one answer)
 - Business
 - Entertainment
 - Editorial (including Op-Ed/sub-editorial)
 - International
 - Politics
 - Sports
 - Other (please specify):
- 7) How often do you have discussions with your friends on recent affairs quoted from an English newspaper?
 - o Very Frequently (80% to 100%)
 - o Frequently (60% to 80%)
 - o Occasionally (40% to 60%)
 - o Rarely (20% to 40%)
 - o Very Rarely (1% to 20%)

- o Never (0%)

SECTION III: SKILL DEVELOPMENT

8) Why do you like to read English newspapers? *(You may choose more than one answer)*

- To enrich vocabularies
- To develop English reading habit
- For job preparation
- For GRE/GMAT/IELTS/TOEFL or any other standardized test
- For academic excellence
- As a hobby
- To learn exclusive features only available in English newspapers
- As for being more comfortable reading English
- Other (please specify):

9) How often do you take notes while reading English newspaper?

- o Always (75% to 100%)
- o Usually (50% to 75%)
- o Sometimes (25% to 50%)
- o Rarely (1% to 25%)
- o Never (0%)

10) What do you think about your comprehension level of reading English newspaper?

- o Very Good (80% to 100%)
- o Good (60% to 80%)
- o Acceptable (40% to 60%)
- o Poor (20% to 40%)
- o Very Poor (1% to 20%)

SECTION III: SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate box:

Very High	80% to 100%
Above Average	60% to 80%
Average	40% to 60%
Below Average	20% to 40%
Very Low	0% to 20%

Questions

To what extent do you consider the impact of reading newspapers on developing your overall language skills?

Above Average

Average

Below Average

Very Low

To what extent do you consider the impact of reading newspapers on developing your writing skills?

How do you evaluate the facilities in your hall's newspaper room?

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

1. From your experience, have English newspapers been effective for improving your English skills? Why or why not?
2. How has reading English newspapers personally helped you develop reading skills?
3. In your own learning journey, how has reading English newspapers contributed to improving your writing abilities?
4. Can you describe how reading English newspapers has enriched your vocabulary? Do you feel this has noticeably improved your English proficiency?
5. What challenges, if any, have you encountered while reading English newspapers?
6. Could you share a personal example of how reading English newspapers has impacted your second language learning journey?
7. Drawing from your experience, what strategies do you believe would enhance this habit for second language acquisition, specifically for a student residing in a university dormitory?