



Using Authentic Materials in Foreign Language Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts at El-Mergib University

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استخدام المواد الأصلية في الفصول الدراسية للغة الأجنبية: وجهة نظر الأساتذة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب، جامعة المرقب

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Abstract:

The use of authentic materials in EFL classrooms has been a dominant and influential practice for many decades. Many teachers incorporate authentic materials in their classes due to the numerous benefits they offer to students but some teachers may not. Hence, this study investigates whether teachers of English in the Department of English in Faculty of Arts at El-Mergib University use authentic materials in their classes or not, and if they face any difficulties in doing so.

To achieve this goal, a questionnaire was administered to ten teachers of English. The findings of the study revealed that teachers of English have positive perspectives towards integrating authentic materials into their language teaching.

Keywords

Authentic Materials, Classroom, Integration, Advantages, Sources.

المخلص:

لقد كان استخدام المواد الأصلية أو الحقيقية في الفصول الدراسية الخاصة بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ممارسة مسيطرة ومؤثرة لعقود عديدة. يدمج العديد من المعلمين المواد الأصلية أو الحقيقية في فصولهم الدراسية بسبب الفوائد العديدة التي تقدمها للطلاب ولكن بعض المعلمين قد لا يفعلون ذلك. وبالتالي، تبحث هذه الدراسة ما إذا كان معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية الآداب بجامعة المرقب يستخدمون المواد الأصلية أو الحقيقية في فصولهم الدراسية أم لا، وما إذا كانوا يواجهون أي صعوبات في القيام بذلك.

لكي يتم إنجاز هذه الدراسة، تم توزيع استبيان على عشرة معلمين للغة الإنجليزية. وكشفت النتائج أن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لديهم مواقف إيجابية تجاه دمج المواد الأصلية أو الحقيقية في تدريسهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المواد الأصلية أو الحقيقية، الفصل، دمج، ميزات، مصادر .

Introduction

Since the appearance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in 1970s, fundamental changes have taken place in learning styles and teaching methods. The real communication is the most important feature of CLT (Richard, 2006). Teachers started using Authentic Materials (AMs) in classes in order to make the language of classrooms similar to the real-life language as much as possible. Richard (2006, p. 20) stated that "Classroom activities should parallel the 'real world' as closely as possible". Rogers (1988) maintained that the AMs should be qualified according to goals, needs of the learners and nature of meaningful communication. Hence, incorporating AMs in classrooms helps students achieve competence in the target language. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the use of AMs and its role in English foreign language classrooms in the Department of English in Faculty of Arts at El-Mergib University, Libya.

Literature Review

Definitions of Authentic Materials

There are various definitions of the term "Authentic Materials" (AMs) in the EFL context. For instance, Polio (2014, p.1) defines AMs as "materials that were not created for language learning purposes. Instead, they were created with some real-life goal for, generally, native speakers. They include both spoken and written language samples" (Polio, 2014, p. 1).

Similarly, Nunan (1989) and Jordan (1997) defined AMs as materials that are not specifically designed for pedagogical purposes. Likewise, Bacon and Finnemann (1990) defined AMs as texts that have been created by native speakers for non-pedagogical aims.

Sources of Authentic Materials

There are several sources of AMs available that teachers can utilize in their classes. AMs can be anything that is being used for communication by native speakers. It can be in a form of advertisements, radio or TV programs, songs, movies, magazines, or newspapers (Rao, 2019). However, teachers should be careful when choosing such materials.

Teachers should take into account the time, setting, aims, and level of their learners since their needs have a great impact on the selection of these resources.

Advantages of Using Authentic Materials

Teachers and scholars alike are increasingly recognizing the importance of authentic resources in the field of language teaching. Numerous empirical studies have shown the benefits of using AMs in the classroom for both language teachers and learners. According to Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000), their study highlights how the use of AMs promotes the development of oral language skills.

Furthermore, Otte (2006) investigated how audible real texts affected the listening comprehension skills of adult ESL students at an American university. He found that language learners' motivation and listening comprehension skills improved when they were exposed to authentic content.

In a similar vein, Herron and Seay (1991) report that language learners who regularly engage in classroom activities such as listening to authentic radio tapes exhibited better listening comprehension than the other students. In addition, a number of pedagogical and language instruction professionals asserted that using authentic resources will enhance students' communicative skills.

Tamo (2009) claims that providing a greater range of instructional materials and methods is the most effective way to prepare students for real-world scenarios. Beginning students will have access to genuine materials. Students learning a new language should understand the context in which they will use it in order to understand it better. Because of this, using trustworthy sources is essential to getting up-to-date information about current events.

Another study by Omid and Azam (2016) which was conducted on 105 participants in Tabadkan English Department in Mashhad, Iran. This study aimed at exploring the beliefs of Iranian English language teachers towards the use of AMs in their classrooms. The results revealed that teachers of English language were enthusiastic about using real materials in the classroom. Thus, many studies share similar findings regarding the importance of using AMs.

Orooq and Abdel Razeq (2022), in their study of 63 participants from school districts in Palestine found out that despite the challenges teachers faced, most participants strongly favored the use of real materials. Additionally, most participants agreed that the frequency of using AMs should depend on students' English proficiency.

As stated by Schulz (1991), the utility of AMs in the classroom has an impact on students' emotions and attitudes throughout the EFL learning process and on all facets of psychology, including anxiety and self-confidence. He further argues that Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) supported the use of AMs. Krashen's theory suggests that AMs have an impact on students' motivation and perspective. It is worth mentioning here that these findings align with Otte's study (2006).

By adding real-world language to textbooks, educators can raise student achievement and improve their language

proficiency. For instance, research conducted by Soliman (2013) revealed that the ideal reading classroom combines textbooks and authentic texts. Consequently, he suggested that language schools should think about the integration of AMs in their EFL curricula to improve the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Alzarga (2021) conducted a study in Sirte University in Libya about the use of AMs in foreign language classes. The study participants were 15 Libyan teachers. The results showed that teachers view AMs as useful resources for language learning. According to teachers, these resources can expand language learning's relevance, engagement, and focus on the real world.

In their study on EFL teachers' attitudes towards the use of AMs in teaching English in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, Omar and Mekael (2020) concluded that AMs are essential in teachers' classrooms, and they are also aware of the benefits AMs offer to students.

Disadvantages of Authentic Materials

While AMs can present a number of benefits for both teachers and students, AMs are not always valuable despite their crucial role in foreign language teaching. According to Richards (2001), AMs have often language structures that are complex and also challenging vocabulary, which may not be appropriate for the student's current needs and proficiency level.

Alderson (1980 cited in Lee, 1995), asserts that teachers make their own materials to make sure the learning activities are suitable for the students when they are unable to obtain appropriate resources that fit learners' needs. While students become more interested in using teacher-created materials over textbooks, this can cause issues for teachers who must find relevant authentic texts and create learning tasks that take students' abilities into account. These tasks can be time-consuming for teachers.

The fact that certain texts emphasize competency training rather than comprehensible input is another drawback of using AMs. When the text is too challenging for students, they may become frustrated or disappointed since these texts teach them to extract only the most significant information rather than comprehending the whole text (Guariento and Morley, 2001). Having said that, teachers should bear in mind how to use AMs properly as these materials are of great importance.

Selection of Authentic Materials

Selecting authentic texts should be based on three factors as Mahsefat and Sabet (2012) stated. These factors are: content appropriateness, exploitability, and readability. If the material is engaging for the students and fits their requirements and skill level, then it is appropriate. Bacon and Finneman (1990), also argue that authentic texts should be appropriate to the culture and experience of the students. Whereas exploitability refers to how the genuine text is utilized to enhance students' competence and how it may be altered for educational aims. Lastly, readability is related to the text's language as well as its structural and lexical difficulties.

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

This study aims to achieve the following points:

- 1- To investigate the degree of incorporating the AMs to teach English in El-Mergib University, Faculty of Arts, English Department.
- 2- To explore the influence of AMs on teaching English to Libyan students.
- 3- To examine the obstacles that Libyan teachers face using AMs.

The above aims will be looked through the perception of English teachers in El-Mergib University regarding the use of AMs. The study investigates why they include or exclude AMs in their lectures, the effects of using AMs on their teaching process, and the difficulties they face in selecting and using AMs.

Research Questions

This study will answer the following questions:

- 1-Do Libyan teachers use AMs in their teaching? If so, what are their attitudes?
- 2-Do Libyan teachers have any difficulties in using AMs?

Methodology

This section discusses the research tools the researchers used to collect the required data as well as the participants and the procedures.

Participants

The number of participants who took part in this study was ten teachers. These participants are all Libyan teachers who teach English language in English Department at El-Mergib University, Libya. They teach the basic four skills (Reading- Listening- Speaking- Writing). They also teach students in different academic years.

Instrument

A quantitative approach was adopted by using a questionnaire. This questionnaire is used to gather data on teachers' perspectives regarding the incorporation of AMs in their classrooms. The questionnaire was adapted from Alzarga (2021), and Belaid & Murray (2015). It was distributed to teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and the actual use of AMs in their classrooms.

The first two questions of the questionnaire enquired about the teaching experience of the participants and the level of students as general questions not as variables. The rest of the questions were about whether participants use AMs or not.

Results And Discussion

The current study was carried out with the aim of identifying teachers' perspectives towards using AMs in their foreign language classrooms. To answer the questions of the study, a questionnaire was distributed to ten Libyan teachers of English. The questionnaire is made of 14 items that asked teachers to give their perspectives on using AMs.

According to the results of the questionnaire, it is obvious that the vast majority of teachers agreed upon the usefulness of using AMs in their classrooms. This finding aligns with Alzarga (2021). The results of the questionnaire are as follows:

The first question asked participants to state their teaching experience which varied from one teacher to another. As for the second question, it was about the levels of students that teachers teach. The majority of answers were almost similar regarding the level of students. Question three was about the teachers' familiarity of the concept of AMs, four teachers out of ten answered very familiar, while six of them answered somewhat familiar. Question four was about if teachers believe that AMs are important in EFL teaching. Four teachers chose the first answer which is strongly agree, whereas six teachers stated the second answer which is agree. This result is consistent with Omar and Mekaël's study (2020). According to the fifth question, which was about the types of AMs teachers typically use. In this question, there was more than one option to answer. All teachers expressed that they use mostly all types of AMs mentioned in the questionnaire question except one option which was authentic literature as in novels or short stories. This option was not used at all. These findings are in accordance with the study by Orooq and Abdel Razeq (2022) regarding the types of AMs that teachers use. Moreover, this answers the first research question of this paper.

Question six enquired about the criteria you would follow when choosing AMs. In this question, participants can choose more than one answer, so six teachers selected the answer "course objectives", within the same participants, five teachers chose the answer "students' needs and interests" as a second option. Three teachers selected students' proficiency level and only two chose cultural differences. Thus, the majority of teachers prioritized course objectives when selecting AMs. These results align with the findings of what Berardo, (2006); Bacon and Finneman, (1990); Lee, (1995); Mishan, (2005); Omid and Azam, (2016); and others have all stated the usage of such ideas in materials selection.

The following question was about to what extent teachers agree that AMs enhance language learning. Six teachers chose the answer strongly agree while four teachers chose the answer agree. These findings are in accordance with the study by Omar and Mekaël (2020). None of them chose the option neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. Moving on to the eighth question which questioned about the main advantages of using AMs in EFL classrooms. All teachers selected all the advantages mentioned in the questionnaire question. These views clearly agree with other studies as in Belaid and Murray (2015). The ninth question asked about the challenges teachers face when using AMs in their teaching. All teachers chose the options found in the questionnaire question as in lack of time to prepare materials, limited access to materials and so on. This particular point answers the second research question of this study which is if teachers encounter any difficulties in using AMs.

In their answers to question ten which asked about the reasons why teachers use AMs in their classrooms. Eight teachers stated that they do so to expose students to real-world language use, which reflects the views of almost all participants. Two teachers answered to make the class more interesting and motivating. These results are consistent with Belaid and Murray (2015). Also, this answer does respond to the first research question. The rest of teachers had different answers. Question eleven asked about if AMs are more effective for advanced students or for beginner/ intermediate students. Six teachers said that they are effective for advanced. Three stated that they are more effective for intermediate students, while only one teacher said they are more effective for beginner students. Alzarga (2021) shared the same outcome.

As for question twelve, which enquired about how students generally respond to AMs. Seven teachers chose the option positively (they appreciate the real-world connections), whereas three teachers answered very positively (they enjoy and engage with it). Other studies, such as those by Omar and Mekaël (2020) and others have reported similar results regarding this point.

Regarding question thirteen, which asked whether teachers feel adequately trained to use AMs effectively in the classroom. The responses revealed that six teachers answered 'yes,' while four answered 'no'. These findings do

not align with the studies by Belaid and Murray (2015) and Omid and Azam (2015) which indicated that the majority of participants required training in the use of AMs.

Finally, the last question of the questionnaire was about the kind of support would help teachers to integrate AMs more effectively into their teaching. Four teachers out of ten chose all the given options such as collaboration with other teachers to share ideas and materials and secondly more time for planning and adapting materials. On the other hand, the rest selected individually one or two options out of the four options listed.

Conclusion

This study examined the perspectives of teachers towards using authentic materials in EFL classrooms. The findings revealed that AMs are widely used by language teachers in El-Mergib University, Faculty of Arts and also have a significant impact on improving learners' English regardless of teachers' teaching experience or students' proficiency level.

The study also highlighted that using AMs has some benefits such as exposing students to real-world language use and making classes more interesting and motivating. Moreover, when asked about the types of AMs teachers use, all teachers reported using a variety of types except for novels or short stories which none of the participants selected.

Given the study's small sample size, further research with larger and more diverse participant groups is needed to validate the generalizability of these findings.

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Teacher's Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Teachers' Perspectives on Using Authentic Materials in EFL Teaching:

I kindly invite you to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will make a significant contribution to the study.

1. What is your teaching experience?
 - a) 0-5 years
 - b) 6-10 years
 - c) 11-15 years
 - d) 16+ years
2. What level(s) of students do you teach?
 - a) Beginner
 - b) Intermediate
 - c) Advanced
 - d) Mixed levels
3. How familiar are you with the concept of 'authentic materials'?
 - a) Very familiar
 - b) Somewhat familiar
 - c) Not familiar at all
4. Do you believe that authentic materials are important in EFL teaching?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
5. Which types of authentic materials do you typically use? (Select all that apply)
 - Newspapers/magazines
 - Video/audio recordings (e.g., podcasts, news, interviews)
 - Websites/blogs/social media posts
 - Advertisements/commercials
 - Authentic literature (e.g., novels, short stories)
 - Interviews/real-life conversations
 - Instructional materials (e.g., manuals, guides)
 - Other (please specify)
6. When selecting authentic materials, what criteria would you follow?
 - a) Course objectives
 - b) Cultural differences
 - c) Students' proficiency level
 - d) Students' needs and interests
7. To what extent do you agree that authentic materials enhance language learning?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

8. In your opinion, what are the main advantages of using authentic materials in EFL classrooms?

- Improves student motivation and engagement
- Provides exposure to real-life language use
- Enhances cultural understanding
- Increases student confidence
- Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving
- Other (please specify)

9. What challenges do you face when using authentic materials in your teaching?
(Select all that apply)

- Lack of time to prepare materials
- Limited access to materials
- Students' lack of proficiency with authentic texts
- Difficulty in integrating authentic materials with syllabus objectives
- Student disinterest or resistance
- Other (please specify)

10. Why do you use authentic materials in your classroom?

- a) To expose students to real-world language use.
- b) To increase students' engagement
- c) To introduce cultural aspects of the language
- d) To make class more interesting and motivating

11. Do you think authentic materials are more effective for advanced students or for beginner/intermediate students?

- a) More effective for advanced students
- b) More effective for beginner/intermediate students
- c) equally effective for both
- d) Not sure

12. How do your students generally respond to authentic materials?

- a) Very positively (they enjoy and engage with it)
- b) Positively (they appreciate the real-world connections)
- c) Neutral (they are indifferent or unresponsive)
- d) Negatively (they find it too difficult or irrelevant)

13. Do you feel adequately trained to use authentic materials effectively in the classroom?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Somewhat, but I would benefit from more training

14. What kind of support would help you integrate authentic materials more effectively into your teaching?
(Select all that apply)

- Workshops or training sessions on selecting and using authentic materials
- Access to a repository of authentic resources
- Collaboration with other teachers to share ideas and materials
- More time for planning and adapting materials
- Other (please specify)