

Using Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom for Effective Learning

Naima Afrin¹

Abstract:

To develop student's language proficiency, many innovative and essential materials have been applied in the ELT classroom. Their faculties observe lots of difficulties and deficiencies to meet the expected goals. As result authentic materials that have designed to learners' levels and interests naturally increases their sensitivity to and competence in the target language. Authentic materials, which trigger the process of natural language acquisition, effective EFL education can be realized successfully if substantial input of authentic materials properly selected and efficiently adapted to the learners' levels and interests would increase their sensitivity to and competence in the target language. Furthermore, current authentic materials such as clips from mass media, movies, and cartoons, newspaper articles, plays, short stories. If properly selected and implemented, it will certainly enhance the process of language learning. Methodology is based on using Primary and secondary data sources like Interviews, diaries, letters, journals, speeches, autobiographies & classroom observations. This paper describes whether authentic materials increase the motivation of the classroom learners and how much those materials are effective for the EFL language learners. The article also has come to the conclusion that authentic materials can be used at any level in accordance with the students' Knowledge and need.

Keywords: *Authentic materials, Selection, Variety of authentic text, Cultural issue, Real life language use.*

1. Introduction:

Interest in authentic materials has a history as long as 1890s and Henry Sweet (1899) is believed to be one of the first advocates who favored the use of authentic materials and discussed their benefits over contrived ones. He believed that natural texts "do justice to every feature of the language" while artificial materials include "repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the vocabulary, certain combinations of words to the almost total exclusion of others which are equally, or perhaps even more essential" [1]. The reappearance of authenticity dates back to the discussion raised by Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972) who remarked that communicative competence does not only comprise the knowledge of the language but the need for contextualized

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Information Technology & Sciences (UITS)

communication. The climax of this view was seen in communicative language teaching [2].

Nowadays, it is believed that in the course of the decade, the use of authentic materials has become increasingly popular in learning situations ranging from traditional intensive ESL to language training for professionals. Particularly in the latter setting, he believes that a larger number of teachers are starting to identify the benefits of authentic materials and the options that such texts may provide. Thus, these options may be applied to diverse settings, learning objectives or tasks [3]. Syllabus designers and materials developers used to base material development on the arrangement of the content materials and activities while ignoring authenticity criterion. Nevertheless, as Oxford (2001) states some teaching practices such as multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, task-based learning, and content-based learning lead to authentic interaction in classroom [4]. Karpova (1999) provides a list of the criteria, which need to be considered when using authentic materials as follows [5]:

- i. Content: the content of authentic materials has to be appropriate for learners' age, interest, needs and goals.
- ii. Tasks: tasks must be "sequenced and differentiated" and must include "communicative and cognitive procedures" so that the learners' background and new knowledge can be integrated.
- iii. Teacher-learner relationship: the materials must be structured in a way that a "reciprocal" interaction between the instructor and the learner takes place.
- iv. Learning strategies: cognitive abilities of the learners must be improved by paying attention to learning strategies.
- v. Learning environment: the environment provided must in a way encourage "risk taking and idea sharing".
- vi. Social Values and Attitudes: authentic materials must be a reflection of social values and attitudes.
- vii. Culture issue: authentic materials must further learners' "cultural, sociolinguistic, and paralinguistic awareness

2. Objectives of the Study: The objectives of this paper are:

- To explain the different kinds of Authentic Materials that can be used in ELT classroom.
- To look for the correct Authentic Materials that can be used inside the classroom in order to the teaching process will be easier.
- To analyze if Authentic Materials are really approached for teachers into classes.

Using Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom for Effective Learning

3. Methodology:

The study is based on both primary and secondary data, like-

1. Data have been taken from primary sources such as Interviews, diaries, letters, journals, speeches, autobiographies, and witness statements.
2. Different types of Art, photographs, films, maps, fiction, music, newspaper and magazine clippings, artifacts, buildings, furniture, and clothing have been analyzed as sources of authentic materials.
3. English language Teaching (ELT) classrooms have been closely observed and teachers, students and educationists who shared their frank opinions regarding this issue have been discussed with.
4. Books and modern websites have extensively been used.
5. Moreover, existing ELT syllabuses & class materials of different universities have been analyzed.
6. Thereafter, the information has been analyzed to assess authentic teaching materials in various situations and some techniques and recommendations have been provided to overcome the problems.

4. Authentic material Formerly, 'authentic texts' were defined as those that were designed for native speakers: they were 'real' texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language in question [6].

However, nowadays a new definition has been provided. It is not merely based on **who** designs the material and **to whom** is addressed, but on whether the language used sounds authentic in part or in its entirety, and on whether students are likely to hear or read it in real situations. For these reasons we should not define authentic material on the basis that it has been designed for native speakers.

Consequently, anything a native speaker of English would hear or read or use can be described as authentic: theatre programmes, newspapers, magazines...Because authentic materials are not designed for the EFL student they are not graded for level, although some are obviously more difficult to understand than others. Thus, the teacher should select the material carefully, with the needs and interests of the students in mind, and also decide what the students are to do with the material. So the same piece of authentic material can be used at different levels; an easier task can be set for lower level students and a more difficult task set for higher-level students.

5. Non-authentic material

A non-authentic text in language teaching terms is one that has been written especially for language students. Such texts sometimes concentrate on the language we wish to teach.

Authentic written materials: There are a number of clues, which can show us that

the language used in this type of material is artificial:

- ▶ Both speakers use perfectly formed sentences all the time. Yet, conversation between people is just not like that!
- ▶ The language is extremely unvaried.
- ▶ Their aim is to isolate bits of language so that students can concentrate on it.

Such material should not be used, however, to help students become better listeners or readers. The obviously artificial nature of the language makes it very unlike anything that they are likely to encounter in real life. Whilst some may claim that it is useful for teaching structures, it cannot be used to teach reading or listening skills.

6. Authentic materials motivate learners: Authentic materials motivate learners for many reasons. Authentic materials should be the kind of material that will need and want to be able to read when travelling, studying abroad, or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom. Authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. [7]

The sources of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom are infinite, but the most common are newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature. One of the most useful is the Internet. Whereas newspapers and any other printed material date very quickly, the Internet is continuously updated, more visually stimulating as well as being interactive, therefore promoting a more active approach to reading rather than a passive one. From a more practical point of view, the Internet is a modern day reality, most students use it and for teachers, there is easier access to endless amounts of many different types of material.

From an even more practical/economical point of view, trying to obtain authentic materials abroad can be very expensive, an English paper/magazine can cost up to 3-4 times the price that it usually is and sometimes is not very good. Often by having unlimited access in the work place, looking for materials costs nothing, only time. Authentic materials should be the kind of material that students will need and want to be able to read when travelling, studying abroad, or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom. Authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. When choosing materials from the various sources, it is therefore worth taking into consideration that the aim should be to understand meaning and not form, especially when using literary texts with the emphasis being on what is being said and not necessarily on the literary form or stylistics.

7. Using authentic materials are significant for many reasons. There are some advantages as follows:

- Students are exposed to real discourse as in videos of interviews of famous people where intermediate students listen for gist.

Using Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom for Effective Learning

- Books, articles, newspapers and so on contain a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials.
- The same material can be used in different circumstances if the task is different.
- Language change is reflected in the materials so that students and teachers can keep abreast of such changes.
- Authentic materials keep students informed what is happening in the world so they have an intrinsic educational value. As teachers we are educators working within the school system, so education and general development are part of our responsibilities.
- They can encourage reading for pleasure because they are likely to contain topics of interest to learners, especially if students are given the chance to have a say about the topics or kinds of authentic materials to be used in class.

8. Disadvantages

The disadvantages mentioned by several writers are:

- They may be too culturally biased, so unnecessarily difficult to understand outside the language community.
- The vocabulary might not be relevant to the student's immediate needs.
- Special preparation is necessary which can be time consuming.
- Too many structures are mixed so lower levels have a hard time decoding the text.
- With listening: too many different accents.
- The material can become outdated easily, e.g. news.

9. Sources of Authentic Materials:

In today's globalized world, examples abound, but the most commonly used perhaps are: newspaper, TV programs, menus, magazines, the internet, movies, songs, brochures, comics, literature (novel, poems and short stories) and so forth. There are several important points to consider when choosing authentic materials. You should make sure that you have enough copies of the materials to be used so that each student or pair of students can have a copy to use. It is best not to use material with too many pages, unless the pages are clearly numbered for easy reference. If you plan to use the same materials in more than one class, it is important that they be hardy enough to withstand a lot of handling and they should be easily refolded and put back together. Materials with multiple pieces or pages that fall out or come apart should be avoided. Also, keep in mind that some materials are more easily dated than others. For example, last season's

catalog does not have the same impact as a current one which is filled with items which the student could actually order. A menu, on the other hand, can be used as long as the prices remain contemporary. Students are generally uninterested in special events, for example an Expo that have already past. Remember to choose material that is appropriate for the students' level. However, a certain amount of adjustment can be made depending on the type and level of questions used in the accompanying question handout.

10. Arguments for using authentic written material

In modern methodology, it seems to be a must to use authentic material in the English language lesson. It is important to realize that we, as teachers, must make our own selection from course books although writers and publishers would argue that the material they include in their books is the best for learners of English as it has been prepared and designed by specialists. Thus, apart from following a course book, teachers should feel like introducing certain novelties, since they know not only their students and their level of proficiency, but also their needs, their weaknesses and strong points. As a result, they are perfectly able of selecting the most appropriate material to be used in class.

Presently, the use of magazines and newspapers in English lessons is widely acknowledged, since they provide stimulating texts full of cultural information to students who have a wide range of interests. Once the appropriate text has been selected, students usually get interested in reading, listening and watching, since they regard English texts and programmes not merely as a tool to learn a language, but also as a source of information [8].

Authentic written materials using authentic material in the classroom, even when not done in an authentic situation, and provided it is appropriately exploited, is significant for many reasons, amongst which are:

- Students are exposed to real discourse. Authentic written materials provide examples of language as it is really used.
- Authentic materials keep students informed about what is happening in the world, so they have an intrinsic educational value.
- Textbooks often do not include incidental or improper English.
- They can produce a sense of achievement, because students get real satisfaction from having made some sense out of real life language. They are more interesting and motivating and they give students confidence when they understand them.
- The same piece of material can be used under different circumstances if the task is different.
- Language change is reflected in the materials so that students and teachers can keep aware of such changes.
- Reading texts are ideal to teach/practice mini-skills such as scanning, e.g. students are given a news article and asked to look for specific

Using Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom for Effective Learning

information (amounts, percentages, etc.).

- Books, articles, newspapers, and so on contain a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials.
- They can encourage reading for pleasure because they are likely to contain topics of interest to learners, especially if students are given the chance to have a say about the topics or kinds of authentic materials to be used in class.
- Students who read and listen a lot seem to acquire English better than those who do not, as long as the input is comprehensible.
- Clearly, the most obvious reason for giving students reading and listening material is to encourage them to be better readers and listeners. It is clear that the more reading and listening we give them the better they will become at reading and listening in English.

11. Arguments against using authentic written material

Nonetheless, we may also consider some arguments against the use of authentic material in English teaching such as:

- They may be too culturally biased, so unnecessarily difficult to understand outside the language community.
- The vocabulary might not be relevant to the student's immediate needs.
- Too many structures are mixed so lower levels have a hard time decoding the texts. Hence, it can be frustrating when used with less proficient learners.
- Special preparation is necessary, which can be time consuming.
- The material can become outdated easily, e.g. news.
- Courses are now communicative, and use authentic and simulated material; therefore, it is not necessary to look for further material.
- Photocopies are a nuisance, because students may lose them or collect them in their folders and never look back at them.
- Photocopy copyright material is an offence and one can be prosecuted.

12. Adaptation of authentic material (reasons and techniques)

Valdeón (1995: 234) suggests that “once we have tried to establish a new classification of the material used in the teaching of English, or any other languages for the matter”, we should “focus on authentic material and the various processes that it can undergo to be adapted to suit the needs of our students”. That adaptation of given material responds to the need of individualizing it to focus on one or various aspects of the language [9].

However, some authors, focusing their attention on the communicative trend, have rejected any alteration to the authentic material, without considering that the priorities of teachers and students may vary and change [9].

As a consequence, there are some relevant reasons why we might decide to adapt some material before using it in the classroom:

- Grammar points included in the material are not clear enough or do not correspond to the level of our class.
- The text includes a number of examples of structures which have been studied in class, but we might find it helpful to supply the original text with further examples.
- We might decide to avoid certain grammatical points altogether if we are more interested in the material as a starting point for a debate or to introduce new vocabulary.
- Too much emphasis on the communicative aspect of the material, not allowing the students to understand the message. We might start by presenting some grammatical structures.
- The vocabulary included is too complex or there are too many unknown words.
- The text might be appealing, but it could be too easy. We need to use supplementary material to introduce new language points.
- The text is too difficult. So, we might delete certain parts, although we must make sure that the main ideas remain and the students can follow it easily.
- Some texts are too formal, and the students are not likely to read them or use them.
- If the material is to be used as part of an exam, we should adapt it to suit the level the students have reached when they sit the exam, not the level we had expected them to reach.
- The text might offend our students.

Once we have mentioned the main reasons for the adaptation of authentic written material, we will deal with the different **ways** whereby we can adapt this material to suit the needs of our students: **adding, deleting, modifying, simplifying** and **reordering**.

- **Adding:** Whenever we want our students to practice certain grammatical structures, items of vocabulary or minimal pairs that are not found in their L1, and the authentic material we want to use does not provide enough examples, we can supply the text with further examples of any of these linguistic exponents.
- **Deleting:** Textbooks are prepared for an international public with various needs. We must not feel guilty if we have to omit two or three

Using Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom for Effective Learning

exercises in one unit, if we feel that they are not relevant, or even the whole unit, if our students will not learn anything from it.

- **Modifying**: There are two main techniques to modify a text: rewrite it and restructure it. Furthermore, we can also adapt a text for our students to read aloud or for us to dictate it to the students, if we want them to practice certain features.
- **Simplifying**: This technique is also useful, but can lead to a distortion of natural speech or written English if we are not especially careful when we simplify grammar or certain features of speech. In many cases it would be worthwhile keeping those grammatical points that will certainly require further practice rather than simplifying them. Simplification can be mainly applied to texts rather than audiovisual material and affects the sentence structure, the lexical content and the grammatical structures. But as we mentioned before every one of these processes must be carried out very carefully so that we do not turn authentic material into artificial language.

• **Reordering**

13. Some Personal Experiences about using authentic materials:

My own experience of using authentic materials in the classroom with advanced learners was when given the task of designing an intensive reading course for university students. The course was to last 12 weeks for a total of 36 hours teaching time, twice a week for 3 hours per lesson, with the only criteria being that they had to be able to read and understand English texts by the end of the course. Most of the students were either advanced or upper intermediate level. The initial approach was to use ESP textbooks, one textbook that was tried, but it was soon discovered that the students were not very motivated and the material not very stimulating. Materials downloaded from the Internet were then adapted, with tasks being designed to use the different reading skills. The skills concentrated upon were *Extensive & Intensive* reading and *skimming & scanning*. Extensive reading was good for larger texts that contained a lot of information, while intensive reading was used to obtain an exact understanding of the text. Skimming & scanning were used in the pre-reading activities, either for getting a general idea of the text or the main points or finding a specific piece of information. Authentic reading texts that were not simplified were then used with the use of task based activities, pair & group work (peer learning) and peer correction. The role of the teacher in the classroom was a very low profile one, with most of the work being done outside of the classroom. Most of the preparation involved looking for suitable material and designing tasks. Once in the classroom after having set up the activity, very little to had to done which included monitoring, giving advice and any eventual feedback. The students were highly motivated and preferred working with the authentic material, finding it more interesting, more up to date than the textbooks as well as generally more stimulating.

Whereas language control is necessary at lower levels, being advanced learners, their problem was neither lack of vocabulary nor control of the language but the fact that they could not use the same different types of reading skills when reading authentic texts as when reading in their L1. They all wanted to use a bottom-up approach and read intensively, word for word and very often translating. The aim of the course as well as the use of authentic materials was to make the students aware of the reading skills that they use in their L1 as well as how to use these skills when reading in a foreign language.

14. Conclusion

The use of authentic materials in the classroom has been discussed, with the student benefiting from the exposure to real language being used in a real context. Other aspects that proved positive when using authentic materials were those they are highly motivating, giving a sense of achievement when understood and encourage further reading. They also reflect the changes in the use of language, there is a wide variety of text types, they are also very versatile (they can be used in different ways to promote different skills) and can be used more than once as well as be updated. Anything can be used as authentic material but for developing reading one of the most useful resources is the Internet, with large amounts of varied material being easily accessible.

The use of authentic materials in an EFL classroom is what many teachers involved in foreign language teaching have discussed in recent years. There are persuasive voices insisting that the English presented in the classroom should be authentic, not produced only for instructional purposes. Generally, what this means is that authentic materials involve the language that naturally occurs as communication in the native speaker contexts of use, or rather in the selected contexts where Standard English is the norm: real newspaper reports, real magazine articles, real advertisements, cooking recipes, horoscopes, etc. Most of the teachers throughout the world agree that authentic texts or materials are beneficial to the language learning process, but what is less agreed is when authentic materials should be introduced and how they should be used in an EFL classroom.

Finally, we will present the main points that can be inferred from our presentation on the use of authentic written material:

1. Authentic material should be used in the teaching of English so that our students get used to real English.
2. Teachers must be extremely careful when selecting this material since students might feel disappointed if the text is too difficult to understand. We must bear in mind that students will expect to understand as much as possible, no matter how strongly we insist on the fact that this is not necessary.
3. Therefore, we might need to adapt this material to suit the needs of our students, which can be of various types, as indicated before.
4. Adapting material does not mean to falsify its contents or structure. It

Using Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom for Effective Learning

means to use it to the advantage of our students and to focus on certain features of the language.

Authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. Considering this, it may not be wrong to say that at any level authentic materials should be used to complete the gap between the competency and performance of the language learners, which is a common problem among the nonnative speakers. This requires the language patterns being put into practice in real life situations. Since learning about a culture is not accepting it and the role of the culture in the materials is just to create learner interest towards the target language, there should be a variety of culture in the materials, not a specific one.

15. References

- [1] A Gilmore (2007), "Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning", - Language Teaching – cambridgefluids.org – Volume 40, Issue 02, pp 56-60.
- [2] Jack C. Richards, Theodore S. Rodgers, (2001) – “Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching”– Education Page 159.
- [3] Ferit Kilickaya , “Authentic Materials and Cultural Content in EFL Classrooms”, The Internet TESL Journal,pp 43-48
- [4] Nimatullah Shomossi & Saeed Ketabi ,(2007), “A *Critical Look at The Concept of Authenticity* ,Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching", vol 4 no 1, page 149-155.
- [5] Zahra Zohoorian, . “A Review on the Effectiveness of Using Authentic Materials in ESP Courses” ,Vahid baghban Islamic Azad University of Mashhad English for Specific Purposes World, Issue 31 Volume 10, 201, pp 123-126.
- [6] Harmer, J. (1991). “The Practice of English Language Teaching.”, London: Longman. p. 212.
- [7] Ferit Kilickaya: “Authentic Materials and Cultural Content in EFL Classrooms”. The Internet TESL Journal pp 35-39.
- [8] Doff, A. (1988). “*Teach English: A Training Course for Teachers*”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,pp 78-79.
- [9] Valdeón García,R.A. (1995). “A Redefinition of Authentic Material and its Use in the Teaching of English”. Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses. Universidad de La Laguna: Tenerife. Volumen n30/31, pp.227-239.