

SIGNIFICANCE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN TEACHING PROCESS WRITING

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Abstract

Nowadays it is very important to know at least one foreign language. Technical university students study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and we should not only rouse their learning interest but also give sound knowledge in the subject. This article emphasizes pros and cons of authentic materials in classrooms and provides some practical advice. There is no doubt that today English teachers have a lot of choices in terms of teaching materials. Choosing them we are to keep in mind that we should focus students' attention not only on vocabulary and grammar structures but prepare them for real communication where the knowledge of culture is sometimes crucial. Thus the use of authentic materials can help solve this problem. There exist a lot of authentic materials like reading, newspapers, literature, video, TV, surveys, guest speakers, cultural quizzes / tests, role plays / dramatizations, songs, anecdotes, travel brochures, menus, catalogues, real estate pamphlets, phone books, CDs, the Internet, illustrations and so on. In this article we are going to deal with the most commonly used materials at EFL classes: reading (texts); video; computer programs.

Keywords: EFL (English as a Foreign Language), authentic materials, vocabulary structures, grammar structures, culture, communication, writing, reading, authentic environment, language.

Introduction

Actuality of the work: In recent days, use of authentic materials has become widespread across educational contexts. According to Jane Crawford, (Richards & Renandya, 2002) many a times course books fail to address the needs of a specific group of students. For this reason, use of authentic material alongside the textbooks better caters to the needs of the students.

As far as teaching writing is concerned, a teacher can make very good use of authentic materials by highlighting real language use in various real-life materials like advertisements etc. and also by assigning them tasks based on them. Allwright (1982; as cited in Block, 1991) claims that, sometimes classroom teachers need to provide different materials so that they can bring in variety into the activities. For example, in the online journal of 'using comic strip to teach narrative writing' Rabideau (1993) refers to the use of comic strips which motivate the learners to work around it and build up a written piece of work where the learners find interesting ways to express their ideas. Moreover, there are different types of writing such as essay, short stories, paragraph, project work etc. By using authentic materials, writing as a skill can be effectively taught to the students. As Nunan said, (2001, p. 212) authentic materials helps the students learn and use the foreign language more indicative.



The aim of this research is to examine the effectiveness of authentic materials as used to teach academic writing at the tertiary level.

The researcher has chosen this issue to identify whether authentic materials help students better their writing or not.

Materials and Methods

The following instruments have been used to collect data:

- A teacher questionnaire
- A student questionnaire
- Researcher's own checklist.

The majority of scholars define authentic materials as materials which are designed for native speakers; they are real texts, designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. Basically, authentic materials provide the following benefits: motivation to learning; authentic cultural information; real language presentation; creative approach to teaching. The majority of scholars define authentic materials as materials which are designed for native speakers; they are real texts, designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. Basically, authentic materials provide the following benefits: motivation to learning; authentic cultural information; real language presentation; creative approach to teaching. The use of authentic texts in classrooms is important as it performs a lot of functions: widening and reinforcement of language knowledge; language material training; development of abilities in oral speech; development of abilities in written speech [1, 5, 7]. Working with texts, a teacher can use the following exercises: pre-reading (aimed at title work, contents prediction, grammar and vocabulary work); while-reading (aimed at general perception, identification of interesting parts for a reader, meaningful parts selection); post-reading (aimed at comprehension check, text interpretation, abilities to find specific information); exercises aimed at the production of a personal utterance (aimed at the development of oral and written abilities). Using video materials in classroom environment can favor students' motivation to learn a foreign language as they present real language, provide students with an aesthetic look at the culture. Undoubtedly, video is very effective in teaching because it: represents authentic environment; gives examples of particular language functions in operation; presents authentic language interaction; shows the nonverbal components of the language: eye movements and facial expression; body language (besides eyes and face, there are multifarious body postures, certain gestures of the neck, hands, limbs); space language (In general, the distance while talking, many times depends on personal relationship. The distance of space indicates interpersonal relation and closeness of rapport. The distance may be classified into: close or intimate (where bodies can come in contact with each other also); social; flying or avoiding distance; demonstrates situations that learners are likely to encounter through their day-to-day socio-cultural interaction with native speakers of English [2, 4, 6]. Working with video, a teacher should include the following activities: pre-viewing (to acquaint students with the material they are going to watch, further better comprehension); while-viewing (answer teacher's questions); post-viewing (discussions, role-playings, and writing). The thought of using computer programs in teaching is not new. Its basic purpose is to make teaching and learning more efficient and productive. With the help of computer programs students can check their



knowledge, do different exercises and communicate in a written form. Besides computer-mediated communication gives students additional opportunities to plan their discourse, notice and reflect on language use in the messages they compose and read. Похожая статья: Some advantages and disadvantages of MOOCs in education With access to the Internet language learners can communicate with native speakers (or other language learners) all over the world, search through millions of files around the world and access authentic material that answer their personal interests. The examples of authentic materials can be a newspaper or a magazine article, a rock song, a novel, a radio interview, a movie's review, a traditional fairy story and so on. Using a computer program a teacher can easily notice the mistakes which a student does. And if he is in the habit of making the same mistakes then some extra exercises must be offered to him to avoid making them anymore. In addition the work with a computer provides the following opportunities, it can: motivate the studying of different structures, grammar rules and vocabulary by showing how they are needed in communication; give a student the ability to work in an individual way; give a chance to return to any task which was left or omitted and correct the answer to any question; give several exercises in which a certain structure is trained; provide a chance to involve every student of the class in a studying process; show the results of the work as soon as the task is done; give the possibility to organize a self-dependent work. But in spite of all these advantages the role of a teacher in the educational process is still important. We should remember that a computer program, like any other tool used in teaching (e.g. textbooks, worksheets, newspaper, charts, bulletin boards, educational visual aids, realia, whiteboard, SMART board, overhead projector, tape-recorder, video tape, CD, computer, etc.), does not bring improvements in learning itself. Moreover, there is no any unique book or computer program that can be suitable for everyone. That is why a teacher must select programs which answer definite requirements. The requirements can be quite different depending on the aim which we set. For example, using computer programs a language learner can do grammar and vocabulary exercises, listen and repeat oral speech as well as read short articles, texts and express his opinion in a written form. So if we want to teach students to communicate in a written form and write their own utterances then while choosing computer programs we should pay a special attention to the following aspects: correspondence of the program to a definite purpose; accordance with the topic, vocabulary and grammar that are studied; usage simplicity and clear explanation of tasks to students; presence of certain rules which are necessary for correct writing in a foreign language; presence of appropriate examples. Thus a proper work with computer programs can contribute to the skills formation and abilities to express oneself in a foreign language. Planning a lesson, a teacher should try to use authentic materials because they provide the opportunity to demonstrate language and speech material of a foreign language as well as widen learner's ideas about national peculiarities, mentality of other people; help to know and compare customs and traditions of his own country and the country which language a person studies; broaden the notion about surrounding world; give the source for a future utterance and the basis for the exchange of opinions [1,3]. However, alongside with various advantages, authentic materials often contain difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items and complex language structures, which cause a burden for the teacher in lower-level classes. In addition, authentic materials may be too culturally biased. [5]. To solve these disadvantages, a teacher should choose materials according to the abilities of his students, provide appropriate



exercises which will help overcome difficulties and help students comprehend, remember and use new material. To summarize aforesaid, it should be noted that authentic materials can play multiple roles in language teaching, enable learners to interact with real language and content rather than the form (grammar and vocabulary). In other words, the proper and systematic use of these materials at classes give students understanding that they are learning a language as it is used outside the classroom, prepare them for real communication.

Formerly, '**authentic texts**' were defined as those which were designed for native speakers: they were 'real' texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language in question (Harmer, 1991: 185-88).

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 programs, 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.

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.

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.

According to Harmer (1991:185-88), in addition to the two previous types of written materials, we should consider a third type, called '**simulated authentic material**'. This material is specially prepared for students of English; however, it attempts to reproduce the authentic written or spoken English.

The authors of this material roughly-tune the language and content to suit their students' needs, but they do not sacrifice the feel of the language. Their simulated authenticity will be helpful to students who are practicing reading. What is being suggested, therefore, is that material designed to foster the acquisition of receptive skills must at least simulate authenticity. The need for language control at lower levels must not be used as an excuse for extreme artificiality.



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. According to Doff (1988: 170), once the appropriate text has been selected, students usually get interested in reading, listening and watching, since they regard English texts and programs not merely as a tool to learn a language, but also as a source of information. 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/practise mini-skills such as scanning, e.g. students are given a news article and asked to look for specific 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.

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.

Valdeon (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. 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. 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 practise 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 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 practise 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 which 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.

There are many positive sides to using authentic materials in language classroom. A few of them are discussed below:

First of all, Peacock (1997) mentioned that authentic materials are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials. He also believes that if a teacher uses suitable authentic materials in the language classroom, it motivates students because these are more interesting and inspiring than artificial materials.

Secondly, while applying authentic materials in the language classes, a teacher has to ensure that the material is exploited well. Sometimes teachers need to "shorten authentic texts, or add a glossary in order to make them more accessible" (Gower, 1995, p. 83) or suitable to the class' program of work.

Thirdly, in a language classroom, authentic materials can be used for different levels of students. For example: from a newspaper article, a teacher may ask elementary level students to find out the name of the place used in the article or s/he may ask students of the intermediate level to predict the name of the place shown on the picture and so on. So, for the teacher, suitable authentic materials might be helpful while preparing his lesson.

Besides, students can relate this type of materials to their real life situation (Gower, 1995, p 80). Moreover, by using authentic materials in the writing classroom, a teacher can keep the students informed about what is happening in the world so they can have intrinsic educational value.

Despite the positive sides of the authentic materials, there are some negative sides of using authentic materials in the writing classroom as mentioned by some writers. A few of them are discussed below:

Firstly, Martinez (2002) claimed that authentic materials are sometimes too culturally biased that becomes challenging to understand while writing.

Secondly, when too many different structures are mixed in an article, especially students with lower proficiency level face problems to process all of them at the same time. Besides these, articles become old-fashioned very quick. For example: newspaper articles. While selecting materials teachers need to look at some points that sometimes these materials use more complex



sentence and superfluous vocabulary items which are time consuming for both the students and teachers (Kilickaya 2004).

Results and Discussions

Many researchers mentioned that sometimes authentic materials need to be adapted to be suitable for a particular level of students. Materials adaptation means matching materials to the learner's needs, the teacher's demands and administration's purpose (McDonough and Shaw, p. 73). Adaptation of materials, therefore, plays a valuable role in language teaching. McDonough and Shaw (2004) pointed out "adoption is concerned with whole course books, adaptation concerns the parts that make up that whole" (p. 74). For the teachers, adaptation is an extensive activity because they need to change or adjust the various parts of the course book to make it appropriate for the students.

Furthermore, McDonough and Shaw (2004) also mentioned "the teacher must satisfy the demands of the textbook, but in ways that will be satisfying to those who learn from it" (p. 75). He adds that teaching materials are internally coherent but sometimes they don't suit the context. As Littlejohn (1998; as cited in Tomlinson, 2003, p. 43) affirmed that, here 'adaptation' can take place as a rather formal process and if necessary, the teacher can adapt the exercises by changing and then writing out a modified version for the class. Madsen and Bowen (1978) (as cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2004, p. 75) mentioned "The good teacher is constantly adapting. He adapts when he adds an example not found in the book or [...] when he introduces a supplementary picture". So, it can be said that teachers need to adapt materials for the writing classes.

The term "material" can be defined as information, objects whereas, "Teaching materials" are the lectures, syllabi, texts, useful guidelines to get the students involved etc." (Little John, 1998; as cited in Tomlinson, 2003, p. 43). Examples of authentic materials would be newspaper reports, magazine articles, advertisements, poems, songs, video clips, menus, horoscopes etc. One important feature of authentic materials is that they are not written for educational purposes and are rather defined as real life texts (Wallace, 1994, p. 145). Teachers may incorporate authentic materials not only to motivate the learners but also to give them the feeling that they are using real language- "the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it". (McNeill, 1994, p.130).

According to Alejandro G. Martinez (2002), "*Authentic* would be material designed for native speakers of English used in the classroom in a way similar to the one it was designed for". For example, from a radio news report, the teacher can ask the students to discuss the report on pollution in the city they live. However, Widdowson (1990; cited in Martinez, 2002) differentiates between authentic and genuine materials. Authentic materials are used in their original form as they are not changed, but the genuine materials are basically the authentic materials which are used in a somewhat artificial way and adapted from a class, such as; jumbled paragraphs, cut out headlines etc. (Martinez, 2002).

Authentic materials can also be very purposeful as Willikins believes that (1976; as cited in Guariento and Morley, 2001) authentic text creates a bridge between classroom knowledge and 'a student's capacity to participate in the real world events' (p 79). Besides, a teacher has to



"make sure that activities taken from different sources link together to make a cohesive whole, and that they serve to fulfill the aims and objectives of your lesson" (Gower, 1995, p. 80).

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Conclusion

It can be said that in a writing classroom, authentic materials are definitely valuable parts which have to be selected and controlled carefully by the teacher. In this study, the researcher tried to explore that textbook materials are undoubtedly a valuable resource but at the same time authentic materials can increase the student's potential for writing English language. Through the suitable authentic materials teacher can motivate the students to gather more knowledge about the outside world. Also, the students have the chance to share their predictions and thoughts to the other students and thereby gain confidence in being able to communicate in English. Also, the way the teachers use the authentic material is also very important. Student's participation is mandatory to make an effective class. Especially while using the authentic materials, both teacher and students have to enthusiastically participate equally in the classroom.

Consequently, it can be said that, from teachers and students perspective authentic materials can bring an effective writing classes. Also, to construct an effective writing class there should be a combination of both effective materials and teaching system to engage the students with the tasks. So, the students can enhance the opportunities for language learning.

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