
Authentic materials in teaching English

Abstract. This article provides general information about authentic materials and their use in a foreign language classroom. It does so by giving a brief overview of the concept of authentic materials and discussing core problems that impede a wide use of authentic materials in a classroom. English language teachers find them time-consuming for planning a lesson and avoid using authentic materials because they contain complex language structures. Further, the paper goes on with a literature and historical overview and describes different approaches to the definition of the term 'authentic materials'. The article also discusses the difference between authentic materials and adapted (or fabricated) materials. Further, the discussion touches upon the problem of incorporating materials into teaching. The article continues by giving strategies for incorporating authentic materials into teaching. The study in this paper was done to explore the attitude of teachers to the use of authentic materials in a classroom. The results of the study demonstrate that most respondents vote for positive influence of authentic materials on learners' language competency.

Key words: authentic materials, authenticity, foreign language teaching, language competence, a real-life context.

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Introduction

The issue of using authentic materials in foreign language teaching has been discussed in numerous research works and textbooks, and most of these discussions prove that the impact of authentic materials on learners' competence in a foreign language classroom is undoubtedly beneficial. The approach to teaching English as a foreign language has completely changed in the last decades, and contemporary methodology of foreign language teaching is oriented at communicative competency-based approach bringing a real-life communication into English classes. In this regard, materials of original sources are increasingly becoming a vital factor in teaching English as a foreign language. However, many language practitioners and applied linguists find authentic materials rather complicated to be used in a classroom. One of the core problems is that contemporary purposes of teaching a foreign language are very different from those of a curriculum in educational institutions. Secondly, for some teachers, such materials are a demanding task in terms of language content. English teachers in Kazakhstan have a plentiful choice of instructional materials today – there is a great number of course books that have become an integral part of English language teaching because they are considered to be most effective and less time-consuming for planning a lesson. In the light of real-life communication there is considerable concern about the use of such materials as they contain edited texts that do not or poorly present the language naturally occurring in the context of a native speaker or in the context of standard English. The motivation of this paper is that authentic materials can help learners avoid artificial language in a classroom and absorb the language of the real world. Most language practitioners agree that authentic language is very good for a language learning process, but

they still have a lot of disputes about when authentic materials should be introduced and how they should be selected for teaching a foreign language.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to learn about teachers' reflections on the use of authentic materials in the classroom.

We asked Master's and Ph.D. students of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University to participate in the study as most of them teach the English Language at schools or universities. There took part 30 teaching participants in the survey. Their experience of teaching English ranges from two to fifteen years.

The survey questionnaire was distributed among participants to elicit information about their attitudes on use of authentic materials in a foreign language class. The questionnaire included eight questions. The participants were allowed to give their own comments on each of the questions. All the questions were analyzed after the participants had returned the surveys. The quantitative method was used for the result analysis. Research results showed that most participants find authentic materials significant in motivating learners to communicate. Most respondents (41%) agreed that authentic materials make the communication 'real'.

The concept of authentic materials in teaching English as a foreign language is not a new phenomenon. To follow how changes in approaches to English language teaching influenced the use of authentic materials, this work discusses the historical background and development of views on the study of authenticity. We searched for published works to examine what researchers and linguists know in relation to topics relevant to the use of authentic materials in foreign language teaching.

The first investigation into the field of authenticity goes back to as long as 1899, when Henry Sweet emphasized the importance of authenticity [1, p.97; 2, p.101]. He indicated that 'the great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial 'methods' or 'series' is that they do justice to every feature of the language. The artificial systems, on the other hand, tend to cause incessant repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the vocabulary, certain combinations of words to the almost total exclusion of others which are equally, or perhaps even more, essential' [1, p.97].

Later in the 20th century, most linguistic theories spread around the 'Audiolingual Method'. This method was described by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers in *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching (A description and analysis)* [3, p.44]. They assumed that 'the emergence of the Audiolingual Method resulted from the increased attention given to foreign language teaching in the United States toward the end of the 1950s' [3, p.47]. This approach demanded the use of carefully selected and structured instructional materials that needed to be oriented at teachers. In this regard, the role of authentic materials in teaching lost its significance during that period.

The issue of authenticity gained an increased interest again in the 1970s. The major factor of considerable concern to the importance of authentic materials was the introduction of the idea of communicative competence by Dell Hymes, which involved more than knowledge of language structures. In his work, D. Hymes claimed that communicative competence does not only comprise knowledge of the language but the need for the contextualized communication [4, p.281].

The introduction of communicative philosophy assumed pivoting of teaching priorities and concentrating on teaching via showing the realities of the language. Freda Mishan classifies approaches to the study of the concept of authenticity in language learning and mentions that the idea of using texts 'communicatively', that is, exploiting them for their content rather than for their linguistic structure, represented a key precept of communicative language teaching [5, p.3]. She describes three groups of approaches to foreign language teaching. Apart from 'communicative approaches', which have been mentioned earlier in this work, she highlights 'materials focused' approaches, in which

learning is centred principally round the text, and 'humanistic approaches' which address the 'whole' learner and emphasize the value of individual development [5, p.1]. She argues that all three groups of approaches are relevant to authenticity.

In the 21st century, English has become a dominant international language. The authors of the British Council report (2013) estimate that about 1.75 billion people in the world speak English. There is a strong need for English in all the spheres, for instance, everyday use, mass media, business, politics, travels, social interaction, and others. In this regard, the role of authentic materials in language teaching has become important because they convey a message of a life context.

Modern approaches to foreign language teaching are basically concentrated on the interrelationship between language, society and culture. An intercultural component has become a fundamentally new concept in contemporary foreign language teaching. S. S. Kunanbaeva focuses on the language as the greatest indicator of culture [6, p.98]. She claims that linguoculturological methodology is the basis for this new approach, and we can view foreign language teaching as a system of intercultural communicative approach in pedagogy [6, p. 8]. In this regard, we cannot but agree that authentic materials are the best way to establish the relationship between a learner, language, and culture. The use of materials found in original sources increases the motivation of language acquisition.

The study of the term 'authentic materials' is characterized by the multiplicity of definitions to describe the idea of authenticity. In the field of language teaching, numerous definitions of authentic materials highlight the fact that they (authentic materials) are (1) not written for specific language teaching purposes and (2) exposure students to a real language atmosphere.

In the literature, there seems to be no general definition of the term authentic materials. In this connection, we have tried to review a range of different labels to define the meaning of authenticity offered by different researchers and linguists.

These are listed in Table 1 and derive from various research works. For example, K. Morrow describes the concept of authenticity as '...a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort' [7, p.13]. F. Mishan notes how Morrow emphasizes real in his definition, trying to convey the idea that authentic texts are a means of communicating information and not of illustrating specific language points [5, p.12]. Jeremy Harmer describes authentic texts as '... intended for any competent user of the language' [8, p.100]. In this regard, we can assume that authentic materials are particularly beneficial for teaching proficient users of English.

We cannot but mention the results of M. Peacock's investigation of the impact of authentic materials on his students. His findings led to mixed results because along with evidence of positive effects of authentic materials on learners' competency, he revealed that 'overall, learners found authentic materials to be significantly less interesting than artificial' [9]. Some scholars and linguists state that authentic materials are not designed for language teaching, whereas others promote the use of authentic materials in language teaching. It is obvious that despite the differences of opinions in defining the terms 'authenticity' and 'authentic materials', most researchers agree that such materials are produced by native speakers or writers and aimed at conveying a message in a real-life context.

In this article, we can define authentic materials as any type of materials written or recorded by native speakers for native speakers.

However, this paper takes the view that authentic materials can be employed in teaching as they offer students exposure to the language used by native speakers when communicating with native speakers.

Table 1. Definitions in 'authentic materials' research

Source	Definition
K. Morrow (1977)	"An authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of sort." [7, p.13]
Vivian J. Cook (1981)	"Authentic materials are real examples of language produced by native speakers." [10]
H.G. Widdowson (1983)	"[Authenticity] can, on the one hand, be used to refer to actually attested language produced by native speakers for a normal communicative purpose. But the term can also be used, quite legitimately, to refer to the communicative activity of the language user, to the engagement of interpretative procedures for making sense, even if these procedures are operated on and with textual data which are not authentic in the first sense. An authentic stimulus in the form of attested instances of language does not guarantee an authentic response in the form of appropriate language activity." [11, p.30]
D. Nunan (1989)	"Authentic material is any material which has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching." [12, p.54]
C. Kramersch (1993)	"The term authentic [...] refers to the way language is used in non-pedagogic, natural Communication." [13]
J. F. Lee (1995)	"A text is usually regarded as authentic if it is not written for teaching purposes but for a real-life communicative purpose, where the writer has a certain message to pass on to the reader. As such, an authentic text is one that possesses an intrinsically communicative quality." [14]
M. Peacock (1997)	"Authentic materials are materials that have been produced to fulfil some social purpose in the language community." [9]
J. Harmer (2007)	"Authentic texts are not written especially for language learners but are intended for any competent user of the language." [8, p.100]
E. Jacobson (2003)	"...We mean print materials used in ways that they would be used in the lives of learners outside of their adult education classes." [15, p.14]

Discussion

One issue that needs to be raised is the limitation of the use of authentic materials in a classroom. Many language practitioners agree that learners’ insufficient language abilities impede the use of authentic materials. Some linguists believe that adaptation of authentic materials might bridge the gap between the complexity of authentic materials and learners’ language level. However, we consider the adaptation of authentic materials as one of the least effective ways that can help learners easily absorb a foreign language. Traditional teaching materials concede to authentic materials in terms of their content. This fact explains the necessity of the introduction of authentic materials as early as at an elementary level. Moreover, native-like proficiency is assumed to be the learners’ ideal target in mastering a foreign language; and adapted teaching materials lack meaningful content to convey a message of a life context. Authentic materials encourage learners to polish their language skills through real-life communication and provide diversity of learning activity due to their genre style variety.

The afore-mentioned definitions of authenticity and numerous descriptions of the use of authentic materials in foreign language teaching allow us to differentiate authentic materials from adapted ones. Table 2 illustrates essential distinctions between authentic and adapted (fabricated) materials.

Table 2. Essential distinctions between authentic and adapted materials

	Authentic materials	Adapted materials
The text is composed for	Real-life context	Pedagogic context
The text is aimed at	Communicative competency enhancement	Revision of language structures
The language content	Ellipsis, clichés, etc.	Standard simple speech
Material source	Authentic sources	Specially adapted (fabricated) materials

Turning to the shortcomings of authentic materials, we infer difficulties in authentic texts comprehension due to cultural differences; deterioration of information, and necessity to carefully select materials as a result. Criteria for the selection of authentic materials depend on learners’ language level. Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2001) created by the Council of Europe specified requirements of language acquisition for all reference levels. All the levels require students to be able to deal with most situations that are likely to arise in almost all the spheres of life; and authentic materials are a powerful source to achieve general comprehension of authentic English. Authentic exposure to language occurs when learners immerse in it in a natural way: read non-adapted books, newspapers, magazines, announcements in English; listen to the radio; watch TV and films in English; search the Internet, etc. A wide variety of different types of authentic materials make it easy to find something that will interest the learners and might encourage them to further exploiting a real-life language context.

We believe that following strategies can help teachers successfully implement authentic materials in a classroom. The first and very important step is the assessment of learners’ needs and goals. The second step involves the participation of learners in the process of choosing authentic materials. Here, learners are allowed to bring their own authentic materials to class to support their learning goals. Thirdly, teachers should use authentic materials in authentic ways and not in traditional pedagogy-based ways. For example, a discussion of a current newspaper article is far more beneficial than

reading an adapted political text as it contains more relevant information. Because authentic materials seem to be challenging for learners, teachers should warn them about difficulties they may encounter.

Results

As indicated earlier, we tried to learn about teachers' opinions on use of authentic materials in a language classroom. The results of the questionnaire are demonstrated in Table 3.

This analysis shows that all the respondents prefer to use authentic materials in their language classes. Most participants (83 %) highlighted that they prefer authentic materials mostly because such materials expose learners to a real-life context. More than half of respondents (57 %) consider authentic materials to be an effective way to improve learners' language skills. The results of the research show that authentic materials greatly improve learners' speaking skills. Some of the participants stated that authentic texts motivate learners to speak. For instance, they agree that reading original restaurant menus strongly motivate learners to make a dialogue to discuss items on the menu. According to this research, authentic materials have proved to be a very powerful source at all language levels; and most respondents believe that introducing authentic materials at an early stage will encourage students to feel more confident with complex language structures in no time. The most suitable level for the introduction of authentic materials is a debated aspect in the language teaching field. We would rather support the opinion of our participants. The findings of this research have common grounds with considerations of some research that emphasized positive effects of authentic materials in improving students' reading [8]. The analysis of teachers' responses shows that 100 % of them would use authentic materials in speaking classes, while 90 % of the respondents agree that authentic materials are good in reading classes. The lowest number (43 %) of participants would use authentic materials to improve learners' writing skills. All the respondents (100 %) focus on the complexity of materials while selecting authentic texts for use in the classroom. They also consider the language level (90 %) and learners' needs (70 %) as well. According to them, learners should be given an opportunity to choose the type of authentic materials they would prefer to work with in the classroom. The table shows that the participants of the experiment view the Internet and TV/video as the most common sources of authentic materials. Regarding strategies to follow when incorporating authentic materials in a classroom, 40 % of respondents prefer to use up-to-date sources and claim that they are primarily focused on choosing the best authentic materials for their learners. The results of the analysis show that most of the respondents expect authentic materials to play a crucial role in forming learners' language competency. To feel confident, teachers should carefully select authentic materials and thoroughly design tasks to be used in the classroom.

Question	Answer	No. of respondents	%
Do you prefer to use authentic materials in the class?	yes	30	100%
	no	0	0 %
Why do you prefer to use authentic materials in the class?	exposure to a real-life context	25	83 %
	improvement of learners' language skills	17	57 %
	learners learn about new cultures	9	30 %
What type of skills (receptive or productive) are	receptive (listening)	15	50 %
	receptive (reading)	27	90 %
	productive (speaking)	30	100 %

authentic materials most likely to help to master?	productive (writing)	13	43 %
At what level do you think authentic materials can be used?	A1	30	100 %
	A2	30	100 %
	B1	30	100 %
	B2	30	100 %
	C1	30	100 %
	C2	30	100 %
What criteria can be applied for selection of authentic materials?	learners' level of language	27	90 %
	complexity of the text	30	100 %
	students' needs	23	77 %
What sources of authentic materials are most suited for use in a foreign language class?	Internet	30	100 %
	belles-lettres	19	63 %
	newspapers and journals (or magazines)	11	37 %
	TV/video	28	93 %
What strategies do you follow when incorporating authentic materials in the classroom?	learners' needs assessment	23	77 %
	participation of learners in identifying authentic materials	7	23 %
	using authentic materials in authentic ways	12	40 %
Do you feel confident enough when using authentic materials?	yes	26	87 %
	no	4	13 %

Diagram 1 shows the main advantages of using authentic materials in teaching as offered by the participants of the experiment. Based on the results of the diagram, we can assume that one most significant advantage of authentic materials is that they motivate learners to communicate.

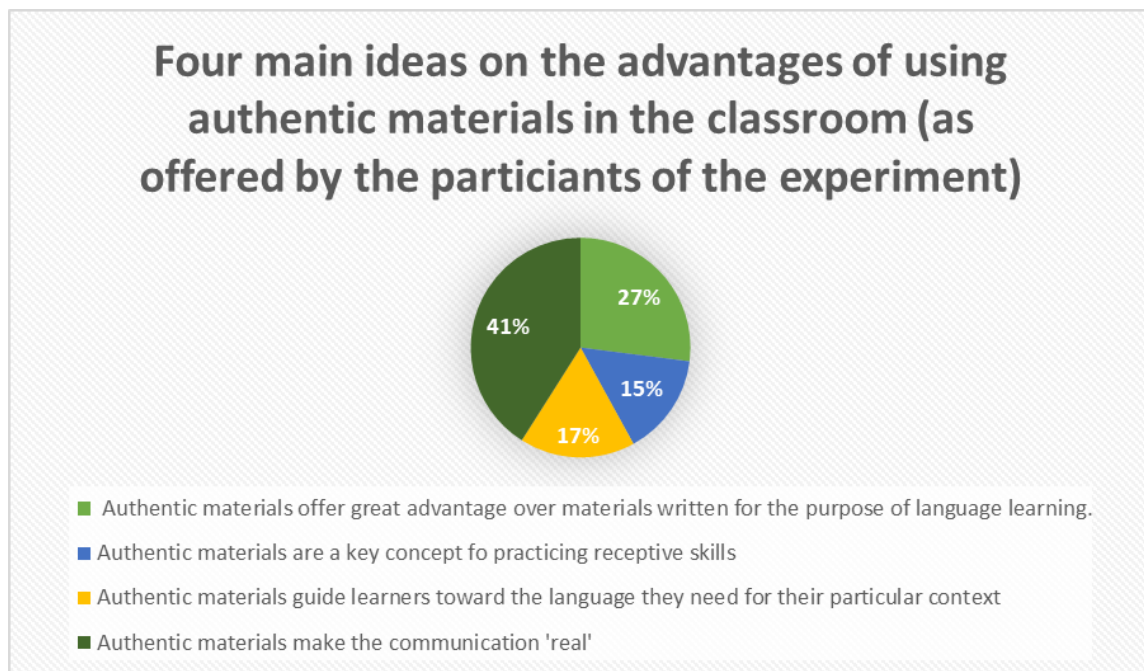


Diagram 1. Four main ideas on the advantages of using authentic materials in the classroom.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the theoretical issues of using authentic materials in a foreign language classroom. The research in the paper explored participants' reflections on the use of authentic materials in the classroom. Both the theoretical part and the research results show that authentic materials are a very helpful and useful 'tool' to encourage learners to absorb a language of the real world. Dealing with authentic materials, learners should be able to comprehend the meaning of the text in a real-life context. This implies a greater role of a teacher as a mediator between learners and authentic materials. Teachers should thoroughly select materials to develop learners' language skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Authentic materials should convey a certain message to pass on to learners and are the most effective source to enlarge learners' vocabulary. In this regard, the needs of students must be considered.

Shortcomings of the use of authentic materials mainly concern learners' language level. Teachers need to be very careful when choosing authentic materials for one specific level, bearing in mind the grammatical and textual complexity of the material.

Of course, more issues seem to arise in terms of the use of authentic materials in teaching. However, they will be the subject of the research in our further works.

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Ағылшын тілін оқыту барысында аутентикалық материалдарды пайдалану

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада ағылшын тілін оқытудағы аутентикалық материалды пайдалану мәселелері қарастырылады. Мақалада «аутентикалық материал» ұғымының түрлі анықтамасы беріліп, зерттеу тарихы қарастырылған. Шет тілін оқыту барысында аутентикалық материалды пайдалану кезінде кездесетін негізгі мәселелер айқындалады. Аталған материалдар ағылшын тілінің оқытушыларына сабақты жоспарлауда қиындық тудырады. Аутентикалық материалдардың күрделі тілдік құрылымдары мұқият қарауды талап етеді. Мақалада аутентикалық және бейімделген материал арасындағы жалпы айырмашылықтар сипатталған және оны ағылшын тілін оқыту үдерісіне енгізу тәсілдері ұсынылған. Аутентикалық материалдың бейімделген материалға қарағанда артықшылығы - мұнда қарапайым тілдік құрылымдар емес, ана тілінде сөйлейтіндердің өзіндік сөйлеу элементтері бар. Сонымен қатар, студенттердің оқу, жазу және сөйлеу дағдыларын дамыту үшін аутентикалық материалдар мұқият таңдалуы керек. Шет тілін оқытуда респонденттердің пікірін анықтау үшін сауалнама жүргізілді. Оның нәтижелері аутентикалық материалдар шетел тілін үйренушілердің тілдік құзыреттілігіне оң әсер тигізетінін, нақты тілдік жағдаят аясында шетел тілін үйренуге көмектесетінін, студенттердің коммуникативтік дағдыларын дамытуға ықпал ететінін көрсетті.

Түйін сөздер: аутентикалық материалдар, шет тілін үйрену, тілдік құзыреттілік, нақты тілдік жағдай.

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Аутентичные материалы в преподавании английского языка

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуются вопросы применения аутентичных материалов при обучении английскому языку. Рассматриваются основные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются преподаватели иностранного языка при использовании аутентичных материалов на занятиях. В частности, аутентичный материал представляет трудности для преподавателей английского языка при планировании занятия и содержит сложные языковые структуры. Описывается история подхода к изучению данного понятия, а также приводятся его различные интерпретации. В работе также представлены различия между аутентичными и адаптированными материалами и изучаются пути включения аутентичных материалов в процесс обучения английскому языку. Данная категория текстов имеют преимущество над адаптированными материалами, так как содержат элементы оригинальной речи носителей языка, а не упрощенные языковые структуры. Кроме того, необходим тщательный подбор подобного материала для его эффективного усвоения обучающимися. С целью выяснения мнения преподавателей относительно использования аутентичных материалов при обучении иностранному языку был проведен опрос. Результаты показали, что согласно мнению большинства респондентов, аутентичные материалы оказывают положительный эффект на языковую компетенцию изучающих иностранный язык и помогают изучать иностранный язык в контексте реальной языковой ситуации.

Ключевые слова: аутентичные материалы, аутентичность, изучение иностранного языка, языковая компетенция, реальная языковая ситуация.

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