

Prospects of using Authentic Material in Teaching Vocabulary at Tertiary Level

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Abstract : Teaching material plays a very crucial role in extracting effective outcomes during English Language Teaching. Several researches have substantiated this claim. The use of appropriate teaching material attains highest importance when the target learning outcome is vocabulary. The quality of the learning experience is determined by the authenticity of the material employed in the teaching learning process. The choice of the authentic material used in the teaching learning process will have far reaching impact on the learner's ability to acquire new vocabulary. An attempt has been made as part of this research paper to study the prospects of using authentic material like newspaper in the English Language Teaching for tertiary level students.

Key words: Reading, authentic material, newspaper, vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION

Using authentic material in the language learning environment is not an altogether novel concept since it has been in use for the past few decades. Authentic material had been very widely used in Foreign Language classrooms and it is also believed that this method is specifically designed for Foreign Language learning. According to Martinez (2002), authentic materials are prepared for native speakers and not designed to be used for teaching purposes. On the other hand, Kilickaya (2004) considers authentic materials to give "exposure to real language and use in its own community. The English teachers must select effective teaching materials which help the students to face the real life situations. The selected material must prepare the students to communicate effectively. Scholars like Bacon and Finnemann (1990, p.459) argue that ways and means have to be developed to exploit the potential of authentic material in the classroom instruction.

Definition of authenticity of the materials

According to Larsen-Freeman (2000, p.129), one of the characteristics of communicative language teaching is using authentic materials. But authentic material has been defined from varied perspectives. The authenticity of the material used for instruction is defined basically from two focal points being the authenticity of the characteristics of the text and response of the learner to the contexts experienced by him in the text.

One group of scholars holds the belief that authentic material is not designed for pedagogical purpose. Another group of scholars viewed authentic material as a source that gives students an opportunity to learn from real life events or situations. Preparing the students to the real life language situations is also one of the objectives of teaching English. According to Herod (2002), authentic learning 'materials and activities' are designed to imitate the real world situations. Stubbs (1996) defines authentic texts as "actual, attested, and such that they have real authentic instances of use."

To evaluate the authenticity of the material used the issues of context and the learner's response are also taken into consideration. According to Widdowson (1978), authenticity doesn't emerge from the text alone. He claims that the authenticity of the text is disturbed once it is brought into the classroom because it is taken out of the real context. Widdowson emphasises that the learner's relationship, reactions and responses to the material used in the classroom will determine the authenticity of a text.

Sources of Authentic Material

There are various sources from where authentic material can be prepared or designed for English Language Teaching. A television programme showing various cultures in the world, interesting facts about wild life, unknown details about historical monuments, great leaders who changed the course of history, documentaries on various issue, programmes on scientific turning points in mans journey etc. broadcast on TV are sources of authentic material that can be used in a classroom for English Language Teaching. Movies, especially classics, in which serious attention is paid towards dialogues and the language, are certainly big sources to chose content that can make learning interesting and at the same time fruitful. Radio Broadcast is a good source to conduct listening activities using authentic material. Currently Internet has emerged as a vast source to choose authentic material. Internet provides audio, visual and printable sources for authentic material. Newspaper is the most economical of all the sources. Moreover, Newspaper can be considered as a live textbook since it provides more dependable content for structure and vocabulary instruction. Newspaper can be very easily introduced into the classroom. Students will not show resistance because they are found in everyday life. The different content and contests that Newspapers contain will ignite curiosity among students which in turn will aid learning.

Choice of Authentic Material

When choosing materials from the various sources, care has to be taken in establishing the objective of using the material in instruction. Fundamentally the teacher should be clear about the teaching output that is expected after using the authentic material in the classroom. "Authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purpose by real-life people" (Nuttall 1985). The material chosen must fundamentally create interest among the learners. Ascertaining this is the responsibility of the teacher. Interest can be generated only if the learner considers the text or material relevant to him. At the same time, the teacher should focus on the exact skills that can be enhanced using the material. If too difficult and complex text is used to teach reading skill the learner may lose interest in learning. Even the new vocabulary to which the learner is exposed must be invariably relevant. Moreover, the material used must also be attractive to motivate the learner to use it on his own even outside the classroom environment. Nuttall says that one has to be very careful while choosing texts for teaching in the classroom. Suitability of the content, readability and exploitability of the selected texts is the main criteria. Presentation is also an important factor that determines the authenticity of the material to be used. Other important factors that must be considered while choosing the materials are:

- i) Does the text challenges the students' intelligence without making difficult linguistic demands?
- ii) Does the language in the material chosen reflect written or spoken usage?
- iii) Is the language distorted to suit a particular teaching point?
- iv) Can teachers develop good questions and tasks based on the material used?
- v) Does the text motivate the student to read for himself and introduce him to fresh ideas?

Arguments against the use of Authentic Material

Researchers supported the use of authentic material in the foreign language learning classrooms. But a section of the scholars discounted the use of authentic material citing them as having no value from pedagogical perspective. The authentic material may become a burden on the teachers when they contain difficult and low frequency vocabulary and structures that demands extra effort for simplification and explanation. It is also challenging issue for the teachers to source the authentic material and prepare lessons. Another important challenge for the teachers while choosing the authentic materials is to evaluate the amount of cultural bias that may hinder the learning. When the authentic materials are not pragmatically chosen they may produce adverse effects in the classrooms. Such learning experience will demotivate the learner. All these arguments are valid and give insights into the concept of authenticity while choosing material for language teaching. The shortcomings enlisted here are also of serious nature. But these can be overcome if the teachers consider them seriously and device a perfectly planned lesson with clear idea of what to teach, whom to teach, and when to teach. The teachers with focused efforts can convert any material into a successful aid in teaching an English language.

Levels at which Authentic Material can be used.

Kilickaya (2004) is of the opinion that authentic materials are highly suitable for classrooms with advanced and intermediate level learners only. Other researchers such as Miller (2005) and McNeil (1994) have another view. In their opinion, authentic materials can be used even with lower level learners. At whatever level the authentic material used in the classroom the teachers must not lose the focus of the original context present in the material. The authentic material, when used in the classroom in the real life context, gives good results.

The Benefits of the use of Authentic Texts in English Language Teaching

According to Gilmore's (2007), three communicative competencies attained by using authentic materials on learners' are linguistic, pragmalinguistic and discourse competence. The benefits can be both linguistic and non-linguistic. Another important benefit of using authentic material is the opportunity to motivate and create interest among the learners. Authentic materials can also influence various learning styles of the learners.

According to the Input Hypothesis of Krashen (1985), when a language acquisition device is involved, language is subconsciously acquired. Krashen in his Input Hypothesis states that learners acquire but not learn language by understanding the input which is little beyond the current level of the competence. In other words, the learners understand the message when they are exposed to comprehensible input. Krashen repeatedly states that 'comprehending messages is the only way language is acquired'. It is stated the comprehension complements the language acquisition. The authentic material also provides an opportunity to comprehend material that has content relevant to the real life language situations.

According to Paul Nation (1993), learning occurs when certain mental conditions are created which encourage learning. Essentially, vocabulary learning depends on the number of meetings with each word and the quality of attention at each meeting. Authentic material creates opportunities for the learners to encounter words in different situations. Multiple exposures to the same word but in different contexts will increase the chances of acquiring the word. This process is identical to the incidental learning. This is one of the key benefits of using authentic material in the classroom. It influences the learning style of the students.

It is understood from the research done so far that authentic material has definite and distinct advantages. The teacher will have to play a pivotal role in making a meaningful use the material. The teacher has to walk the tight rope of sourcing an appropriate material for teaching. Another important task of the teacher will be to use the authentic material without disturbing the basic context of the content. As already learnt the content of any authentic material is to convey the receiver about real life events. Disturbing or making changes to the content to suit the learning situation is not a pedagogically sound practice, so teachers must restrain themselves from manipulating the content.

Table 1.2: Advantages of using authentic materials in the classroom

Advantages of using authentic material in the classroom			
S.No	Quality	Authentic Material	Non-Authentic Material
1	Sources	Infinite - Newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and Internet and literature.	Limited - Text Books prescribed by the Boards, Colleges and Universities.
3	Purpose	Have been produced to fulfil some social purpose in the language community.	Produced for pedagogical purpose only.
4	Language	Contain real language.	Artificial Language.
5	Motivation	Students will need and want to be able to read when travelling or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom.	Students do not wish to carry their textbooks while travelling.
6	Access	Unlimited access to different sources of authentic material is possible in the age of Internet.	Thought eh text book is available it lacks variety.
7	Context	The authentic material supported by pictures and photographs helps to set the context.	Limited flexibility to set the context.
8	Interest	More interesting if a variety of texts is used. An attractively looking article grabs the attention of the learner.	Often the test is dull and uninteresting for the learners.
9	Cost	Varies depending on the medium chosen.	Fixed and most of the time affordable.
10	Vocabulary	Gives an opportunity to the student to encounter a word in multiple contexts.	The word is used in limited situations in the lesson or essay prescribed for the study.
11	Interaction	Interact with the real language and content rather than the form.	Focuses primarily on appropriateness of the form and structure.

Linguistic Benefits

Good number of researchers has conducted research on the role of authentic materials and observed that effective reading materials could develop multiple skills among learners. Harmer (1991) states that authentic material helps learners to produce better language acquire language faster and empower learners to deal with real life language situations. Authentic materials are considered very useful in language teaching for the following reasons: Authentic materials expose learners to real language. The language situations found in the authentic material will also be more related to the learners. The material because of its current value, content, and context positively motivates the learner. Above all the authentic material will provide the learners cultural information. Authentic material provides the teachers an opportunity to develop fresh teaching plans and creative approaches. Authentic texts can be motivating, because they are a proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people.

Non Linguistic benefits

Authentic material if used systematically can also produce very meaningful non linguistic benefits too. Researchers like Gilmore (2007) and Sherman (2003) contend that authentic materials are capable of showing a strong positive impact on the learners. Language is acquired properly if the learner is motivated. According to Kilickaya (2004), the learner's feeling that they are interacting with real life language which is used outside the classroom they are bound to be motivated to learn well. Many empirical studies conducted by researchers like Berardo (2006) and Sherman (2003) proved this claim.

After all the arguments done, it has become clear that authentic material has considerable positive value in the field of English Language Teaching whether used in teaching English as a foreign Language or in teaching English as a second language. Its pedagogical usefulness cannot be discounted owing to the probable biases feared to be present in its content. It is solely the responsibility of the teachers to ward off any such instance of any cultural bias at the level of choosing the material and at the level of preparing the lesson plan. Therefore, authentic material can be confidently considered as a dependable means to enhance language learning process. When teachers decide to use authentic materials in the classroom they "need to have a clear pedagogic goal in mind: what precisely they want students to learn from these materials" (Senior 2005, p.71). When the authentic material is properly sourced and used in the learning environment in an effective manner by the teachers the learners stand to benefit.

Use of Newspapers as authentic material

The use of Newspaper in Education (NIE) was initiated in India by some of the leading newspapers like The Times of India, The Hindu etc. The Times of India pioneered NIE in India in the year 1985. Studies conducted have revealed that NIE has so far been a successful programme. The Times of India runs a separate NIE edition for the students whereas The Hindu uses its regular edition for the NIE programmes. A research work done by Manoj Kumar Nagasampige and Kavita Nagasampige (2016) asserts that the NIE programme has been very successful in the middle school level. The NIE in India not only focused on English Language but also on other educative events that boost the student's passion for learning. The researchers propose to use the Newspaper content to teach vocabulary, with primary focus on language acquisition among advanced learners.

Newspaper in English Language Teaching

This research work primarily focuses on using the Newspaper to teach vocabulary and thus the name Newspaper in English Language Teaching (NELT) is considered apt. Earlier research works conducted to study the usefulness of Newspaper in the classroom reveal that it can be used to create lesson in writing, speaking and reading skills (Lindsay Clandfield and Duncan Foord, 2011). The current research work claims that the newspaper content can be used to reinforce the vocabulary items learned by the students by providing more reading opportunities in the classroom. The objective of the present research is to examine whether Newspaper content can be used to teach vocabulary effectively and quickly. It is proposed to embed the newspaper reading activity into the regular classroom activity.

Conclusion

This paper records the choice of Authentic Material and the benefits of the use of authentic texts in English Language teaching. The main objective of this research paper is to lay down a firm foundation on using the Newspaper to teach vocabulary. The research done by various scholars about incidental and intentional learning, the significance and efficacy of extensive reading, the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic material in English Language Teaching is discussed. It is proposed to use the English Newspaper to teach vocabulary and the various aspects of word knowledge. It warrants a detailed parametric study to establish the effectiveness of using the newspaper as an authentic material to instruct students at tertiary level. The points needed to be observed are the practicality of embedding the newspaper into the classroom activity, the influence of embedding newspaper on the effectiveness of vocabulary learning and the impact on the rapidity with which the learners acquire new words.

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