

USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Annotation

The main aim of the present study is to focus on the importance and the uses of authentic materials in foreign language teacher training program and to come up with some suggestions concerning the matter. As a result, it was found out that using authentic materials in foreign language teacher training program has an important role in their making use of such materials in their future professional lives.

Key words: Foreign language teaching, teacher training, authentic learning, authentic materials

One of the most challenging tasks language teachers face is about how to motivate the students to learn, stimulate their imagination and capture and maintain interest. One way of accomplishing this can be supplementing the course book with some authentic materials. For example, in English language classes, TV programs broadcasted in English can be used as authentic materials (Boran, 1999). In that way, students can have the chance to enjoy learning a foreign language. Authentic materials as spoken or written language data produced in the course of genuine communication, not specifically for language teaching. So, it can be inferred that they are created not for language teachers, or language teaching, but for the native speakers of that language.

Lots of authentic materials can be made use of in foreign language teaching. These materials can be classified depending on their characteristics. Authentic materials into four categories (<http://www.jrc.sophia.ac.jp/kiyou/ki21/gaio.pdf>):

C Authentic Listening-Viewing Materials: Songs, documentaries, radio and TV ads, or broadcasts, quiz shows, cartoons, movies, soap operas, sit-coms, professionally audio-taped short stories and novels, web pages.

C Authentic Visual Materials: Photographs, paintings, postcards, pictures, stamps, stick-figure drawings, wordless street signs, wordless picture books, posters.

C Authentic Printed Materials: Newspaper articles, song lyrics, restaurant menus, tourist information brochures, leaflets, receipts.

C Realia (Real Objects) Used in EFL-ESL Classrooms: Masks, dolls, puppets, etc.

As seen above, though lots of authentic materials are mentioned, it must be paid attention to their choice and use. For example, for listening comprehension activities authentic materials can be used in foreign language classes (Karaduman, 1990). However, the materials used in one environment may not work to realize another aim. To develop the students' four language skills, sometimes auditory, sometimes visual or tactile authentic materials can be used in class using active teaching techniques taking the objectives of the lesson into consideration. When used properly in the learning environment, authentic materials may have a lot of gains both for teachers and students.

Using authentic materials in language learning environments has lots of advantages. Firstly, they engage both the learners' and teacher's attention in the language being taught. They have a high interest value because of their relevance to the real world keeping the students informed about what is happening in the world they live. So, it can be said that they have an intrinsic educational value (Martinez, 2002). The studies done on authentic materials show that these materials are very influential in increasing the students' motivation and teaching a foreign language (Akar and Yildirim, 2000). Authentic activities that are realized in constructivist learning environments with the active participation of the students enable them to become the thinkers and problem solvers of today and the future. They provide the teachers with the necessary linguistic and structural basis for them to form a highly qualified teaching atmosphere (Taylor *et al.*, 2004).

Authentic materials have at least three layers of learning embedded within them: language (the structure and vocabulary), cultural insights (cultural norms and values of the community this language is used) and practical application (using the item in the way it was intended) (Spelleri, 2002). These layers motivate the students intrinsically because students have the chance to enjoy both learning the language and the culture where this language is spoken and putting what they have learned into practice as used in real world. Saito (1994) say that in that way, they can understand the value of learning a language.

An authentic material is a way to contextualize language learning (<http://www.jrc.sophia.ac.jp/kiyou/ki21/gaio.pdf>). When used in class, students get the chance to read, rehearse, listen to, practice, use and learn the language via the materials that they can see, examine, touch and listen to. They can enjoy learning about the museums in London watching a related documentary, watching their favorite cartoon in English, following the lyrics of their favorite song, viewing the photographs of famous places in America, participating in a quiz show etc. without going to the country where the language they learn is spoken.

Authentic materials are available everywhere. A vast amount of materials can be accessed on the net. Teacher can take these materials to the class, or integrating the technology into the class, he or she can cooperate with the students to access them in class on the net. Also, he or she can collect small pieces of materials like travel guides or brochures, menus, train tickets, receipts, postcards, or newspaper articles when traveling. Moreover, newspapers and magazines in English are available in the newsagent's and music CDs, movies, documentaries in the book and music stores. In that way, teacher can enrich his or her class with the materials rich in content.

Books, articles, newspapers and so on include a variety of text types and language styles; however, it is difficult to find this variety in conventional teaching materials, particularly in textbooks, which include only the proper and fluent language (Martinez, 2002). Providing the students with a variety of authentic reading materials will encourage them to read and enjoy reading. Also, the same material can be used several times for different purposes. To illustrate, an authentic text-a dialogue between a teacher and a student or a husband and a wife- can be accompanied with a listening task after being used as a reading material for the students to become familiar with the pronunciation and intonation of native speakers. Such authentic materials give the students a chance to be aware of various accents used by different English speakers living in different English speaking countries and become familiar with these accents instead of just listening to the proper English in the textbooks.

For the authentic materials to be effective, they should not be chosen randomly. There must be an aim in using them and the chosen materials should meet the objectives of the lesson.

Similarly, for the learners to enjoy dealing with the authentic materials, it should be paid attention to whether they are appropriate to the learners' age, language level, interests, needs, expectations and goals. Choosing and using authentic materials haphazardly is detrimental rather than advantageous. In authentic tasks, which enable meaningful learning, students' maturity and skills and the content must be taken into consideration. Shortly, a material should not be used only for the reason that it is real, but also the students' level and interests must be considered. Spelleri (2002) states that the level of language complexity must be just slightly beyond the learners' current ability. If they are too complex for the learners, rather than increasing motivation, awareness, curiosity to learn, development and so on, they can work the other way. For example, if a text about the parts of a car is given to young learners, it will not be appropriate not only for the learners' age or interests, but also for their language level because that kind of a text would include terms that the learners would most probably be unfamiliar with. Or it would not be suitable to give materials about football to the learners who aim at practicing business English. In short, the materials should match the learners' goals and expectations and should contribute to their language development. Thus, it can be said that a teacher should be aware of different kinds of authentic materials, what these materials can offer and how he or she can make use of them in the best way to develop the students' foreign language skills.

In foreign language teaching a variety of authentic materials can be used. The materials which can be obtained from various resources can attract students' attention and increase their motivation towards learning a foreign language. As these materials connect the students to the social world and enable them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice, they open a way for positive transfer of learning. So, authentic materials can increase the quality of foreign language teaching. However, these materials should be chosen and used taking the instructional objectives and student characteristics into account. For example, having the beginner level language learners listen to English radio broadcast may decrease their motivation as they may have difficulty in understanding it. Similarly, asking the students who are not interested in politics to examine an article on politics written in English may arouse

negative feelings in them. At this point, foreign language teachers have important roles for not using any authentic material randomly.

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