

# DEVELOPING STUDENTS' READING SKILL THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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## Abstract:

In modern language classrooms, authentic materials have already been an integral part of language learning process due to the opportunities they provide for classroom interaction among FLLs (Foreign language learners) and SLSs (Second language learners). When applied appropriately, authentic texts can be of great benefit to language learners and teachers in general. For this reason, this article will explore the benefits and challenges of using authentic materials to teach English language, in particular, reading skills.

**Keywords:** Authentic materials, reading skill, texts, suitability, exploitability, readability, challenges.

## Introduction

The postwar era is characterized by advancements in science and technology including teaching sphere. The dominance of more interactive methods and approaches, namely CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), ALM (Audio-lingual Method) and TBL (Task-based Learning) and etc. over GTM (Grammar Translation Method) did necessitate a change of teaching materials, techniques along with assessment tools. In this regard, language teachers to date have reached general consensus on the significance of authentic materials for teaching foreign languages considering that textbooks cannot always be representative of real life communication and cultural contexts. Especially, popularity of CLT in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave language teachers further impetus to apply authentic materials for educational purposes (Hamed & Hilal, 2014). Besides, Larsen-Freeman (2000) noted that integrating authentic materials is one of the characteristics of CLT.

What is authentic material? How can we use them for teaching purposes? Are there any problems related to the use of authentic materials for teaching? Authentic materials are defined as the materials intended for native speakers of the target language (Martinez, 2002) and thus students can have exposure to natural language which is typical of its own community (Kilickaya, 2004). As opposed to the textbooks which have been utilized in language classrooms, authentic materials are, to great extent, far more engaging, motivating and effective since they ensure that students are able to use the target language inside and outside the classroom efficiently (Lee, 1995; Little, Devitt & Singleton, 1988; Peacock, 1997; Shei, 2001). In brief, authentic material is an umbrella term for real-life texts produced not specifically for pedagogic purposes as suggested by Wallace (1992). There are several factors to which



authenticity should play a leading role to teach students reading skill and they will be discussed below.

### **Main Part**

According to Widdowson (1990), “It was considered that the input students are exposed to should be rather uncomplicated to make it easy to follow. Nowadays, however, it is suggested that the language should be authentic”. Berardo (2006) also noted that “non-authentic texts include “artificial” language and therefore they mainly focus on linguistic aspects to be taught. In addition, they contain “false-text indicators”, that is to say, complete and repeated grammatical structures which rarely reflect on real language use.

As mentioned above, authentic reading materials can be more advantageous over non-authentic texts because they make the learning process more interesting, motivating and undemanding. The research carried out by Fitriana et al., (2019) concluded that majority of the participants were more encouraged and interested to read authentic English texts owing to their low-level complexities. Bektashev & Erkaboyeva (2021) added more benefits of using authentic texts as teaching tools stating that they can be applied into different contexts to teach different language skills due to their versatility.

Berardo (2006) believed that the most common sources can be articles, songs, literature, TV programmes and movies. First and foremost, Internet can be one of the most useful sources for teachers/learners due to its readily accessibility, updateability, interactivity and dynamic nature. Having said that, there are several factors in selecting authentic texts including suitability of content, exploitability and readability (Nuttal, 1996). Suitability refers to the quality of being absorbing, stimulating and relevant, while readability is about the level of difficulty of the text. Exploitability can be used to describe the purpose of the materials chosen. Language teachers should take into account that not all the materials in L2 can be integrated into classroom unless they serve for educational purposes.

Notwithstanding above-mentioned advantages of authentic reading materials, there are some potential challenges language teachers occasionally encounter. Firstly, Martinez (2002) argued that authentic texts can be culturally biased resulting in misunderstandings among learners whose cultural background knowledge is not good enough. Secondly, low level students may oftentimes have trouble in deciphering authentic texts that include mixed level and advanced vocabulary and structures, and even some vocabulary inside those texts can be irrelevant or inappropriate. Richards (2001) considered that this can also pose challenges for not only learners but also teachers. Nonetheless, the biggest challenge is, according to Berardo (2006), when students’ needs are not compatible with the chosen materials such as unsuitable text types, too complicated vocabulary and structures leading students to feel demotivated. It is noteworthy that language teachers are required to allocate considerable amount of time for preparations prior to bringing those materials into the class.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, authentic materials are designed for native speakers to use in their daily lives with no emphasis on teaching the language which is the reason why language teachers should



be attentive in terms of materials selection. However, they can be beneficial for learners in many cases. Day (2004) concluded that authentic texts can motivate learners as they regard them as appealing, engaging, and culturally enlightening. On the other hand, Williams (1984) and Morrison (1989) argued that as a matter of fact they lower students' motivation and their confidence providing that they are exposed to such materials beyond their capacity. I strongly believe that further research should be done regarding this.

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