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Research Article

THE ADVANTAGES OF USING THE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS (NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES AND OTHERS) IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This article acknowledges the advantages of using the authentic materials in teaching English in higher education institutions and extensively researches and experiences on this topic.

KEYWORDS

Authentic materials, target language, method, skills, teaching, environment.

INTRODUCTION

There is no reason of trying to get your students delighted by a text on the latest art movie if they are all fans of action films. Your written or recorded text is likely to be too hard, still, in some cases, for advanced students. The stunt, regardless of the used text, is not to edit and grade the text, but to grade the task according to your students' abilities. Because, most importantly, it reflects the kind of situation your students may face in an English-speaking environment, it saves your time and energy, and it encourages and motivates your students when they can overcome a

real text. The same text can be used in different ways. For example, if we take a tourist information leaflet as authentic material, it has the advantage that it can be easily and swiftly ordered for free and in multiple copies from tourist boards and agencies.

In foreign language teaching, authentic materials play a great role and they are very useful. When people first think of authentic materials they often think that we are talking about newspaper and magazine articles. Though, the term can also include such things as web

pages, radio & TV broadcasts, films, songs, leaflets, flyers, and posters, indeed anything is written in the target language and used unedited in the classroom. Of course, the used materials depend on the usual factors: target language area, topic, skills, students' needs and interests. These materials can be classified depending on their characteristics into four categories:

1. Authentic listening viewing materials: songs, documentaries, radio and TV ads, or broadcasts, quiz shows, cartoons, movies, soap operas, sitcoms, professionally audio taped short stories and novels, web pages.
2. Authentic visual materials: photographs, postcards, stamps, posters, paintings, pictures, stick figure drawings, wordless picture books, wordless street signs.
3. Authentic printed materials: newspaper articles, song lyrics, restaurant menus, tourist information brochures, leaflets, receipts.
4. Realia (real objects) used in EFL-ESL classrooms: toys, masks, dolls, puppets, etc.

Authentic learning leads to student creativity, discovery, awareness, and development in and outside the classroom. Students not only learn from the teachers in class, but also from the other teachers and students, friends or parents in that way. So, students cannot be passive in authentic learning environments. That is, social interactions with the other people and various authentic materials are a crucial part of the learning process.

Students in the authentic learning process can carry out real-life activities. The activities are the usual practices of a culture and which are alike what actual practitioners of that culture do in authentic activities, as the activities that direct the students to real-life contexts and tasks can be defined as authentic activities. If learning activities are authentic, students

understand the importance of what they are learning as the tasks mirror real-life experiences. Moreover, they learn to think critically and creatively, analyze information, express ideas, come up with logical conclusions and solutions and cooperate with others when trying to explore, discover, discuss and construct concepts doing authentic activities. Then, the goal of authentic learning is to help students relate and apply their in-class learning to what they have learned in the world. Thus, it can be said that authentic activities prepare students to be lifelong learners. The above-mentioned goal can be achieved better if learning takes place in an authentic learning environment as it provides a context which reflects the way knowledge and skills will be used in real life. This environment, be it a physical or a virtual one, resembles the real world with its complexities, limitations, options, and possibilities also present in real life and provides a context to an authentic task. When learned in such an environment, the information will be more meaningful and long-lasting for the students. Moreover, they will be motivated and stimulated to develop competencies for their future professional or daily lives. Authentic materials used in such a learning environment are not prepared specifically to be used in class, but they are the materials already existing in real life so they reflect real life and its cultural values. For example, a cartoon, a photograph or a song sung at festival, news or articles in magazines or newspapers, or a politician's speech on TV can be brought into class to be used for instructional purposes. In the present age in which technology is developing very fast, modern technology such as computers, the internet, or CD Rom makes it easier to access authentic learning materials. Such technological media as databases, information banks, computer conferences, or multimedia/hypermedia provide the students with multi-perspectives. Furthermore, they enable the students to be active,

develop their higher-order thinking skills, and get information at the expertise level.

As can be seen, when used properly in the learning environment, authentic materials may have a lot of gains both for teachers and students. And using authentic materials is a relatively easy and convenient way of improving not only your students' general skills but also their confidence in a real situation. This is only a brief introduction to the ideas involved, but some of these ideas could easily be expanded to form part of a motivating and effective course.

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