

IMPROVING WRITING COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH BASED ON AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract: The use of authentic materials in EFL has long been acknowledged to be advantageous to learners as they provide real-life experience in the language classroom. However, many of the existing definitions which most teachers are utilizing to select appropriate teaching resources present a strong bias toward the notion of “native speakers’ production”. This article aims to call for reconsideration of defining “authentic materials” by pointing out that the English language no longer belongs to the so-called “native speakers”, stating the fact that a growing number of non-native speakers are using it to communicate purposefully every day. Also, authentic materials can be ideally used in secondary schools, both to ensure real communication between users of the English language and to improve written competence in English.

Key words: writing competence, authentic materials, writing skills, worldwide view, innovative actions

The use of authentic materials in the language classroom has been widely considered to be beneficial to the language learners in different aspects. Efforts have been made in investigating the advantages that the authenticity of language materials may bring and positive results have been reported. Harmer states that authentic materials can provide great benefits to learners in the production and acquisition of language with a boost in their confidence in real-life use. [4] Additionally, Peacock claims those learners’ levels of on-task behavior, concentration and involvement can be increased by using authentic materials greater than employing artificial ones.

This paper, which attempts to recommend a more balanced perspective on this issue, is going to examine some definitions of authentic materials before discussing the notion of native speakers within the dramatic popularity of the English language worldwide in this 21st century. Furthermore, it argues over the belief that materials can only be produced by the native speakers of English, and makes endeavor to complement existing definitions to harmonize with this current century teaching context to eventually recommend some principles which can be employed for choosing teaching resources.

The definition that can cover virtually all aspects of authentic materials is still debatable among methodologists. Many researchers and practitioners have, through their teaching and researching experience, provided different definitions on what can be classified as “authentic materials”.

Morrow states, “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.” [5] Cook defines those as real examples of language produced by native speakers. [3] Author stresses on



the realness of certain materials by stating that authentic materials are those written for native speakers of the language with the real purpose. [1] Similarly, Bacon and Finnemann also provided a definition putting emphasis on the production and the intention of native speakers. [2] Sanderson, while maintaining an analogous viewpoint in understanding this kind of materials, claims that a newspaper article written for a native-English-speaking audience is a very classic example in this. More recently, Kilickaya stresses on the “exposure to the real usage of the everyday life language” and how the materials are used by native speakers for their own purposes in daily life.

It can easily be understood from the presented viewpoints of classifying what are authentic materials and what are not that, together with the omission of the pedagogical purposes in adapting the materials, those authors seem to overemphasize on the existence of what is indicated as “the production by native speakers”. These many cited definitions have presented a prevailing belief among English language teachers that only native-speaker-produced materials can be of satisfactory quality to be utilized as authentic materials. Whether or not this belief is appropriate in the dramatically changing context of English language teaching in this century is still to be discussed. The consequence, however, has arisen with some researchers employing only definitions that indicate the native-produced materials in their practice. Murray, in his research on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers in using authentic materials, only adopts the definitions provided by those who differentiate the materials produced by native speakers. Akbari and Razavi, while examining how EFL teachers view the employment of such materials in language classrooms in Iran, assume the definition which recognizes native speakers as the producers of the used text while other definitions does not.

Schoolchildren need to continually participate in a real English community to meet the needs of sustained English language learning, where they will be needed for meaningful, authentic communication and practice. Videotapes, audiotapes, television, interactive computer software, journals and other publications are becoming increasingly common methods in English language lessons in our educational institutions. Unfortunately the use of these authentic materials in the formation of English written competence is not provided for by regulatory documents and textbooks at schools. In order to achieve fulfill the tasks put forward before the foreign language teaching system we should change our attitudes, approaches to teaching, by changing our methods, materials and instructions.

Up to the present moment, there have been a lot of researches on learning alternative approaches and methods in teaching English. Recently, using authentic materials has been accepted as the most effective and profitable way of teaching foreign languages. A lot of students are facing some problems and difficulties in the process of communication with native English speakers because of having learnt language from non-authentic materials. In the modern methods of teaching the foreign language the usage of authentic materials stands as the main criterion of the «right» resources that are utilized while developing the language proficiency.

Authentic material is material used in the TEFL classroom which was originally created for native speakers of English. The reason we use authentic material in class rather than material specifically written for learners is to provide more variety and authenticity to the lesson. It also allows to tailor the content of the lesson more specifically to your class needs and interests. Using authentic materials is one of the mainstays of an imaginative and motivating higher level course, but rarely features at levels lower than intermediate. There are



several reasons for this, primarily a kind of fear that students will panic faced with language that is largely unfamiliar. This is an unnecessary fear, as using the authentic materials can be rewarding and stimulating for both teachers and students. As you all know, the main difference between authentic and graded materials is that in the latter, the materials almost revolve around a particular structure that is presented to the students. For example, if the tense being presented is, say, «The Past Tense», every single speaker in the dialogs or even the texts given to the students are in that tense. It seems as if there were no other tense in the whole world. In reality, when talking about the past, for example, native speakers may use a wider variety of tenses, sometimes even the present tense.

Authentic materials, on the other hand, are real in the sense that they are not created for students as the target audience but for native speakers. The obvious advantage, of course, is that by using authentic materials as you present students with actual everyday language, just as it appears in real life. The main disadvantage of these materials of course, is that sometimes they are not teacher-friendly, and you may need to spend several hours reading or watching videos until you finally find what you need in order to use in your class. In addition, on many occasions in a whole context or situation you may find just one instance of what you need to present your students with. This could be overcome if you provide students with several situations in which the pattern appears, but again, you need to have the time to research and gather the appropriate materials. If time is no object to you, you may well spend some time doing this research and you will soon find out that there's myriads of information out there that is terrific for your classroom. However, if you have time constraints, as most teachers unfortunately do, a balanced approach may be the solution for you.

Authentic materials are the materials which are not specifically written for teaching. Teacher can even tell class to go over some authentic texts, videos, songs etc. and find similar constructions. Sometimes a combination of both approaches yields the best of both worlds. It is up to the teacher to decide what could be the best for the classrooms.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the definition of authentic materials, while attempting to set ground for English teachers to develop their own criteria for choosing what is best to use, needs to become more flexible in a way that the changing environment of language use in the 21st century should be taken into account. The assumption of “native speakers” should be understood differently and all those who use English for real communication purposes should have the authority in creating materials that can be employed as “authentic” in the English classroom.

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