AUTHENTIC MATERIALS: FOSTERING COLLABORATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract:

Authentic materials serve as a framework in language education, placing emphasis on resources that resonate with the everyday experiences of learners. This approach ignites a profound motivation among learners. They are prompting their active involvement in the learning process. By infusing authentic materials into the lesson, students get exposed to a practical and relatable learning experience that, as they provide real-world contexts, fosters a more enhanced comprehension and better retention. The incorporation of authentic materials represents more than just a pedagogy; it symbolizes an initial venture into the vigorous intricacies of language acquisition, where learners are invited to embark on a learning journey filled with excitement and discovery. Confronting linguistic challenges akin to deciphering a foreign tongue can indeed prove daunting. Nevertheless, the burden of learning is significantly alleviated when materials resonate with students on a personal level, offering relatable content that resonates with their interests and experiences. Moreover, the art of tailoring materials to meet the unique needs and backgrounds of students is a transformative practice that yields tangible results in their academic journey. By aligning educational resources with students' cognitive and cultural landscapes, educators can cultivate an inclusive learning environment where every learner feels valued and empowered to excel. Ultimately, the integration of authentic materials not only enriches the educational experience but also fosters a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment among both students and educators alike, thereby propelling the trajectory of language learning to new heights of excellence.

Keywords: authentic materials, English language teaching (ELT), collaborative learning

1. Introduction

Learning a new language ignites a fascinating sense of interest and wonder among learners. Nevertheless, this enthusiasm can wane drastically when instructors lack materials that echo with their students. When teaching materials align with learners'

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experiences, they are more likely to be motivated to engage with the language learning process.

A primary motivation for learning a new language is often the desire to connect with its native speakers, to comprehend their perspectives, and to actively participate in their daily lives. Furthermore, it has been noted that the incorporation of authentic sources enriches the lesson and cultivates a heightened interest among learners due to the diversity of materials presented to them (Ahmad, 2017).

Authentic materials offer students the opportunity to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life experiences, thus rendering the acquisition and application of the target language more meaningful and rewarding. By facilitating encounters with authentic language use in various contexts, educators enrich the learning experience and equip students with the tools to navigate genuine communicative situations with confidence and fluency.

In Oman, the overriding dependence on mandated textbooks in language classrooms often eclipses the unrealised benefits of incorporating authentic texts. Teachers often submit and adhere religiously to the prescribed materials, considering them as crucial for meeting and achieving the intended learning outcomes. This article aims to hoist awareness among language educators about the many advantages of integrating authentic texts into the learning process, highlighting the massive potential its integration holds for enriching students' language learning exposure.

2. What are authentic materials in ELT?

Pearson (2023) defines authentic material in ELT as any resource in English that was not designed for intentional consumption in the language classroom. Utilizing these materials in the language classroom can make the teaching and learning experience even more appealing, insightful and motivating for learners. It can also be useful to extract real and authentic responses from English language learners.

3. What are the sources of authentic materials?

Authentic materials for the language classroom are easy to find. The advent of modern technology has made it even faster and more convenient to access and find such materials. There are two main categories of authentic materials: print and auditory. Examples of print materials include bills, slips, order forms, receipts, websites, street signs, coupons, traffic tickets, greeting cards, calendars, report cards, TV guides, food menus, magazines and newspapers. On the other hand, auditory materials include phone messages, broadcasts, podcasts, electronic books, movies, videos and television programs (Laniro & Hector-Mason, 2007)

4. What are the considerations in choosing authentic materials?

When using authentic materials in the classroom, it is essential to consider some factors to make learning successful.

1) **Difficulty level.** As teachers, there is a need to guarantee that the resources we choose to use in class are within the level of understanding of the learners.
2) **Schema.** Students' ideas, beliefs and preconceived notions should play a role in choosing the material to use in class, as this can significantly affect their understanding of the text.
3) **Familiarity with material type.** Text familiarity facilitates comprehension, promotes increased engagement, and better-perceived knowledge construction.

5. What are the advantages of using authentic materials?

Steve (2023) outlines the following as the main advantages of using authentic materials in the language classroom.

1) **Integrative motivation** - Raw materials from the target culture act as a key starting point for learners to better understand and engage with that culture
2) **Increased confidence levels** - Using authentic materials in class might cause students to believe they are being treated as 'native speakers'. This increases their level of confidence and improves their overall learning journey.
3) **Enhanced engagement** - Engagement in a text presupposes a certain degree of empathy. Since authentic materials are something that students can very much relate to, they tend to have great personal significance for learners, which enhances their engagement.
4) **Accessibility to low-level learners** - Low-level students feel more at ease approaching materials such as the television news bulletin since visual materials convey information more effectively, which could help in comprehension even for those who have limited language ability.

6. What are some limitations of the use of authentic materials in the classroom?

While using authentic resources in the language classroom offers numerous advantages, in my experience, these are some drawbacks I have encountered.

1) **Time constraints.** Using authentic texts can be time-consuming compared to using textbooks as they require careful selection and adaptation to suit students' proficiency levels, pre-teaching concepts, and unlocking vocabulary while making sure they align with curriculum learning outcomes.
2) **Incongruence to objectives**. Authentic materials might not always match the language learning goals or curriculum specifications. This makes it difficult for teachers to effectively incorporate them into lessons.
3) **Material appropriateness.** Generating and choosing suitable materials can be challenging for teachers, particularly if they want to guarantee the cultural

sensitivity and pertinence of such resources to learners' preferences and backgrounds.

7. How does the use of authentic materials foster collaborative learning in ELT?

Using genuine materials in my classroom has helped me to extract key insights into how they enhance cooperative learning.

1) Authentic materials provide real world context to the learners, which enhances collaborative engagement among them.
2) Authentic materials provide genuine language use and cultural settings, encouraging learners to understand the content.
3) Authentic materials allow students to actively engage with the resources given to them since they are relatable to their actual life circumstances, making the learning journey more meaningful.

8. What are some of the tasks exemplifying authentic materials that were used in my teaching?

1) **Job advertisements from local newspapers or magazines**
   Students are asked to identify what job they could qualify for in the future. After the discussion, the teacher divides the class into three and gives each group a task to work on. One group will be asked to write an application letter, another group will recreate a job interview, and the last group will be tasked to come up with a poster advertising the job.
2) **Menu books**
   Students are first asked to scan a menu book. The teachers then asked what food on the menu they liked best. After that, students are divided into groups. One group is asked to write a recipe which Oman is known for. Another group will do a role play where one acts as the waiter and the others as customers. The final group will be asked to design a menu book for local recipes.
4) **Travel brochures**
   Students are asked to identify the different travel destinations in Oman. After the discussion, students are divided into different groups. One group will be asked to do a role play where one is a tour guide, and the rest are tourists. Another group will come up with a slogan, while the rest will be asked to design a travel brochure for Oman.
4) **Pictures**
   The teachers show sets of pictures depicting social problems in class. Students are asked to describe what they see in each of the pictures. After the discussion, they are divided into different groups based on the sets of pictures shown. Each group will then come up with a story and dramatise to exemplify the social problem. After the dramatisation, students will be asked to come up with a campaign poster against the social problem they chose.

9. What rubrics were used to grade the tasks?

As mentioned, one of the main challenges I faced in using authentic materials was marking different tasks done by students. The below rubrics were developed to make grading more accessible and more reliable.

9.1 Conversation

Category	.5 - 2.5 Poor	3 or 3.5 Satisfactory	4 or 4.5 Good/Very Good	5 Excellent
Accuracy	**Multiple** mistakes in grammar, use of terminology and incorrect explanation	**Some** mistakes in grammar, use of terminology and explanation	Very **few** mistakes in grammar, use of terminology and explanation	Delivery is **accurate**. No mistakes in grammar, use of terminology and explanation.
Communication	Communication is **disorganized** and confusing.	Communication is **difficult to follow, but effort is shown** to make it logical	Communication is logical and **easy** to follow in **most** parts of the conversation.	Communication is logical and clear **throughout** the conversation.
Delivery	Delivery is **distracting** and fails to communicate the content to the audience. **Fails to engage** the audience	Delivery is **somewhat confident** and lacks consistency in communicating the content to the audience effectively. Engages the audience to a **limited** extent	Delivery is **mostly confident** and communicates the content to the audience effectively. Engages the audience effectively for the **most part** of the delivery.	Delivery is **confident throughout** and communicates the content to the audience effectively. Engages the audience effectively **throughout** the delivery.

9.2 Written output

Category	.5- 2.5 Poor	3 - 3.5 Satisfactory	4 - 4.5 Good/Very Good	5 Excellent
Mechanics: Accuracy in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and vocabulary	Output has **many** mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and vocabulary	Output shows **some** mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and vocabulary.	Output is **mostly correct** with minor issues.	Output is **completely correct** and is free of errors
Content: Demonstrates understanding of the requirements of the task	Content demonstrates a **poor** understanding of the requirements of the task.	Content demonstrates a **basic** understanding of the requirements of the task.	Content demonstrates a **good** understanding of the requirements of the task.	Content demonstrates an **excellent** understanding of the requirements of the task.
Communication: Writes effectively and logically	**Disorganized** and very difficult to follow. Language is **poor.**	Some information is logically organised. Language is **average.**	**Most** information is logically organized. Language is **good.**	**All information** is logical, interesting and organized. Language is **excellent**.

9.3 Poster

Category	.5 - 2.5 Poor	3 - 3.5 Satisfactory	4 - 4.5 Good/Very Good	5 Excellent
Content	The content **does not show knowledge** of the requisites of the advertisement.	The content **shows basic knowledge** and understanding	The content **shows good knowledge** and understanding.	The content **shows excellent knowledge** and understanding. The presentation is both accurate and meaningful.
Presentation	The presentation is **disorganized, which makes** it difficult to follow.	The presentation shows **basic organization** and can be followed only through meticulous attention.	The presentation shows **good organization,** which makes it easy to follow.	The presentation shows great precision and **excellent organization,** making it very easy to follow.
Organization and Visuals	The poster's format is **confusing**. Pictures and graphics are **irrelevant.**	The poster's format shows a **little organization**. **Some** pictures and graphics are relevant.	The poster format is **organized**. **Most** pictures and graphics are relevant.	The poster is exceptionally attractive and has a **very well-organized** presentation. **All** pictures and graphics are relevant

10. What are some noticeable effects on my students when I use authentic materials in class?

Using authentic texts in class has had a positive impact on my students. The most tangible benefits include:

1) **Increased engagement** - Using authentic materials in class allowed my students to relate better, making them more interested because they relate directly to their daily experiences.
2) **Improved motivation** - Students became more interested in doing the task because they saw the relevance of the task to their real-life situations.
3) **Enhanced language use** - Since authentic materials expose my students to natural language use, they became more fluent at sharing their thoughts and ideas, which is especially evident in the output they made.
4) **Cultural awareness** - Using authentic text broadened my students' view of the world, making them understand that they do not live in isolation but as citizens of the world.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of authentic materials in the classroom offers a myriad of advantages to language learners, such as improving motivation, confidence, and

engagement. However, it also presents some challenges, which include time constraints, incongruence to meet learning outcomes and appropriation of learners' interests and backgrounds. Despite these limitations, the advantages of the use of authentic materials outweigh the drawbacks. With careful selection and proper scaffolding, using authentic materials in class offers a prosperous and immersive language learning experience that will indeed prepare learners for real-world interactions.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

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