

# The Effect Of Using Authentic Materials In Teaching

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**Abstract** - Authentic materials are among the most important tools a teacher can and must use in class in order to make his/her teaching go smoothly and be effective in transmitting the necessary knowledge to all students. In this paper, the writers will discuss the Effect of Using Authentic Materials in teaching, because a number of studies point out that the use of authentic materials is regarded a useful means to motivate learners, arouse their interest and expose them to the real language they will face in the real world.

**Index Terms:** Authentic/Non-Authentic Materials; Authentic Learning; Communicative Approach

## 1 INTRODUCTION:

The use of authentic materials in EFL classes is not new, because teachers started using them in the 1970s as a result of the spread of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Martinez (2002), defines authentic materials as the materials which are prepared for native speakers and not designed to be used for teaching purposes. Kilickaya (2004) has another definition for authentic materials, which is "exposure to real language and use in its own community." Nowadays, preparing students for real life situations is of utmost concern for English language teachers, especially in EFL classes. Therefore, like other teachers around the world, especially in places where English is a foreign language, Omani teachers need to adopt effective teaching materials, in order to help their students learn English better, as well as prepare them to communicate with the outside world. Bacon and Finnemann (1990: 459), state that teachers need to "find ways and means of exploiting authentic materials in classroom instructions." Many researchers state that if students are willing to use English language sufficiently, they must be exposed to the language, exactly as it is used in real life situations by native speakers. Nuttall (1996) argues that "authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purpose by real people." Widdowson (1990) and Harmer (2001) use the terms "authentic" and "non-authentic" to distinguish between the two, but the point is not in the language materials themselves but rather on their outcomes and their effectiveness. These can be measured only by the learners' observable and measurable performances. Nunan (1997) mentioned in Widdowson (1990), believes that exposing learners to authentic materials is indispensable, because of the rich language input they provide. Exposing students to such language forms will enable them to cope with genuine interaction, whether it is inside or outside the classroom. Researchers claim that when authentic materials are used with the purpose of students' learning, students will have a sense that the real language for communication is being learnt, as opposed to classroom language itself. In contrast to the design of the text books, authentic materials are intrinsically more active, interesting and stimulating (Lee, 1995; Little, Devitt & Singleton, 1988; Peacock, 1997; Shei, 2001). Furthermore, students in Oman are very keen on the originality of things, particularly when the matter is connected with their learning. So, authentic texts will bring them closer to the target language culture, and therefore this will result in them making the learning process overall an even more enjoyable and thus, motivating.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction:

During the past decades, teaching a foreign language has gained much more attention in most countries around the world. As a result, searching for appropriate and effective teaching materials occupies a great space of instructors' thinking. The purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to benefit from using it in the real world, in real situations. Therefore, most of the language teachers think whether it is enough to teach the language using the course book tasks, which are regarded artificial because they are designed for teaching purposes only, or if they should adopt using authentic materials to scaffold learners' learning process in general and develop reading skills in particular. Therefore, when teachers are concerned with helping their students to develop reading skills, they should think about the methods of teaching being used and materials being taught to students. Reading tasks should provide learners with a high level of independence when reading in a foreign language in a real life context, which in turn means, using actual authentic materials. Larsen-Freeman (2000, 129) states that one of the characteristics of communicative language teaching is using authentic materials. Communicative language teaching approach changes the view of syllabus designers toward English subjects, from just a language to be learned like other subjects in the school, to a very important tool of communication inside and outside the classroom. Hence, the syllabus designers are advised to take into account the learners' needs and provide them with the chance, to be able to communicate the learned language in real situations outside the school walls. Recently, using authentic materials in teaching English language in ESL classes, gained much attention from teachers. Furthermore, (Kilickaya, 2004) states that nowadays there are a lot of voices suggesting that English language presented to the learners in the classroom, should be authentic in order to enhance learners' learning process. There are many references to authentic materials in ELT literature. Debates are still raging on why they should or not be included in lessons, and how they are to be used or best exploited. Reading such literature, it is clear that those authors who support the use of authentic material have one idea in common: 'exposure', or in other words, the benefit students get from being "exposed" to the language in authentic materials. Actually there are a lot of linguists, who encourage the use of authentic materials in teaching because of their positive effects on learners. According to Carter & Nunan (2001, p. 68) authentic materials are the kind of "texts" that are not designed for "teaching"

aims. Peacock (1997) defines authentic materials as the materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purposes in the language community. While Nunan (1999), has another definition for authentic materials, which is: "spoken or written materials, which are not intended for use in teaching". On his part, Widdowson (1990) believes that "authentic" would be the materials designed for native speakers of English, and used in the classrooms in a way similar to the one it was designed for. Authentic materials may be written or spoken. For example, a radio news report was brought into the class, so students discuss the report on pollution in the city where learners live. Other examples of authentic materials are newspapers, magazines, posters, etc. Kelly, Kelly, Offner & Vorland (2002) believes that authentic materials are a useful means, to bridge the gap between classroom and the real world. Researchers have proven that the language taught in the classroom must be linked to its functions in the real world. In addition, Richards (2001) states that the language which the learners are engaged with in classroom, must represent the language used in the real world.

### Definition of Authentic Material:

This section will go through some of the common definitions of the term "authentic materials", from the point of view of the following writers:

1. Herrington and Oliver (2000) suggested a new pedagogical term, called "authentic learning". This term is directly related to the students' real life and prepares them to face and deal with real world situations.
2. According to Herod (2002) authentic learning 'materials and activities' are designed to imitate the real world situations.
3. Nunan (1988) defines authentic materials as the materials "which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language".
4. Jordan (1997) defines authentic texts as the ones which are not designed for pedagogical aims.
5. Jacobson et al (2003, p. 1) sees authentic materials as printed materials, which are used in classrooms in the same way they would be used in real life.
6. In other words, Stubbs (1996) defines authentic texts as "actual, attested, and such that they have real authentic instances of use."
7. According to Carter & Nunan (2001, p. 68) authentic materials are "ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes."

### 2.2. Authenticity:

According to Rost (2005) authenticity is one of the terms which researchers talk about questionably. Kilickaya (2004), states that authenticity has been put under deep discussion by many researchers. As a result, they came up with different definitions for this problematic term. Defining 'authenticity' is a vital element for both materials designers and language teachers, who are willing to employ authenticity in language teaching in EFL classrooms. There were a number of studies engaged with studying authenticity and the use of authentic materials in EFL classes. For many researchers, authenticity is very significant, because it prepares the learners for the real world situations in terms of using the target language. On the other

hand, using less authentic materials with our learners, may lead to less practice in the real world. According to Hedge (2000) the notion of authenticity, came to the surface in association with communicative approach in language teaching in the 1970-s. Defining authenticity is not an easy matter. Therefore, there are various differences among writers, regarding the definition of this term. According to Tatsuki (2006) "authenticity, is taken as being synonymous with genuineness, realness, truthfulness, validity, reliability... of materials." Furthermore, MacDonald et al. (2006) state that "if a correspondence occurs between the texts used by teachers in the classrooms and kinds of texts used in the real world, in this case, these texts can be regarded authentic". Mishan (2005), states that there are three approaches which are regarded as the basis for the term authenticity in language teaching. These are communicative, materials-focused and humanistic approaches. Communicative approach: in this approach, the focus is on communication from both sides - the learning process and the teaching methods.

1. Materials-focused approach: the learning in this approach is text-centered.
2. Humanistic approach: this approach emphasizes the unity of learners' feelings and the learning process.

Widdowson (1996, p. 67) states that teaching "real English as it functions in contextually appropriate ways, needs to refer to... how people who have the language as an L1 actually put it, to communicative use." Furthermore, Dunlop (1981), states that because being able to read authentic materials is important for learners, teachers have to use more of this type of materials in the classrooms. Otte (2006, p. 56) believes that learners need to "practice using authentic language themselves, in order to be better prepared to deal with authentic language in the real world." According to Brown and Eskenzai (2004), by using textbooks alone, learners will not be exposed to the real language, as it is used in the real world.

### 2.3 Types of Authenticity:

According to Breen (1985) there are four types of authenticity. These are: text authenticity, learner authenticity, task authenticity and authenticity of the classroom. These types are discussed below: Authenticity of text: refers to the authentic qualities of a text. Authentic texts in the context of language learning, means any source of information used to help learners to develop an authentic understanding.

- Authenticity of learners: refers to the ability of learners to interpret the meaning present in the text like the native speakers do in the real world.

- Authenticity of the tasks: refers to the chosen tasks provided for the learners to be engaged in an authentic communication and authentic aims for learning.

- Authenticity of the classroom: the most important role of the classroom is to enable the learners to experience "public and interpersonal sharing of content of language learning, the sharing of problems with such content, and revealing of the most effective means and strategies to overcome such problems." Breen (1985, p. 67).

### 2.4 The use of Authentic Materials in the EFL classroom:

Using inappropriate teaching materials makes learners face difficulties in learning a foreign language. Learners need to be motivated to succeed in learning any language. Therefore,

teaching materials must be motivating and raise learners' interest. If teaching materials are not interesting and motivating, learners will learn nothing. In order to help learners learn better, a lot of researchers suggest using authentic materials (AM). The use of AM in teaching has come under discussion since the 1970-s. Many researchers study the impact of this kind of materials on learners. Using authentic materials particularly in teaching language in classrooms has been effective over the past decades. Many researchers shed more light on the usefulness of authentic materials to support language learning and teaching (Guariento and Morley, 2001; Paltridge, 2001; Shrum and Glisan, 2000). Most of them state that this kind of materials help increase the learners motivation towards reading. For instance, (Otte, 2006 and Thanajaro, 2000) noticed that learners' self-satisfaction and motivation showed improvement after employing authentic texts in the classroom. Authentic materials help motivate learners learn the language by making them feel that they are learning the 'real' language (Guariento & Morely, 2001). Whereas Hyland (2003, p. 94) states that one of the most important advantages of using authentic materials is that it increases learners' motivation and reflects positively on the learning process. In other words, students learn the language better when we as teachers use authentic materials as a teaching aid. Furthermore, as it was already mentioned before, it was concluded that authentic materials are helpful in developing learners' reading skills. "Without the use of authentic materials while exposing learners to EFL situations, it is difficult to anticipate how the learner will perform in the real situations." Tirth (n.d.) Peacock (1997) cited in Richards (2001), mentions several reasons for using authentic materials in the classroom. These are: (1) they prepare learners for real life, (2) they meet learners' needs, (3) they affect learners' motivation positively, (4) they encourage teachers to adopt effective teaching methods and (5) they present authentic information about culture. Authentic materials therefore, help learners realize the relationship between the language presented in the classroom and the language used in real world situations. From his side, Genhard (1996) believes that authentic materials "contextualize" the language learning. In addition, authentic materials help to bridge the gap between the language being taught in the classroom and the language used by real people in real situations in the real world.

## 2.5 Types of Authentic Materials:

Teaching materials are a very essential part of teaching and learning a foreign language. These days, the resources for teaching materials are available for everybody. The internet is regarded as a very important and rich source for authentic materials. Genhard (1996) classified authentic materials into three categories as follows:

1. Authentic listening materials, such as radio news, cartoons, songs, etc.
2. Authentic visual materials, such as street signs, magazines and newspapers pictures, post cards, etc.
3. Authentic printed materials, such as sports reports, newspapers, restaurant menus, train tickets, etc.

## 2.6 Selecting Authentic Materials:

Nunan (1989) divides communicative classroom tasks into two categories. These are:

- 'real world': this type of task provides the learners with

a chance to be involved in 'approximate' practice of the language and behaviors they might need beyond the classroom.

- 'pedagogic': this type 'stimulates interned process of acquisition' only without getting the learners to practice the skill that might be needed in the real world. This type is represented in the course books used by teachers in the class. Therefore, using authentic materials is necessary for learners to be prepared for dealing with real world situations. Here, it is the teachers' role to choose suitable authentic tasks to support learners' learning. Teachers need some criteria to lighten their path, to be able to choose the tasks the learners will benefit from.

According to McGrath (2002) there are eight criteria to be considered when choosing appropriate authentic texts. These are: (1) Relevance to course book and learners' needs, (2) Topic interest, (3) Cultural fitness, (4) Logistical considerations, (5) Cognitive demands, (6) Linguistic demands, (7) Quality and (8) Exploitability. There are three main criteria used to choose and access texts to be used in the classroom: "suitability of the content, exploitability and readability." (Nuttal, in Sacha n.d.) Suitability is regarded as the most important one, because it means that reading materials must arouse the learners' interest, meet their needs and motivate them. Exploitability stands for the way in which the text is used to develop the reading competence of learners, while readability refers to the difficulty and complexity of a text. The reading text must not contain too difficult or demanding words and structures. It must also suit the learners' level of English. Otherwise, it might de-motivate the learners and have a negative effect. Berardo (2006), states that two more important criteria must also be taken into account by teachers when selecting authentic materials, which are: variety and presentation. Using different types of texts helps to make the reading tasks more interesting. Also, presenting the materials in an authentic context is a key element to attract learners' attention and interest. That means using colored pictures, diagrams, photos, etc. Some teachers might argue that they cannot teach only using authentic materials and ignore the assigned tasks (non-authentic) in the course book. In this case, Foppoli (2006) suggests that teachers can teach the assigned tasks in the course book, use authentic materials to support and enhance students' learning.

## 2.7 Arguments In Favor of Authentic Materials:

Most researchers realize the role of authentic materials in language teaching. They believe that authentic materials scaffold learners' learning of a target language more sufficiently (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Wilcox & Oaks, 1999; Weyers, 1999). They state that using authentic materials has linguistic and non-linguistic advantages, which are:

### 2.7.1 Linguistic Advantages:

Going through some empirical studies conducted concerning the effectiveness of authentic materials, it is obvious that authentic materials had a positive effect on learners' achievement. For instance, Otte (2006) studied the effect of aural authentic texts on listening comprehension skills of a number of students involved in a study at a university in USA. He noticed that authentic materials developed the students'

listening comprehension skills and their motivation as well. In addition, it's a fact that a number of researchers have confirmed the role of authentic materials in developing reading skills through introducing learners to new vocabulary and expressions. Harmer (1994) states that authentic material has positive effects on learners, in that it: (1) helps learners to produce better language. (2) helps learners to acquire the language faster (3) makes learners more confident to deal with real life situations. Furthermore, (Philips and Shettlsworth, 1978; Clarke 1989; Peacock 1997, cited in Richards, 2001) regard authentic materials useful in language teaching, for the following reasons: (1) they expose learners to real language; (2) they are more related to learners' needs; (3) they have a positive effect on learners' motivation; (4) they bring cultural information to the students' attention. They encourage teachers to adopt creative teaching approach. "Authentic texts can be motivating, because they are a proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people." (Nuttall 1996, p. 172) Although the authentic materials play an important role in supporting students' learning of a foreign language by giving them an opportunity to deal with situations similar to the real world situations outside the classroom, there are many difficulties that hinder the use of such materials by teachers. Teachers might say that they cannot depend only on authentic materials in teaching Reading. Nunan (1999), states that teachers cannot depend only on authentic materials for teaching in the classroom. Therefore, they can use both: authentic and artificial (non-authentic) materials, because learners need to get accustomed to both types.

### 2.7.2 Non-linguistic Advantages:

Besides the linguistic advantages, authentic materials have some non-linguistic advantages, too. Researchers such as Gilmore (2007) and Sherman (2003) believe that authentic materials have a strong positive effect on motivation. Motivation is regarded as the key element in the success of learning in general, and in learning languages in particular. For his part, Kilickaya (2004) states that using authentic materials helps increase learners' motivation for learning a language, because they feel that they are practicing a real language used beyond the classroom. In addition, some empirical studies conducted by Thanajaro (2000) and Otte (2006), concluded that authentic materials have a positive effect on learners' motivation and encourage them to learn better. Berardo (2006) experienced using authentic materials and notices that they contributed in increasing his learners' motivation and he himself, likes using them. Sherman (2003), mentions that the importance of authentic materials reside in the fact that "it is a window into culture." Finally, Garcia (1991) claims that using authentic reading materials helps to improve the learners' cultural awareness. To conclude, it is obvious from the previously mentioned arguments that authentic materials have a positive contribution in the field of language teaching and learning. Hence, it merits to be adopted by language teachers to enhance their learners' learning progress. When teachers decide to use authentic materials in the classroom they "need to have a clear pedagogic goal in mind: what precisely they want students to learn from these materials." (Senior 2005, p. 71) One more point to be stated here is that learners will learn better and benefit from the use of authentic materials, if they get sufficient support from teachers.

### 2.7.3 Arguments against the Use of Authentic Materials:

Although a lot of researchers argue that authentic materials have made a noticeable contribution in foreign language teaching and learning, there are some scholars who are against the use of this kind of materials claiming that they have no value. For instance, Kilickaya (2004) claims that authentic materials add a burden on teachers, as they may contain difficult vocabulary and structures which need more effort to be simplified and explained, in order to make them appropriate for their learners. Mihwa (1994) found that the level of reading comprehension of weak ESL learners was not affected by the text, regardless of its type, authentic or non-authentic. In addition, Kienbaum et al. (1986) state that there are no significant differences in learners' performance: between learners using authentic materials and others who use traditional materials. Furthermore, it is a challenging issue for teachers to search for suitable authentic materials to design tasks for their learners. Miller (2005) also states that authentic materials are "too difficult and time consuming to select, edit and prepare." In addition, Martinez (2002) argues that authentic materials are regarded too culturally biased and difficult to comprehend by learners in the classroom. He also adds concerning the cultural effect, that "authentic texts from one culture may give a false impression to students from another, unless they are presented in an authentic context which makes it clear precisely what they exemplify." Kilickaya (2004) believes that using authentic materials with weak learners frustrate and de-motivate them, because they lack the required skills and vocabulary to deal with presented text, successfully. Guariento and Morley (2001, p. 347) assert "At lower levels... the use of authentic texts may not only prevent learners from responding in meaningful ways, but can also lead them to feel frustrated, confused and... de-motivated." In conclusion and after having revised the related literature, we can claim that the advantages of using authentic materials in teaching learners in ESL classrooms outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, teachers should consider them seriously as a successful aid in teaching a foreign language.

## 2. At which level(s) Can Authentic Materials Be Used?

Although using authentic materials in teaching a foreign language is recommended by many researchers, we should ask ourselves whether it is appropriate for all students at all levels. One important point is that when using authentic materials, we must bear in mind the learners' level. This is vital to obtain the highest level of benefit from using authentic materials in the classroom. In other words, if the materials are beyond the learners' ability or level, it might lead to de-motivation and discourage learners from learning the target language. Kim (2000) and Kilickaya (2004) state that authentic materials can be used with advanced and intermediate level learners only. Other researchers such as Miller (2005) and McNeil (1994) have another view. They believe that authentic materials can be used even with lower level learners. Teachers must be aware that they can only benefit from the use of authentic materials, on one condition: that is, if they are used in the classroom in the same context that they were designed for, in the real world. Taylor (1994) mentions that: "a text can only be truly authentic in the context for which it was originally written."

## Conclusion:

After going through the related literature, it is obvious that the use of authentic materials in language teaching is supported by many researchers. They regard the use of this type of materials as a useful means to motivate learners, arouse their interest and expose them to real language they will face in the real world. In addition, authentic materials encourage learners to learn a particular language successfully, because they notice they are dealing with the language in real life. According to Guariento & Morely (2001), authentic materials help to motivate learners learn the language by making them feel they are learning the 'real' language. In addition, Hyland (2003, p. 94) states that one of the most important advantages of using authentic materials, is that it increases learners' motivation and reflects positively on their learning process. Still, some researchers are against the use of authentic materials in the classroom, because they believe that they might be too culturally biased and contain complex words and structure. This might frustrate learners. In spite of this negative view, the advantages of using authentic materials in teaching learners in ESL classrooms, outweigh the disadvantages, and they are still a vital approach which should be adopted by EFL teachers, in order to support their learners' language learning process, as proven by a number of researchers such as (Thanajaro, 2000; Kilickaya, 2004; Otte, 2006). Furthermore, the results of the study carried out by Baniabdelrahman (2006) prove that using authentic materials in teaching English to EFL learners is "more effective than using non-authentic materials". The latter is and will surely be the researchers' conviction of the vital role that such authentic materials have, and will play for an effective, practical learning process that must happen in every teachers' classroom.

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