

## The Use of Authentic Materials in Classrooms

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**Abstract:** 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.

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There are different definitions for the authentic materials, but they do have something in common. All the definitions highlight the fact that authentic materials mean “exposure to real language and its use in its own community.”

“Authentic materials are materials that we can use in the classroom and that have not been changed in any way for ESL students” (Sanderson, 1999). As a result of the researches carried out and the surveys conducted it has come out that there are many advantages in using the authentic materials. At the same time, there are a few disadvantages that teachers and students should be aware of when using different sources of authentic materials such as newspapers, TV programs, menus, magazines, the internet, movies, songs, brochures, comics, literature, etc. The paper shows how authentic materials can be used at any level in accordance with the students’ needs and knowledge.

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.

The definitions of authentic materials. The definitions of authentic materials are slightly different in literature written by different researchers of language. Rogers (1988) defines authentic materials as “appropriate” and “quality” in terms of goals, objectives, learner needs and interest and “natural” in terms of real life and meaningful communication. Harmer (1991) defines authentic texts as “materials which are designed for native speakers; they are real texts; designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language”. Jordan (1997) refers to authentic texts as “texts that are not written for language teaching purposes”. Peacock (1997) describes authentic materials as materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community. What we understand that is common in these definitions is “exposure to real language and its use in its own community” (Widdowson, 1990), in other words it is the benefit students get from being exposed to the language in authentic materials. In short, “authentic materials are materials that we can use with the students in the classroom and that have not been changed in any way for ESL students. A classic example would be a newspaper article that’s written for a Native-English-speaking audience” (Sanderson, 1999).

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Bringing authentic materials into the classroom can be motivating for the students, as it adds a real-life element to the student's learning experience. Authentic materials are significant since it increases students' motivation for learning, makes the learner be exposed to the "real" language. of course, we should always remember that we should bear in mind the task, not the material. This means that, for example, instead of asking a beginner student to read a full-page article that's over their heads, we should ask them to read the headline and guess what the article will be about. The sources of authentic materials and their effects.

Reading means different things to different people, for some it is recognizing written words, while for others it is an opportunity to teach pronunciation and practice speaking. However, reading always has a purpose. It is something that we do every day, it is an integral part of our daily lives, taken very much for granted and generally assumed to be something that everyone can do. The reason for reading depends very much on the purpose for reading. The use of authentic materials in the classroom is discussed, with the student benefiting from the exposure to real language being used in a real context. Other aspects which prove positive when using authentic materials are that 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.

One of the main reason for using authentic materials in the classroom is once outside the "safe", controlled language learning environment, the learner will not encounter the artificial language of the classroom but the real world and language how it is really used. The role of the teacher is not to delude the language learner but to prepare him, giving the awareness and necessary skills so as to understand how the language is actually used. Knowledge is inadequate.

Top-Down processing is the opposite, where a global meaning of the text is obtained, through "clues" in the text and the reader's good schema knowledge. This is often associated with a good reader, who does not read word for word but quickly and efficiently. The most comprehensive description of the reading process are interactive models, "...in which every component in the reading process can interact with any other component... (Alderson 2000:18)", combining elements of both bottom-up and top down models. Reading is considered to be an interactive process (a conversation between writer/reader, even though the writer is not present) and for it to occur both processes are necessary, top-down to predict the meaning and bottom-up to check it. The two are therefore complementary ways of processing a text. Our knowledge and experiences of the world around us also influence how a text is read or processed; this is known as schema theory (Bartlett 1932). It operates actively and constructively, with our knowledge of the world being a continuous process that upon receiving new information interprets it on the basis of what is already known. Good readers have an idea of what is normal (linguistically and conceptually) and of how the world works, therefore when reading they make use of existing schemata and then modify them with any new information. They also have expectations or make predictions before reading that are either reinforced, challenged or modified after reading. Schemata has also been described as "...cognitive instructs which allow for the organization of information in the long term memory..." (Widdowson 1983:34). Often a writer will presume that the target reader has the relevant schemata to read the text and will therefore leave certain facts out or unstated (presuppositions) but this creates problems when the writer and reader do not share the same relevant schema.

Authenticity can therefore be considered to be the interaction between the reader and the text and not just the text in itself. Reading is considered to be an ongoing interaction, going beyond the physical context of the text, looking for meaning as well as processing information. Goodman takes this even further claiming that reading is "...an essential interaction between language and thought..." (1988:12) where the writer encodes his thoughts as language and the reader decodes the language into thought.



Authentic materials bring learners into direct contact with a reality level of English. Real Business English – that is, English as it is used by businesspeople to communicate with other businesspeople – English that has not been made especially easy for learners – can be a great motivator. Constant exposure to real English as it is used to talk about business defines the end of the tunnel – the goal – for many learners. “If I work with and practice real Business English, I am developing a tool that I can use in real life.” The other extremely important point here is that many of our learners are already in business so they will have had a certain amount of exposure to the English language that is used to conduct real business. A lot of value can be generated out of a marriage between real Business English and our learners’ real business experience.

**Basic principles** It is one thing to give your students an article that they find interesting and satisfying to read – and quite another thing to give them an article to read in class (even if it is an interesting and relevant one) that is so difficult for them to understand that they have problems with every third word and lose all confidence in their English. So, particularly when you start using authentic materials with them, you will need to be extremely patient and gently support them in their learning process. It is at this point where you need to make adjustments for your group to compensate for their level of comprehension and vocabulary. See lessons that provide added value and a first lesson with authentic materials.

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