

METHODS OF DEVELOPING WRITING COMPETENCE WITH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Abdullaeva Gulnara
2nd Year Student of NSPI,
The Department of English Language and Literature

Abstract

In this article we examined the effectiveness of authentic materials in the writing classes and some authentic materials that can be used by language teachers to teach writing in the classroom. Also, the scientists' studies of authentic materials used for teaching writing

Keywords: competence, authentic, strategy, criteria.

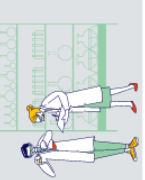
Introduction

There has been growing demand of using authentic materials in the foreign language teaching and in this way a number of teachers are implementing various techniques and materials in effective ways.

Writing is one of the important productive skills in English language teaching. Below, we will write about a number of methods on improving students' writing competence and using them in their writing in properly. Looking through the literatures, we have found some scholars' points about some effective methods in teaching writing. The use of instructional material in language teaching is very important as it helps the teacher to reach the instructional goals. As Stubbs [3;165] points out, 'few linguistic features of a text are distributed evenly throughout' with the result that use of only a small 'sample' of a given genre will inevitably miss out a great many features present. The teacher could then ask the groups to identify features from the authentic materials following the framework outlined above and ask them to compile their own features from the authentic texts. Examples of authentic materials would be newspaper reports, magazine articles, advertisements, poems, songs, video clips, menus, horoscopes etc. One important feature of authentic materials is that they are not written for educational purposes and are rather defined as real life texts [4; 145]. According to Jane Crawford, many a times course books fail to address the needs of a specific group of students [2; 245]. For this reason, use of authentic material alongside the textbooks better caters to the needs of the students. In the following paragraphs we will look through a four-stage authentic-material-based-strategy that teachers of functional writing might employ in their classrooms.

The writing teacher can engage the learners in plenary discussion sessions where each group is given the opportunity to present their findings. The discussion may be guided by the following questions:

-Which generic features are common in the authentic text across the institutions of origin?



- Which features occur in some and not all of the texts of the genre?
- What similarities and differences exist between in-classroom teacher features (those in the textbooks) and those from the authentic materials?

The class discussion could lead to a corpus of features of functional texts as they are composed in workplace settings. In the final stage, the writing teacher can engage learners in functional writing exercises based on imagined workplace situations employing linguistic features they can draw from their classroom corpus. The learners' texts can form the basis for further classroom discussion where learners will have an opportunity to review and comment on their peers' work. Eventually, the learners can compare and contrast their texts with new authentic texts from the workplace. It is believed that many of these exercises will lead to the acquisition of the correct forms of functional texts that meet their intended purposes. Thus, the language for functional writing is made up of a large number of linguistic features that are repeated over and over again in everyday situations.

Assessment Strategies

A number of assessment strategies may be adopted. One of them is portfolio assessment. In general, a portfolio is a folder or boxes in which students store significant pieces of class work that mark their progress. Students are able to reflect on and track their progress if they kept successive pieces of a task in a folder. For instance, an initial exercise on writing a memo can be followed up by write-ups of the same task after class revisions to help learners improve their performance. All such exercises can be filed in a portfolio. The field tests are an accessible gauge of student's progress.

Another form of assessment is teacher observations. When introducing a new concept on functional writing or supervising class writing exercises, the teacher needs to informally observe and document those areas where the learners are doing well and where they are going wrong. This documentation is helpful for lesson planning.

Conferencing with individual students is another form of learner-contextualized assessment. Formal conferences may be held after, say, a term to review students' goals to see what steps have been made towards achieving them. Conferences are an ideal setting for mutual input: both teachers and students are expected to share what they think of learner progress. Student portfolios can also be discussed during such conferences. Criterion-referenced assessment tests may also be used. The tests are designed to measure the progress of students against a pre-specified set of objectives and/or goals for a specified population of students. For each criterion being assessed, criterion-referenced tests will reveal what the students have learned, the degree to which they have learnt it, and how much more they need to work on this skill before they are said to have 'mastered' it. Criterion-referenced tests will help teachers in the in planning their instruction, revision, and remedial activities.

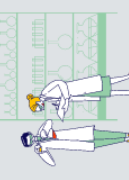
Another form of standardized assessment that can be used is the norm-referenced tests. These tests are designed to measure the progress of students relative to the performance of a representative group called the norm sample. Members of the norm sample, selected by the test makers, are given the test and from their scores 'norms' of the test are established. Norm-

referenced tests can indicate how students are progressing only relative to this norm sample. The norm-referenced tests can be used for comparison purposes: they show how a student performs on a test relative to the 'experts'. Norm-referenced tests are used to classify learners as average, above average and poor [5].

Another example of authentic materials in genre writing is mentioned by Hermer. Here, the task is applicable for the upper intermediate level and above learners. The activity is writing a review and the focus is on identifying genre features. Firstly, students are asked to look at movie reviews from the newspaper. Then the teacher discusses on what students should consider while writing a review. After that students are asked to watch a movie or play and take notes about the plot, characters and other important things. The teacher follows the pair work or group work to get engaged through the activity. Also it motivates the students for writing from their own. Then, they write the first draft and teacher can help them by providing constructive feedback. After finishing the final draft, students vote for the best one [1; 263].

Thus, we would like point out following implications and recommendations:

First of all, the teachers need to be careful while selecting and accessing authentic materials for the writing classes. The selection of useful authentic materials is a big challenge for the teacher and also they need to implement the materials in an effectual way with the students. Secondly, most of the teachers and students believe that authentic materials can be best used in the university level courses. Although from the researchers' perceptions it varies from the difficulty level of the students, so the same materials might not be appropriate for both the pre-intermediate and advanced level students. Thirdly, while using authentic materials cultural appropriateness can be a big issue, so teachers are free to do adaptation before using the materials to motivate the students. As in the classroom students' response and participation are very important to make the materials effective and the classes interesting. If there are pictures in the text book teacher can use elicitation. Teacher can also include their own experience to motivate the students in the classroom. Also, at the university level teacher can give examples from the current affairs to encourage the students and modified the task according to the understanding level of the learner. Fourthly, at the university level the students need to learn advanced English so they have to meet with the challenges included complex sentences and new vocabularies. But in the selected observed classes the researcher found that teachers are using random articles which might be quite easy for them. So, teachers need to choose the higher level materials to increase their motivation. Next, learning environment is also an important factor while using authentic materials frequently. Teachers- students' relationship and social values and attitudes has to be considered before using authentic materials. It also depends on the learners whether they prefer only realistic materials or textbook materials for their writing classes. So, teacher need to develop a better understanding between students and teachers, so they can easily measure the frequency of using authentic materials. Then, there should be an appropriate balance of sub skills between the writing activities. All the classes cannot be only on paraphrasing and summarizing writing. The teacher can develop some effective questions during providing the handouts.



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