



E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
www.allstudyjournal.com
IJAAS 2022; 4(1): 24-27
Received: 10-11-2021
Accepted: 14-12-2021

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Learning English as a foreign language through authentic materials

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Abstract

Authentic materials are the audiovisual and printed materials, which are not intended for the purpose of teaching and learning the language. The aim of authentic materials is to engage learners in real-life and actual communication that occurs outside the classroom. Authentic Materials are that type of materials that learners of a language encounter in the daily life. These materials can be video, printed, or audio. There are several ways to use authentic materials in the classroom that may explain clearly. This research covers the topics such as, various ways of using authentic materials in English as Foreign Language classes, types of authenticity, and sources of authentic materials; selection and presentation of authentic materials.

Keywords: Authentic materials, EFL, proficiency, competency

Introductions

Authentic materials are the materials that are used for the purpose of teaching and learning, such as printed books or articles, or an audio or a video. The aim of authentic materials are to engage learners in classroom discussions and keep students to practice the real-life situations. Majority of the language teachers came up with an agreement that students should be able to use the language out of the classroom. Foreign language teachers seek material, which can benefit learners in the real situation (out-of-the-classroom). In the twenty first century, teachers do not depend their teaching just on textbook. This is because textbooks are artificial material made for teaching purpose. Authentic materials are good alternatives or supplements to textbooks. Teachers try to incorporate authentic materials in their classes.

As the current era of language teaching stands on communicative use of language rather than structure therefore, teaching foreign language requires instructors to mirror language which is used in the real world. This concept suggests teacher and program designers for including materials, which guarantee everyday use of the target language. Several researchers emphasized on the usefulness of authentic materials in language classes. Using authentic materials motivate and makes language learning interesting for students. For ESP classes, these materials engage learners in particular areas of the target language where students need practice. When materials of teaching are not interesting, they will not learn anything. Many researchers suggest using authentic materials in order to assist students to learn better.

Authentic materials can be best presented by communicative approach of language teaching. These materials can bridge the gap between real world and classroom use of language. Several sources of authentic materials are available and teachers make use of them, but there is an increase in using Internet as the major source. With respect to learners' level, authentic materials can be used with any level. The higher learners level, the more advantage they will take from their learning process.

According to Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) ^[3], "If teaching materials are not interesting and motivating, learners will learn nothing. In order to learn better, a lot of researchers suggest using authentic materials (AM)" (p.251). There are several ways to use authentic materials in the classroom. In this research, I want to search the ways of using authentic materials in English as Foreign Language classes, types of authenticity, and sources of authentic materials; selection and presentation of authentic materials.

Statement of the problem

I have been teaching English as a foreign language for almost fifteen years. I have taught different levels and for different purposes.

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My biggest challenge at the beginning of each class was to prepare materials for each class. My observation says that the materials in the classes should be prepared as skillfully as it has a big effect on learners' achievement. Looking at the importance of this issue, I consider it a big challenge in language classes. This research paper will review different articles to analyze the issue in full details.

Research objectives and question

The purpose of this research is to engage second language learners in real life communication and pave the way for better learning of the language so that they become long life learners in second language (English) and use the language effectively in their profession. The purpose of authentic materials is to engage learners in the natural way of using the language. These types of materials boost learning and can better improve language competency of the learners. It can be used for any level. The research questions for my study are:

What is the role of authentic material in English as Foreign Language Classes?

What are the positive points about authentic material in learning process of English as Foreign Language?

Method of research

The method of this research article is library method that reviews articles related to the topic. I have used different credible sources to collect information of authentic materials. After choosing the sources, the important points were reviewed and highlighted.

Literature review

Authentic materials have a prolonged history in language teaching. Its usage started when communicative language teaching approach emerged in 1970s. In EFL classes, basic concerns of teachers are preparing students for the real-life situation. Teachers should use authentic material in order to increase motivation, interest and involve learners in the real use of language. The concept of authentic material is not much spread out in Afghanistan. In some cases, teachers also face problems while using it. This phenomenon caused the students to become less motivated. I review (ten) articles to discuss the effectiveness of authentic and suggest teachers to use. This research covers the topics such as, various ways, of using authentic materials in English as Foreign Language classes, role of authenticity, types of authenticity, selection, presenting authentic material, and source of authentic materials to find out that how authentic materials help students to learn a foreign language more effectively.

Use of authentic materials in EFL classes

First I will focus on benefit of these materials that can bring change to the teaching practice following communicative language teaching approach and outcomes of authentic materials found by researches. According to Belaid and Murray (2015)^[7], an important objective of using authentic material is improving students' L2 competence of communication. Immediate attention is required to make EFL students ready for real-life communication than before. Several studies showed that there is an increase in the usage of authentic material. In the study, usage of authentic material in foreign language classrooms, Akbari and Razavi (2015)^[2] found that 95% of the teachers (participated in the

study) used authentic materials for their reading class. On the other hand 76% of the teachers used it for listening classes. The authors added that for many years incorporating authentic materials were under debate and benefits of such materials are more than the challenges. As I am in favor of communicative teaching methods such as, task-based language teaching and communicative language teaching, therefore I found that these two methods are compatible with the authentic materials. Martinez (2008)^[18] suggested that authentic materials widely demand task-based approach. I believe that authentic materials can be better presented to the classroom by communicative approaches of teaching and task-based which one of the sub-categories of it.

Baghban and Ambigapathy (2001)^[5] stated that authentic materials are useful for ESP learners. The authors added that material developers may also be teachers and they consider the advantages involved in authentic materials. These materials can establish rapport between ESP students' need and the real world outside the classroom in their profession. Since ESP learners are required to use language in their vocational settings, authentic material can better facilitate students to simulate professional settings inside the classroom. I agree with the authors' idea. In my institution, students need English that can help them to use it in their professional field. Medical students need authentic conversation between patient and doctor, case reports from the hospital, health related news through radio or television, and sometimes research articles.

Martinez (2008)^[18] mentioned "if teachers are using textbook all the time, their skills actually deteriorate over the years." (P.55) The author explained that language is filtered in the textbooks in a very distinctive way. I think that using textbooks all the time damage skills of teachers with respect to selecting materials, designing materials, and adapting materials. According to Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014)^[3], either it is inside or outside of the classroom; students are enabled to cope with 'genuine interaction' by authentic materials. The authors added that when authentic materials are used, learners might have the sense of learning language for real communication. Polio (2014)^[19] suggested similar idea regarding authentic materials. She added that authentic materials are not made for educational language purpose. They are created to native speakers and real-life communication. The author also mentioned that there are many available written and spoken samples of authentic materials. I believe that in contexts where learners' need cannot be met by textbooks, alternative way is to make use of authentic materials from variety of sources. The advantages brought by authentic materials to learners are countless. Through these materials learners are able to practice problem-solving skills, project-based learning, task-based learning, simulations, and role-play. These practices empower the learners to be successful in and outside of the classroom.

Studies have shown that authentic materials can cause a positive change in students learning and helps learners to use the language in its natural way. One of the positive effects of authentic materials is that it increases EFL learners' proficiency in real contexts. It is important to face EFL students to real language in the appropriate contexts. According to Shu-Chin (2009)^[20], many advantages exist in using materials that are not created for classroom use. The author added that these materials are culturally significant,

rich in context, and provide clues for comprehension. Authentic materials are consistently much higher than materials that are written inclusively for the learners and can be used for the four language skills. The result of this view is that there is no weak or bad authentic source and all of them are equally significant.

Researches show that nowadays teachers have more tendencies to use authentic materials in either of their classes. In a study to find teachers perspective in using of authentic materials, Belaid and Murray (2015) ^[7] found that the maximum number of the teachers tended to use authentic materials for listening classes; reading and speaking classes are second preferred classes and writing classes appeared the last option of using authentic materials. I believe that authentic materials are more related to students need and provide exposure to the genuine language. These materials include texts that cannot be found in artificial learning materials. As the result of the research Omid and Azam (2015) confirmed that nevertheless of teaching experience, academic degree, and nationality, teachers had a positive attitude toward using authentic input in their classes. The authors mentioned that the theory behind this attitude was to expose student to real English language and improve their skills.

Berardo (2006) ^[8] stated that by using structural and artificial language, learners do not reflect the real use of language. The author suggested advantages of authentic materials as “having a positive effect on student motivation; giving authentic cultural information; - exposing students to real language; - relating more closely to students’ needs; - supporting a more creative approach to teaching.” (p. 65). I think that beside increasing motivations, authentic materials also make the learning process more enjoyable and brighten the EFL classes more. This is because these materials have cultural content, which improve understanding and comprehension of the language. Martinez (2008) ^[18] stated that text books are bounded in a particular time and can be outdated very soon, they are written at a particular time, in a particular context or event. I find authentic materials more attractive and up to dated. Any time a teacher can have access to variety of authentic sources for free. Just the skill is needed to adapt or make activities for that. This is absolutely clear for teachers that textbooks have their own price. In developing countries such as Afghanistan, the economic rate and access to those precious materials is very rare. So, authentic materials are a good alternative to use in EFL classes.

The importance of using authentic materials is that real context, purpose, and audience for language use is provided. In addition, Furuta (2002) ^[12] stated that second language teaching “should parallel first language learning and use by focusing primarily on meaning, purpose and context of language use, not on linguistic forms” (p. 11). I agree to the author’s idea because such materials consolidate the language acquisition through a natural process and fill the gap existed between the real world and classroom. I think that contextually authentic materials are rich. Learners can be benefited with the useful words in natural way. For example, in a magazine or newspaper, words and phrases are related to a specific topic and in that context it is more memorable to learn new words.

Lingzhu and Yuanyuan (2010) ^[17] elaborated that for authentic materials to be used, enough cultural background, wide range of vocabulary, and good knowledge of grammar

is required from students. They noted that low-level learners can be simple de-motivated while expose to such materials. Authentic and artificial materials are widely used in EFL context. However there are many supporters of artificial materials. I believe that one can make decision whether to use authentic material or not after comparing the authentic with inauthentic materials. Several evidence and factors exist which shows the effectiveness of authentic materials than inauthentic materials. According to Belaid and Murray (2015) ^[7], a special feature of authentic materials is that it is utilized for real communication while materials, which are not authentic, are used for educational purposes. Authentic materials increase communicative abilities of learners whereas non-authentic materials pay more attention to structures and forms.

Although there are numerous supporting points for the usage of authentic materials, still there are few critics. One of the major critics of authentic materials is time consumption. According to Belaid and Murray (2015) ^[7], teachers are discouraged to use authentic materials by the time consumption in adapting it for EFL classes. I believe that adapting problems can be resolved by two or three attempts of teachers adapting materials for their classes. On the other hand, Day (2004) ^[11] suggested that instead of authentic materials the issue of ‘appropriateness’ is worth of thinking. The author argued that authentic materials could be frequently ‘misguided’ and it is not a must. For this reason, the author stated that authentic materials confound means with the goal. In this regard, Polio (2014) ^[19], suggested that one of the most challenging dimensions of authentic material is finding stimulating and available material. The author explained that ‘news stories’ is outdated soon and teachers should find materials that can be reused and shared after creating activities for many years.

Martinez (2008) ^[18] recommended using a combination of authentic materials and textbook. The author explained that richness and reality that is desirable is brought to the classroom by authentic materials. The author added that authentic materials offer necessary link to outside of the classroom while textbook provide well organize and practical resource as the backbone of the class. I propose the use of authentic materials as supplementary materials in courses that teachers cannot reduce the content of the course. They can benefit students from the privileges involved in authentic materials. Authentic print materials like magazines and newspapers, or auditory materials like academic lectures and radio broadcasts are good sources of authentic materials to be used in EFL context.

Types of authenticity

Breen (1985) ^[9] suggested four types of authenticity in language teaching. The author stated text authenticity, task authenticity, learners’ authenticity and classroom authenticity as the four types of authenticity. The author added that these types are in a progressive interrelationship with one another in any language lesson. Adams (1995) ^[1] suggested that while making decision about using authentic materials we should either select the materials very carefully and how to use these materials in the classroom.

Sources of authentic materials

One of the distinctive features of authentic materials is that it has no limit. These materials are available for variety of language need, different proficiency level, and various

contexts. Everyday thousands of texts are added to different sources of authentic materials. According to Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) ^[3], nowadays teaching material resources is accessible for everybody anywhere.

Selection and presentation of authentic materials

Among variety of authentic material sources, selecting the appropriate one is not so easy. Selecting materials and presenting it to the learners are two main elements that influence the outcome of learning process. According to Berardo (2006) ^[8], "If authentic texts have been written not for language learning purposes but for completely different ones, where do they come from and how are they selected?" (p.62). The author provided answer to this questions. While choosing material from different sources, it is good to take into account that the aim must be to focus on meaning not on form. This is because artificial materials focus more on form of the target language. The overall emphasize of the language should be on what is being said rather than the literary form. I believe that audio-visual authentic materials provide significant source in order to improve learners' communicative competence at different proficiency levels. According to McGrath (2002, as cited in Azri and Al-Rashidi, 2014), eight principles should be taken into account while selecting authentic texts. The criterions are relevance to course book and learners' needs, topic interest, cultural fitness, logistical considerations, cognitive demands, linguistic demands, quality, and exploitability.

Result and Discussion

From the result of this research, we may find that many empirical researches have been done to prove the effectiveness of authentic materials both in first and second language learning process. Therefore, we find out that most of researchers recommended using a combination of authentic materials and textbook. The author explained that richness and reality that is desirable is brought to the classroom by authentic materials and offer necessary link to outside of the classroom while textbook provide well organize and practical resource as the backbone of the class. In the Afghan context, authentic materials are used very rare. This is because the concept of authentic material is not spread enough in Afghanistan's education system. On the other hand, usage of authentic material is not so easy. Several parameters such as learners' language proficiency, context of the teaching, need of learners, and their interest should be taken into account while adapting authentic materials for a specific classroom. One cannot guarantee to make able students to communicate if the lessons are always restricted to textbooks and lesson objectives. Researches show that nowadays teachers have more tendencies to use authentic materials in either of their classes. I believe that authentic materials are more related to students need and provide exposure to the genuine language. That is why I prefer to use authentic material as a supplementary material beside the text book and suggest to other instructors to use in order to make students long- life learners.

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