

AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND THEIR USAGE IN TEACHING ENGLISH

Abstract. The article presents the usage of authentic materials in teaching English, advantages for teachers and students and its effectiveness in the classrooms.

Key words: authentic materials, appropriate material, effectiveness, speaking in English, unknown vocabulary, English-speaking environment.

Up to the present moment, there have been a lot of researches on learning alternative approaches and methods in teaching English. Recently, using authentic materials has been accepted as the most effective and profitable way of teaching foreign languages. A lot of students are facing some problems and difficulties in the process of communication with native English speakers because of having learnt language from non-authentic materials. In the modern methods of teaching the foreign language the usage of authentic materials stands as the main criterion of the «right» resources that are utilized while developing the language proficiency.

Authentic Material is material used in the TEFL classroom which was originally created for native speakers of English. «The reason we use authentic material in class rather than material specifically written for learners is to provide more variety and authenticity to the lesson. It also allows to tailor the content of the lesson more specifically to your class needs and interests» [1, p. 78]. Using authentic materials is one of the mainstays of an imaginative and motivating higher level course, but rarely features at levels lower than intermediate. There are several reasons for this, primarily a kind of fear that students will panic faced with language that is largely unfamiliar. This is an unnecessary fear, as using the authentic materials can be rewarding and stimulating for both teachers and students. As you all know, the main difference between authentic and graded materials is that in the latter, the materials almost revolve around a particular structure that is presented to the students. For example, if the tense being presented is, say, «The Past Tense», every single speaker in the dialogs or even the texts given to the students are in that tense. It seems as if there were no other tense in the whole world. In reality, when talking about the past, for example, native speakers may use a wider variety of tenses, sometimes even the present tense.

Authentic materials, on the other hand, are real in the sense that they are not created for students as the target audience but for native speakers. The obvious advantage, of course, is that by using authentic materials as you present students with actual everyday language, just as it appears in real life. The main disadvantage of these materials of course, is that sometimes they are not teacher-friendly, and you may need to spend several hours reading or watching videos until you finally find what you need in order to use in your class. In addition, on many occasions in a whole context or situation you may find just one instance of what you need to present your students with. This could be overcome if you provide students with several situations in which the pattern appears, but again, you need to have the time to research and gather the

appropriate materials. If time is no object to you, you may well spend some time doing this research and you will soon find out that there's myriads of information out there that is terrific for your classroom. However, if you have time constraints, as most teachers unfortunately do, a balanced approach may be the solution for you.

Authentic materials are the materials which are not specifically written for teaching. Teacher can even tell class to go over some authentic texts, videos, songs etc. and find similar constructions. Sometimes a combination of both approaches yields the best of both worlds. It is up to the teacher to decide what could be the best for the classrooms.

Authentic materials are used to recreate a natural atmosphere of another language. Authentic materials include books, newspapers, magazines, tutorials, leaflets, menus, maps, postcards, photographs, tickets, etc. Authentic materials are spoken or written materials not specially written for classroom use but taken from media or real life. As authentic materials contain difficult vocabulary and structure, they should not be used as the main means of teaching for beginning learners. The lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge can demotivate, frustrate and discourage learners from learning. Thus, authentic materials have a noticeable contribution in language learning. They raise learners' interest, increase learning motivation, help to realize the relationship between the language that is learnt in the class and the language used in the foreign language environment. In fact, authentic material includes any example of language which was produced originally for native English speakers. Choosing the correct type of authentic material is important. Firstly, it must be of an appropriate level and complexity. For example, you could not give a beginners class the front page of the New York Times and ask them to analyze it. Likewise offering a company report to a class of airport staff learning English to deal with tourists would be inappropriate. Most teachers widened the definition to include videos, television programs and any other sources of language or anything that might stimulate language use. There are some people who think it is too hard to understand...they were not actually any authentic materials in most of the books. There are some other teachers stating that authentic materials are, in principle, materials which have not been adapted in any way. If they are still in principle the same but maybe have been shortened or one or two words changed, then they would say they were only semi-authentic.

The advantage of authentic materials is that they give higher-level students exposure to unregulated native-speaker language — the language as it is actually used by native speakers communicating with other native speakers. They are as keys in receptive skills and learning convention — «authentic listening» to speakers, ideally on video, in particular. But we don't necessarily see authentic materials as a model for productive skills. Authentic materials — a contract or an email — are often a starting point for advanced students to discuss how to communicate most effectively. They will stumble over a phrase or expression and want to discuss the meaning and related intentions and connotations. The authenticity of the materials makes them authoritative. There are a number of advantages for using authentic materials in the language classroom. Learners are exposed to «real» language in context, which helps learners to develop a broader language base. According to Widowson, «it has been traditionally

supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic» [2, p. 4]. Exposure to authentic materials helps language learners to keep informed about what is happening in the world. These materials also help learners to understand that there is a community of language users who use the language outside of the classroom, which promotes language learning and helps to introduce the learners to the target culture.

«Authentic materials are different to the usual formal learning materials in that they may be more relevant, visually stimulating and target different learning styles» [3, p. 4]. As a result these materials can make lessons more interesting, motivating and memorable for learners. They can be used to develop a range of language skills and strategies, including vocabulary and grammar, speaking, reading, writing, listening and critical thinking skills. One of the greatest advantages of authentic materials is that they are relatively inexpensive and readily available.

When people first think of authentic materials they usually assume that it's talking about newspaper and magazine articles. However, the term can also encompass such things as songs, web pages, radio and TV broadcasts, films, leaflets, flyers, projects, indeed anything written in the target language and used unedited in the classroom as mentioned many times above. These materials used, will of course, depend on the «usual» factors:

Topic Skills

Target Language Area Students' needs and interests

It's no good trying to get your students fascinated by a text on the latest art movie if they are all fans of action films. A text, written or recorded, is likely to be too hard, even, in some cases, for advanced students. The trick, regardless of the text used, is not to edit and grade the text, but to grade the task according to your students' abilities. This is for three reasons: most importantly, it reflects the kind of situation the students may face in an English-speaking environment, it saves your time and energy more of an added bonus than a reason and lastly it encourages and motivates your students when they can «conquer» a real text. The same text could be used in a variety of different ways. Let us take a tourist information leaflet. This kind of authentic material has the added advantage that it can be easily and swiftly ordered for free and in multiple copies from tourist boards and agencies. This also removes issues of copyright, which is a common problem of using authentic materials and should be checked depending on particular situation. Some countries allow a small number of copies to be made for educational purposes, but this can vary. With a little pre-teaching a low level class can use the leaflet to find out key information, «What is the telephone number for...?» or «When is...?» and so on. At higher levels the same texts could be used together with similar or related texts to form part of a research project. In this case, websites, posters and similar leaflets spring to mind.

Naturally certain texts will lend themselves more easily to certain levels. At lower levels some possibilities include leaflets, timetables, menus, short headline type reports, audio and video advertising, or short news broadcasts. The task should be simple and

relatively undemanding, and it is important to pre-teach key vocabulary so as to prevent panic.

At more intermediate levels this list could be expanded to include longer articles, four or five minute TV or radio news report, a higher quantity of shorter items, or even whole TV programs, if your copyright agreements allow it. Again pre-teaching is important, although your students should be able to deal with unknown vocabulary to some extent. At higher levels, it's a case of anything goes. At an advanced level students should have some tactics for dealing with new vocabulary without panicking, but it's still useful to have a few quick definitions to hand for some of the trickier stuff. As a key skill can be seen here is dealing with unknown language, in particular vocabulary. It is hard to cover this topic here, as there are several methods, although one which seems immediately appropriate is the skill of ignoring it, if they can complete the task without it. Especially with lower levels, it needs to be emphasized that students do not have to understand everything. I've found that students do not often believe you until you go through a few tasks with them. Teaching them this skill, and developing their confidence at coping with the unknown is an important element in their development as independent learners. As can be seen, using authentic materials is a relatively easy and convenient way of improving not only your students' general skills, but also their confidence in a real situation. This is only a brief introduction to the ideas involved, but some of these ideas could easily be expanded to form part of a motivating and effective course.

To sum up the advantages, we can feel that authentic materials:

- Help prepare learners for the «real» world of communication:
- Guide learners toward the language they need for their particular context:
- Motivate learners to communicate, because they help make communication «real».

Used thoughtfully, authentic material provides a very good way to keep the class interest up, provide your students with language and usage very specifically tailored to their needs, and importantly, authentic material can bring a new level of interests to the class.

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