

ENHANCING FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN UZBEKISTAN: THE ROLE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGIES

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Abstract

The article sheds light on the attitudes of English teachers in Uzbekistan towards the integration of authentic materials in EFL classrooms, contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective language teaching methodologies and materials. The study delves into when authentic materials should be introduced in language instruction, with contrasting perspectives on their suitability for different proficiency levels. Additionally, it discusses criteria for the selection of authentic texts, emphasizing appropriateness, usability, and cultural relevance. Moreover, the sources of authentic material, including newspapers, magazines, television, video, radio, literature, and the Internet, are explored, with a focus on their accessibility and effectiveness in language learning contexts.

Introduction

Foreign language teaching (FLT), language education reform, continuous FLT model, Grammar-Translation method, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Competence-based approach, Action-based approach, Teaching Training Course, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers' attitudes, language learning outcomes, communicative skills, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, language proficiency, motivation, pedagogical challenges, task design, selection criteria, readability, cultural relevance, sources of authentic material, internet access.

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning foreign languages (FLT) in Uzbekistan has gained significant importance since the country's independence in 1991. Deep and fundamental reforms in the foreign language teaching (FLT) system have been introduced during this period. The development of FLT methodology in Uzbekistan after independence can be divided into two distinct periods: 1) 1991-2012 and 2) 2013-2020.

The initial period saw the establishment of a multistage model of continuous FLT, aiming to integrate various FLT approaches and methods. Syllabuses during this time combined the Grammar-Translation method, CLT, and later the Cognitive-Communicative and Intercultural approaches.



Subsequently, a revised FLT model in 2013 aligned with the CEFR standard (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning. Teaching. Assessment). The adaptation involved the creation of new curricula, syllabuses, and teaching materials based on Competence-based and action-based approaches. Consequently, teachers are required to undergo additional The Teaching Training Course integrates a CLT framework, incorporating real-world activities into the classroom as emphasized by Stern (1981).

Within the CLT approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, it is crucial for teachers to include authentic materials. According to Rogers (1988), these materials must align with the objectives, learners' needs, and the essence of meaningful communication (p. 467). Additionally, studies by Dornyei (2003) highlight the significant impact of teachers' attitudes on students' motivation and learning outcomes. Scholars also argue that authentic materials assist students in connecting classroom knowledge with real-world interactions, facilitating the development of effective communicative skills in the target language. Hence, this study aims to explore the attitudes of English teachers in Uzbekistan towards the integration of authentic materials in EFL classrooms.

In Uzbekistan, the importance of authentic materials in foreign language teaching, aligned with the CEFR, cannot be overstated. As the country underwent significant reforms in language education, a key aspect of this transformation was the adoption of international standards, including the CEFR, to guide language teaching and assessment.

Authentic materials play a crucial role in this context by providing learners with exposure to real-world language use, thereby enhancing their language proficiency and communicative competence. By integrating authentic materials into the curriculum, educators in Uzbekistan can better prepare students to navigate diverse linguistic environments and engage in meaningful interactions beyond the classroom. The CEFR emphasizes the importance of learners' ability to understand and produce language in various contexts and situations, ranging from everyday conversations to professional settings. Authentic materials, such as newspaper articles, videos, podcasts, and authentic texts, enable learners to encounter language as it is naturally used by native speakers, thereby facilitating the development of listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. Furthermore, authentic materials help learners develop cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence, which are essential components of language learning in a globalized world. By exposing students to authentic cultural artifacts, such as literature, films, and multimedia resources, educators can broaden their understanding of different cultures and perspectives, fostering empathy and appreciation for diversity.

Incorporating authentic materials also promotes learner motivation and engagement by making language learning relevant and meaningful. When students see the practical applications of language skills in real-life contexts, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and persist in their language studies. The integration of authentic materials in language teaching in Uzbekistan, guided by the principles of the CEFR, serves to enhance the quality and effectiveness of language education, empowering learners to become confident and competent users of the target language in a globalized society.



2.Literature Review

Definition of Authentic Materials - "The concept of authentic materials has been defined in various ways within academic literature. Nunan (1989, as mentioned in Adams, 1995) explains that authentic materials are not necessarily created specifically for language instruction. Little et al. (1988, as cited in Guariento & Morley, 2001) assert that authentic materials serve social functions within the linguistic environment they originate from. Bacon and Finnemann (1990) similarly suggest that authentic materials refer to texts crafted by native speakers for purposes other than teaching. This discussion adopts Bacon and Finnemann's interpretation because it highlights the importance of native speakers as the creators of the content, a distinction not emphasized in other definitions."

2.1 The Impact of Authentic Materials on FL Teaching

Although the incorporation of real materials in the classroom has become common practice over the past three decades, the issue of authenticity has been a topic of debate. Nonetheless, the importance and benefits of authentic materials have been increasingly acknowledged, especially in non-native countries such as Iran. Research studies have shown the positive impact of using authentic texts on language learners. For instance, some studies indicate that utilizing authentic materials enhances oral language skills. Additionally, other research has highlighted the significant role authentic materials play in improving reading comprehension through the introduction of new vocabulary and expressions. It has been emphasized that authentic materials are essential for developing students' listening and reading abilities. Moreover, fostering students' comprehension strategies when dealing with authentic texts can enhance their writing proficiency in the target language. To achieve functional language proficiency and effectively communicate in real-world scenarios, students must engage with authentic language in the classroom. Providing learners with opportunities to practice language skills for everyday situations beyond the classroom setting is crucial for their language development.

Authentic materials can be incorporated as early as the first week of the initial semester; however, these materials should be relevant to learners' personal experiences and include elements that aid comprehension at this stage (Rings, 1986; Vandergrift, 1997). Feyten (1991) claims that learners are capable of engaging with genuine, unedited discourse, though their level of understanding may vary from minimal to significant. Meyer (1984) and Richards and Renandya (1983) recommend providing students with necessary background knowledge and straightforward tasks to complete while listening. Hansen and Jensen (1994) argue that students of all proficiency levels should be exposed to authentic speech regularly during their listening practice. Bacon (1989) suggests that even students with lower proficiency levels can comprehend and derive benefits from authentic texts. Schmitt (2002: 206) emphasizes the importance of guiding learners gradually towards fully authentic tasks, rather than immediately presenting lifelike tasks. Joiner et al. (1989) propose that teachers evaluate current instructional practices and materials in language classes to understand what students are exposed to, to what extent, and how they engage with the material. Lastly, by incorporating authentic speech in



listening activities, students can experience "immediate and direct contact with input data that mirrors real communication in the target language" (Breen, 1985, p. 63).

Incorporating authentic materials when teaching a foreign language is advantageous and can boost learners' motivation. According to McNeil (1994) and Kilickaya (2004), using authentic texts helps increase students' enthusiasm for language learning as they connect with real-life language scenarios. Various studies (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990; Otte, 2006; Thanajaro, 2000) have also shown that the use of authentic listening materials can enhance students' motivation and satisfaction. On the contrary, some academics, like Clark (1983), argue against the use of authentic materials, claiming they do not impact learning significantly. Kilickaya (2004) adds that authentic texts can pose challenges for teachers due to their variability in vocabulary, structure, function, content, and length. Some obstacles teachers face include limited access to authentic materials, the cost of acquiring them, and the time needed to select suitable texts. Despite these challenges, the advantages authentic materials bring to the foreign language classroom far outweigh the difficulties.

2.2 The role of authentic materials in FL teaching and learning

The importance of using authentic materials in language education has been increasingly recognized by educators and researchers. Various research studies, including those by Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000), have highlighted the benefits of learners interacting with authentic materials. For instance, Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000) found that incorporating authentic materials into language learning can enhance aural language skills. Similarly, Otte (2006) investigated the influence of authentic aural texts on the listening comprehension of adult ESL students at an American university, revealing that exposure to authentic materials can improve listening comprehension and motivation among language learners. Furthermore, Herron and Seay's (1991) study demonstrated that language learners who regularly engage with authentic radio tapes during classroom activities show improved listening comprehension compared to their peers. Experts in language teaching and pedagogy, such as Guariento and Morely (2001), have also emphasized that utilizing authentic materials can enhance learners' communicative abilities.

Gilmore (2007) investigated the impact of utilizing authentic materials as opposed to textbook materials on enhancing the communicative abilities of learners over a one-year study period. Weyers (1999) focused on the effects of real-life video resources on language students at the university level, specifically on listening comprehension and communicative skills. Ur (1996) highlighted the challenge students face in comprehending texts outside the classroom due to the disconnect between classroom reading materials and real-world language usage. She emphasized the importance of exposing learners to the same type of reading encountered by native speakers. Bantmeir (2008) advocated for the integration of real-world reading materials into language curricula. Hadley (2001) emphasized the value of using authentic materials such as travel documents, hotel forms, schedules, menus, newspapers, and magazines to familiarize students with real language usage more effectively than artificial classroom materials alone.

It appears that utilizing various authentic materials for reading practices is beneficial for students. Research indicates that students at all language proficiency levels can effectively



engage with authentic materials. Maxim (2002) discovered that even students with limited language skills can read authentic texts in class with the support of their peers and teacher. Integrating authentic materials into foreign language classes offers additional advantages. Language teaching professionals should recognize the enriching influence of authentic materials (Gilmore, 2007). By incorporating authentic materials, students learn how to apply language in real-life situations, enhancing their proficiency in language learning skills. McNeil and Kilickaya (2004) observed that authentic texts create a sense of authentic and practical language learning. The use of the target language in a social context is motivating for learners. Rivers (1987) demonstrated that learners working with authentic materials exhibit higher interest in language acquisition. Kim (2000) also highlighted that authentic materials help overcome cultural and social barriers in language learning.

Some experts, however, question the value of using authentic materials for language learning. Clark (1983) argued that the media does not contribute to language acquisition under any circumstances, making the choice between authentic and non-authentic materials irrelevant. Similarly, Kienbaum and co-authors (1986) contended that students show no noteworthy distinction in language learning when exposed to authentic materials as opposed to traditional ones. Martinez (2002) suggested that using authentic materials could introduce cultural bias. According to McNeil (1994), Kilickaya (2004), and Ur (1996), beginner learners may encounter frustration and lose motivation when presented with authentic texts. Guariento and Morely (2001) highlighted how beginners might struggle to engage meaningfully with authentic materials, leading to feelings of confusion and demotivation. Kim (2000) maintained that real-life materials have minimal impact on students' learning at the initial learning stages. In essence, incorporating authentic materials in language instruction has been a topic of debate for an extended period.

The benefits of utilizing authentic materials outweigh the challenges they may present. Overcoming these obstacles can be achieved through effective task design, as highlighted by Field (1998), who emphasized simplifying the task rather than the language itself for students. Various studies, such as the one conducted at Guilan University by Zhafarghandi, have also noted the positive impact of authentic listening materials in language learning. Zhafarghandi (2014) found that these materials increased students' interest in learning languages by aligning with their real-life needs. Exposure to genuine language through authentic listening materials allows for a more creative teaching approach and fosters a positive attitude towards language learning among students.

2.3 When should Authentic Materials be introduced?

Bringing in authentic material is a controversial topic in language teaching. Kilickaya (2004) and Kim (2000) believe that teachers can use authentic materials only in intermediate and advanced language classes. According to Guariento and Morley (2001), authentic texts should not be used with low-level students because it would lead to frustration, confusion and demotivation. Other researchers, however, believe that students should be exposed to authentic material early in language learning (McNeil, 1994; Miller, 2005), and



argue that early exposure to such texts leads to the development of useful strategies for solving complex problems. tasks later.

2.4 Selection of authentic material

According to Berardo (2006), the selection of authentic texts should be based on the appropriateness, usability and readability of the content. He believes that content is appropriate if it interests the student and matches his needs and abilities. Bacon and Finneman (1990) also argue that authentic texts should be culturally relevant to the students' experience. In addition, exploitation refers to how authentic text is used to develop students' skills and how it is hacked for instructional purposes. Finally, the language of the text and structural and lexical difficulties are related to readability.

2.5 Sources of authentic material

The sources of authentic material (spoken or written) are endless. The most common sources are newspapers, magazines, television, video, radio, literature and the Internet. Although radio is easy to use, its input is the most difficult for language learners to understand because all the non-verbal information is missing... Television and video images, movements, colors and body language, unlike radio, give learners access to non-verbal information. - oral information; therefore television and video are easier to understand for language learners. However, the Internet is considered the most useful source (Berardo, 2006). Since printed materials become outdated very quickly, the Internet is always updated, interactive and provides visual stimulation (Berardo, 2006). Also internet is more useful compared to other sources. Because teachers can access articles, audio clips, podcasts and videos from the Internet. However, as Miller (2003) states, television is the most used medium to obtain authentic listening material for language learning (see Appendix A). A number of studies have provided insight into student attitudes towards authentic input. Pedagogical research was also needed to give recommendations on material selection and sources.

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