The Perspectives of EFL Instructors on the Use of Authentic Materials in the Classroom: Charmo University as a Case Study

Chalak Ali Mohammed Ameen[1], Lana Rizgar Kamal[2]

[1,2] English Department, College of Education and Language, Charmo University, Sulaimani, Iraq

Email: chalak.ali@charmouniversity.org [1], lana.rizgar@charmouniversity.org [2]

Abstract:

Teaching materials have a fundamental role in the language classes. Authentic materials are considered vital to enhance the learners' abilities to transfer what they learn inside the class to the outside world. The current paper investigates Charmo University EFL instructors' perspectives on the use of authentic materials in the class. The data has been gathered among Charmo University EFL instructors through the use of a questionnaire. The results reveal that the majority of the instructors are aware of the benefits of authentic materials and prefer to use them in the class for both listening and reading and for all the levels. Likewise, the participants rely on the internet as a major source for obtaining authentic materials, followed by TV and Radio. Additionally, the participants also confirm that they need trainings for developing their abilities to select appropriate authentic materials and design authentic activities in the class. Lastly, the paper recommends English departments, universities and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to run training courses and workshops to enhance EFL instructors' abilities to use such materials successfully in the class.

Keywords: Authentic/Non-Authentic Materials, Reading Skill, Listening Skill, Design, Selection, Activities.

الملخص:

تلعب المواد التعليمية دورًا أساسيًا في الصف الدراسي لتعليم اللغة. ويعتبر الكثيرُ من الباحثين استخدامَ المواد الأصيلة (مواد من الحياة الواقعية) فاعلاً لتطوير قدرات المتعلمين على نقل ما تعلموه داخل الصف الدراسي إلى خارجه. تبحث هذه الدراسة في وجهات نظر تدريسيي جامعة جرمو في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول استخدام المواد الأصيلة في الصف الدراسي. ولاجل ذلك، تم جمع البيانات من الكادر التدريسي باستخدام استبيان تم اعداده لهذا الغرض. فكشفت النتائج أن الغالبية العظمى من التدريسيين على دراية بفوائد المواد الأصيلة ، ويفضلون استخدامها في تدريس مهارات الاستماع والقراءة ولجميع المستويات. وبالمثل ، يعتمدون الإنترنت كمصدر رئيسي للحصول على مواد أصيلة ، يليها التلفاز / الراديو. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يؤكد المشاركون في الاستبيان أيضًا أنهم بحاجة إلى تدريبات لتطوير قدراتهم على اختيار المواد الأصيلة المناسبة وتصميم أنشطة مماثلة داخل قاعة الدرس. وفي الخاتمة ، أوصت النتائج أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية والجامعات ووزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي بإجراء دورات تدريبية وورش عمل لتعزيز قدرات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على استخدام هذه المواد بنجاح داخل الصف الدراسي.

پوختە:

کەرەستە فێرکارییەکان ڕۆڵی گرنگ دەگێڕن لە پۆلدا. زانا و پسپۆرانی ئەم بوارە، بەکارهێنانی کەرەسە ڕەسەنەکان (وەکو ڕۆژنامە و گۆڤار و چاوپێکەوتنی تەلەفزیۆنی و...هتد کە لە بنەڕەتدا بە مەبەستی کاری ڕۆژانە ئەنجامدراون نەك فێرکاری) بەهەند وەردەگرن بۆ بەرەوپێشبردنی توانای خوێندکاران و گواستنەوەی ئەوزانیارییەی کە لە پۆلدا فێردەبن بۆ جیهانی دەرەوە. ئەم توێژینەوەیە لە بیر و بۆچوونی مامۆستایانی زمانی ئینگلیزی لە زانکۆی چەرموو دەکۆڵێتەوە دەربارەی بەکارهێنانی کەرەستەی فێرکاری ڕەسەن لە پۆلدا. داتاکانی ئەم توێژینەوەیە لە ڕێگەی ڕاپرسییەوە کۆکراونەتەوە. ئەنجامەکان دەریدەخەن کە زۆرینەی مامۆستایان ئاگاداری گرنگی کەرەستە فێرکارییە ڕەسەنەکانن و دەخوازن بەکاریان بهێنن لە پۆلدا بە مەبەستی بەرەوپێشبردنی هەردوو کارامەیی گوێگرتن و خوێندنەوەی خوێندکاران، هەروەها بەکاریبهێنن لە سەرجەم ئاستەکاندا. سەرچاوەی سەرەکی بەدەستهێنانی کەرەستەی ڕەسەنی مامۆستایان ئینتەرنێتە، دوای ئەویش تەلەفزیۆن و ڕادیۆ بە پلەی دووەم دێن. جگە لەوەش، بەشداران جەخت لەوە دەکەنەوە کە پێویستیان بە مەشق و ڕاهێنانە بە مەبەستی بەرەوپێشبردنی تواناکانیان لە هەڵبژاردنی کەرەستەی ڕەسەن و دیزاینکردنی چالاکی ڕەسەن لە پۆلدا. لە کۆتاییدا توێژینەوەکە وەمزارەتی خوێندنی باڵا و توێژینەوەی زانستی و سەرۆکایەتی زانکۆکان و بەشەکانی زمانی ئینگلیزی ڕادەسپێرێت بۆ ئەنجامدانی مەشق و ڕاهێنان بە مامۆستایانی زمانی ئینگلیزی لە زانکۆکاندا بە مەبەستی بەرەوپێشبردنی ئاستیان لە بەکارهێنانی کەرەستەی فێرکاری ڕەسەندا.

1. Introduction

In the field of traditional language teaching, there was a common belief among educators that the language taught in the class should be simplified for easy access and acquisition. However, nowadays there are many opposing views about this since many scholars recommend presenting authentic materials in the class, not simplified ones (Widdowson, 1990). In addition, Scrivener (2011) views replacing the simplified texts with authentic ones as necessary. As the language materials studied in the class were dramatically different from what was taking place in the real world. The learners could not transfer what they have learned in the class to the outside world. To overcome this problem, the idea of using authentic language materials, real language used in English speaking countries, emerged. Specifically, in 1970s and with the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, the use of authentic materials was considered essential to solve the issue. Therefore, the use of authentic materials has been prioritized and became one of the major principles of CLT (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). In addition, there is a widespread view that materials should aim at being 'communicative' and 'authentic' in one way or another (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). Moreover, regarding the significance of using authentic materials and activities in the classrooms; Peacock (1997) finds that the interest and motivation of the learners increase with the use of authentic materials and activities. Another interesting point that makes the students' exposure to authentic materials inevitable is the use of technology. Nowadays, the majority of the students use technology; as a result, they are exposed to authentic materials, whether written or oral, on daily basis. Thus, in Richard's (2001) view, the language taught in the class must mirror the one used in the real world; if not, students will face difficulties when they use English in various contexts. Therefore, due to the importance of the use of authentic materials in the class, the current paper attempts to take the perspectives of the EFL instructors at the University of Charmo about the matter. It is an applied study that uses a questionnaire which includes multiple choice and open-response items. It focuses specifically on using authentic materials for improving listening and speaking skills. In regard to the methodology, only one method of data collection was used; that is a questionnaire and a small number of subjects (17 instructors) participated in the data collection process. In case of having more methods of data collection and/or more participants from a number of universities in Kurdistan, the results would have been more reliable and more generalizable.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Definitions of Authentic and Non-Authentic Materials:

The term authentic material in the field of language learning/teaching has been defined from different perspectives. In Morrow's (1977) view an authentic text is from real life, produced by real speaker or writer, presented to real audience and designed for conveying real messages. Moreover, for McDonough and Shaw (2003) the term 'authenticity' implies that the selection of language material, activities and methods of teaching used should be as close an approximation as possible to the real world outside the classroom. In Nunan's view, authentic materials are those that "have been produced in the course of genuine communication, not specially written for purposes of language teaching. They provide learners with opportunities to experience language as it is used beyond the classroom" (1999:79). Furthermore, in terms of text materials, Wallace (1992) defines authentic texts as real life texts which are not written for pedagogic purposes, but they are parts of real life activities.

On the other hand, other terms such as 'restricted', 'simplified', 'contrived' and 'graded' have also been used to refer to non-authentic language materials. Non-authentic materials are defined as materials which are exclusively prepared to teach a language and are "recognizably simplified or perhaps [include] an unnaturally high number of examples of a specific target item" (Scrivener, 2011: 126-127). Furthermore, it is defined as the material which has been simplified and made easier to the students. The aim of using simplified materials is to allow the students build up their confidence and rely on their abilities (Spratt, et. al. 2011).

2.2 Language Skills and Authentic Materials

It is clear that the four language skills are divided into receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). When it comes to the matter of language authentic material, it is related to the receptive skills, not the productive ones, since they are materials in which the learners are exposed to, not the ones that they produce.

2.2.1 Reading Skill

To simplify the language of the literary texts, such as novels and dramas, graded readers were introduced and used with native speaker children and foreigners for many decades. Many foreign learners of English were taught reading skill relying on simplified texts of pieces of literature and comprehension reading passages followed by questions and answers about them. From Ur's (1991) perspectives the use of simplified texts are more effective at the earlier stages of learning though they may not represent any kind of real-life reading purposes. Moreover, authentic reading texts are those that have been produced for the purpose of 'genuine' communication, not specifically for teaching. They include magazines, newspapers, stories, printed materials and instructions, hotel brochures, bank instructions, airport tickets … etc. (Nunan, 1999).

2.2.2 Listening Skill

Similar to authentic reading materials, authentic listening materials are also considered vital in developing the EFL learners' abilities to communicate successfully in target language communities. For Nunan listening authentic materials may include TV and radio broadcasts, conversations, discussion and meetings of all kinds, talks and announcements (ibid). Moreover, if necessary technology is provided, "showing movies or recorded television programs and playing audiotapes of programs can be enjoyable for students and can provide them with authentic practice in listening to native speaker speech" (Lazaraton, 2001:310).

3. Advantages of Using Authentic Materials

Due to technology advancement and the widespread use of the internet in different angles of the world, especially social media, EFL students come into contact with authentic materials almost every now and then. So, students have access to reading and listening authentic data at their fingertips almost on the daily basis. This fact made many scholars and linguists believe that acquainting EFL students with authentic materials is of vital importance. Thus, replacing the simplified and unnatural texts with the natural and authentic ones has been viewed as necessary (Scrivener, 2011). Additionally, contrary to contrived text books, Little, et al. (1988) contend that the use of authentic materials produces more activities, interests and stimulations in the class. Further, Kilickaya (2004) illustrates that the main advantages of using authentic materials have positive effects on learner motivation, providing authentic cultural information, exposing real language to the learners, meeting their needs and supporting a more creative approach of teaching.

Aligned with this, Nuttall (1996) argues that because authentic materials are used in real life situations, they can be motivating for the students. Likewise, Herron and Seay's (1991) research results confirm that students' listening comprehension is enhanced with increased exposure to authentic materials. Additionally, Peacock (1997) asserts that authentic materials are more motivating than simplified ones since they are intrinsically more interesting. In addition, Guariento and Morley (2001) contend that the EFL students learn the target language more sufficiently with the use of authentic materials. Likewise, Tomlinson (2012) claims that all the teaching materials and tasks should be authentic; otherwise, the students will not be ready to challenge the real authentic language use. In regard to cultural content, undoubtedly authentic materials contain lots of cultural values and facts that the EFL learners obviously lack. Thus, through using authentic materials and with the instructors' supporting strategies, the students would be acquainted with the target language culture since authentic materials act as a window to target language culture (Sherman, 2003).

4. Selecting/Designing Authentic Materials and Activities

As far as selecting authentic materials and designing authentic activities, the variations in the types and sources of such materials will motivate students in learning and also make the learning activities more attractive and creative. Nunan (1999) asserts that it is important to expose learners to different kinds of authentic materials as it brings the content and the subject matter to life for them, and enables them to make the important connections between the classroom world and the real world. Moreover, Gilmore (2004) believes that language is very 'context-sensitive'; so, teachers' careful selection of authentic materials would be more useful in contextualizing language than contrived/restricted textbooks. Thus, generally speaking, EFL teachers need to be creative and enhance their abilities to select authentic materials and design proper authentic tasks in the classroom. Certain important criteria in selecting authentic materials have been presented by various scholars. Nuttal (1996) recommends three criteria which include suitability of content, exploitability and readability. By considering these criteria, in Nuttal's view, the teacher is able to determine which materials are suitable for their students. Suitability means that the materials should meet students' needs and interests. Exploitability means that the materials should enhance the students' competence while readability refers to the mixture of structural and lexical difficulty of a text that is side by side with the new vocabulary and grammatical forms presented. McGrath (2002) suggests eight other criteria to be taken into account while choosing authentic data; in which they are: relevance of course text and learners' needs, topic interest, cultural fitness, logistical considerations, cognitive demands, linguistic demands, quality and exploitability. Additionally, variety and presentation are also considered by Berardo (2006) as important criteria that teachers should follow while selecting their materials. By variety, it is meant different types of texts and activities that make the tasks more interesting. Whilst by presentation, it is meant using colourful pictures, diagrams, photos and so on and so forth.

To conclude, authentic activities should have real-world relevance. In other words, they should match as nearly as possible to the real-world tasks. They should encompass complex tasks to be inspected and completed by students over sustained periods of time such as days, weeks and months rather than minutes or hours. They can be integrated and applied across different subject areas.

5. Arguments against the Use of Authentic Materials

Despite the many advantages of using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms, many arguments are raised against its use by various scholars. These scholars believe that authentic materials may be a burden for teachers and students alike. In Richards' (2001) view, because authentic materials often contain unneeded vocabulary, complex language structure and difficult language, they cause difficulty to teachers and students of lower levels. Ur (1991) goes even further by asserting that using authentic materials with less proficient students might be frightening and counter-productive. What's more, another problem with aural authentic material is in the speed of the speech that is very fast which causes the students not to be able to catch up with it (Hinkel, 2006). Furthermore, Guariento and Morley (2001) claim that authentic materials are suitable for post-intermediate level, not lower than that. They argue that if it is used with the beginner students, they may feel discouraged and frustrated. In regard with being a burden to teachers, Miller (2005) states that it is very difficult and time consuming for the teacher as s/he needs much time and effort to choose, modify and prepare the

materials for the students. Surprisingly, Chavez (1998) is even doubtful about the existence of authentic materials at all; since anything used outside its original context and faraway from its intended audience becomes less authentic and consequently may lose its authenticity. In order to settle these arguing voices about using authentic or non-authentic materials, Nunan (1999) and Hadley (2003) find a middle ground about the issue. They assert that the teachers should not only depend on using authentic material, but a blend of the two is more appropriate. That is, because students need to get accustomed to both types of materials, not only one of them. This view is further supported by Shoomossi and Ketabi (2007) that non-authentic materials are as useful as the authentic ones. In their views, authentic materials can possibly be useless especially if the learners are in a low level.

6. Methodology

To gather the data required, a quantitative method was employed. A questionnaire was adopted that was originally used by Soliman E. M. Soliman, Malaysia, (2013) (appendix 1). The questionnaire was also adapted to meet the needs of gaining proper answers for the research questions. The questionnaire was distributed online among Charmo University EFL instructors who teach at the Department of English for the academic year of 2019-2020. All in all, 17 instructors returned the completed survey. The questionnaire consists of multiple choices and open-response items that the participants were invited to add their own comments and views. The questions seek information about the participants' profile (specialty and year of teaching experience), their preferences about using authentic materials in the class, in what levels and for what skills to be used, their sources for obtaining authentic materials, their criteria for selecting such materials and whether they need trainings to use authentic materials in the class (see appendix 1). Regarding gaining validity and reliability of the method of data collection, the questionnaire was considered and consequently approved by three experts in the field of applied linguistics from the University of Charmo and University of Sulaimani.

6.1 Research Questions

The current paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the EFL instructors' perspectives on using authentic materials in the classroom?
- Do they prefer to use them and why?
- In which level(s) and for what skill(s) do they use them?
- What sources do they use to obtain authentic materials?
- Do they need trainings to use authentic materials? If so, do they need training for selecting materials or designing activities or both?

7. Results, Discussions and Analyses

The sample included EFL instructors at English department who are specialized in linguistics, applied linguistics, TESOL, translation and literature. Their range of teaching experience varies as 1-5 years (6 subjects 35.3%), 6-10 Years (2 Subjects 11.8%), 11-15 Years (7 Subjects 41.2%) and 16-more (2 Subjects 11.8%). The results of the nine items would be illustrated through the pie charts generated by google form that was distributed over the participants online.
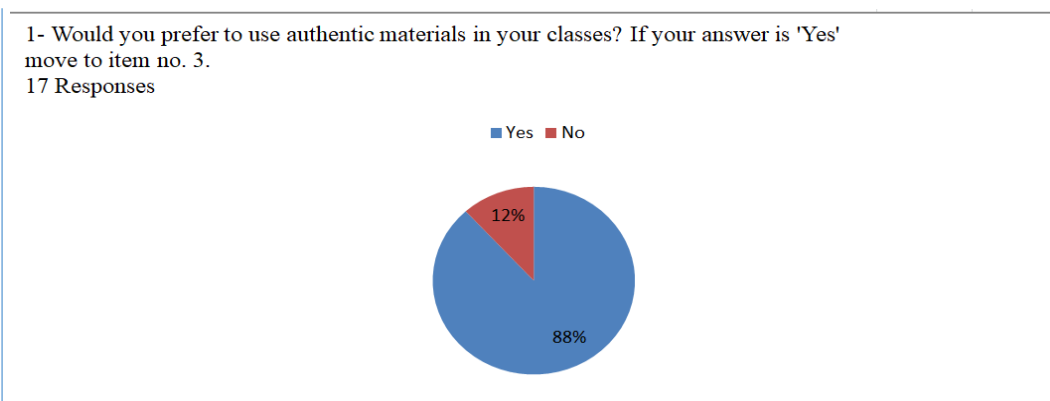

1- Would you prefer to use authentic materials in your classes? If your answer is 'Yes' move to item no. 3.
17 Responses
■Yes ■No
12%
88%

Chart One: Preference of Authentic Materials' Use

Regarding the answer of the first item, the vast majority of the participants (88%) prefer to use authentic materials in their classrooms. This confirms that the vast majority of the Charmo University instructors believe that authentic materials have a vital role in facilitating learning a foreign language. This result supports Richard's (2001) views that the language taught in the EFL class must mirror the real world language. If not, the students will not be successful in transferring what they have already learned in the class. Aligned with this, Berardo (2006) believes that the employment of authentic materials in the classroom makes a close contact with the target language which assists the students to use the language successfully when they are in the real language world. What's more, this idea is further reinforced by Peacock (1997) who found that the more the students interact with the real target language in the classroom activities, the higher their interest and motivation would be in learning. Thus, the first item results very clearly show that Charmo University EFL instructors have good awareness of the vital role of using authentic materials in the class and have positive views about implementing it in the classroom.

2. Why do not you prefer to use authentic materials?

2 responses

Legend:
- Time consuming (in terms of selection and preparation).
- Difficult for the students to comprehend.
- Due to syllabus constraints.
- Difficult to find the appropriate content that may match the topic I teach
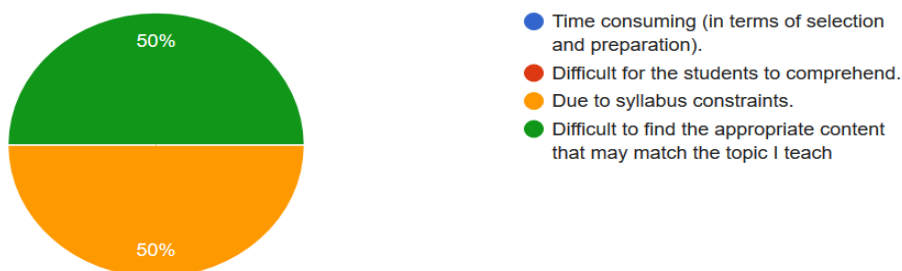
Chart Two: Why not Preferring Authentic Materials' Use

All in all, two participants indicated that they do not prefer to use authentic materials in the class. The first participant's reason for not using authentic materials is the difficulty of finding appropriate content that may match the topic they teach. This implies that the process of selecting and designing authentic materials is not easy, but troublesome, as McDonough and Shaw (2003) assert that authentic materials can be difficult to use and organize since its use is not as easy as using textbooks. The teachers need to be creative to select and modify the authentic materials to be able to be applied. Training is required in this situation to overcome such problem. Moreover, if authentic material is chosen carelessly, it would become extremely de-motivating (Harmer, 2007a).

In addition, the second participant's reason for not preferring to use authentic material is syllabus constraints. This can be seen as a major obstacle in any attempt of using authentic materials in classrooms. It may indicate that English department at Charmo University, as a sample of Kurdistan universities, does not have a supportive policy regarding the use of such materials in their classrooms.

3. Why do you prefer to use authentic materials?

15 responses

Legend:
- Expose students to real language
- Motivate the students
- Improve the students' skills
- Administration requirement
- all the items above
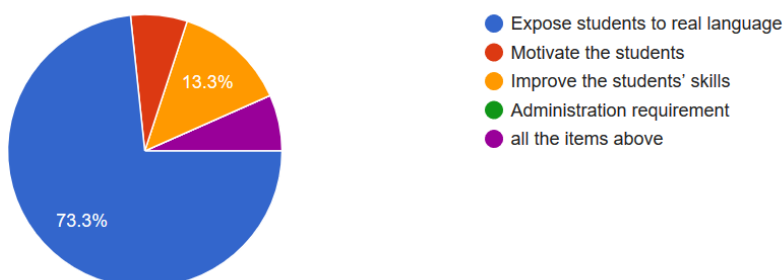
Chart Three: Why Preferring Authentic Materials' Use

In regard with the third item answers, over two thirds (73.3%) of the participants prefer to use authentic material because they would like to expose their students with the real language that is used in the outside world; a language that mirrors real life communication and not just an artificial one which does not prepare them for actual language use. The results are consistent with Wallermire's (2008) statement that without authentic input, students will develop an artificial production of the language since real life language use is very different from the one used in classrooms or written in textbooks. Richard (2001) states that the language the learners are engaged with in the classroom must represent the language used in the real world. This is also maintained by Kilickaya (2004) that using authentic materials helps increase learners' motivation for learning a language, because they feel that they are practicing a real language used in the real world. The results also reinforce Brinton's (2001) argument that authentic materials' use properly acts as a bridge that completes the gap between the classroom language and the real world language. Thus, through using authentic materials, learners are prepared for action in the outside world.

Moreover, other options are chosen by little percentages. A point of concern is that none of the participants ticked 'the administration requirement' option. This result raises red flags regarding the university and department's policies and requirements towards this important matter. In other words, instructors are not required by the department or university to use authentic materials in the class. This may show English department's negligence about this important matter.
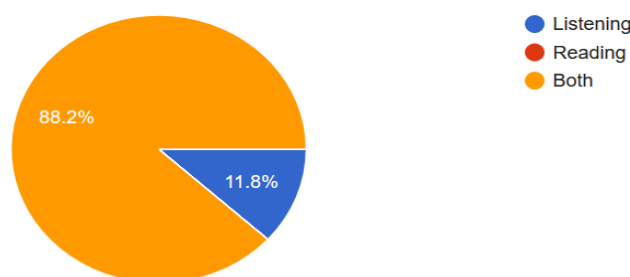
Chart Four: Teaching What Skills through Authentic Materials

The fourth item answers indicate that the vast majority of the participants (88.2%) use authentic materials in teaching both skills 'listening and reading', while 11.8 % state that they use authentic materials only in listening lessons. This result goes in line with Harmer (2007a) that regardless of many textbooks' use of non-authentic materials to practice specific language points, only authentic materials will 'genuinely' improve listening and reading skills. Moreover, Spratt, et al. (2011) illustrate that authentic texts allow learners to develop strategies for dealing with the challenge of real language, while simplified texts (texts that have been made easier) allow them to build up their confidence. On the other hand, only 11.8 % of the participants state that they use authentic materials only in listening lessons. This contradicts Tomlinson's (2012) view that "every text that learners encounter should be authentic and that most tasks should be authentic too- otherwise the learners are not being prepared for the reality of language use". To conclude, the reason behind using authentic

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materials by the vast majority of the instructors in teaching both skills could be due to the widespread availability of authentic materials and easy access to them nowadays thanks to technology and easy internet access. Another reason may be the awareness of the instructors regarding the advantages of using authentic materials to the learners since it bridges the learners' competence and performance.
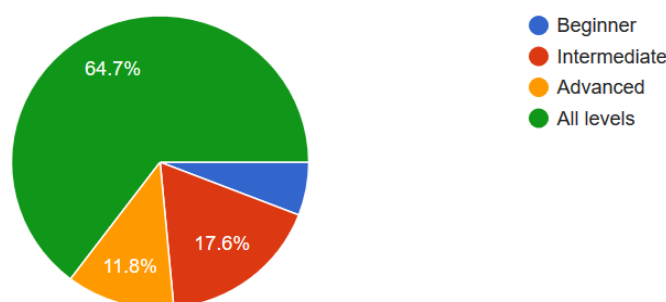
5. At which level(s) would you use authentic materials?

17 responses

Chart Five: With What Level to Be Used

Item five results clearly show that almost two thirds (64.7%) of Charmo University instructors use authentic materials with all levels. This indicates that authentic materials are not labeled for a specific level of learners. In fact, Harmer (2007a) and Miller (2005) believe that authentic materials can be used even with students at fairly low levels. Harmer (2007a) adds that using authentic materials with beginner levels may mean rough-tuned language from the teacher so that it is comprehensible. In other words, the language may be simplified, but not unnatural. What is more, the idea of using authentic materials with beginners is also supported by Vandergrift (1997) but with the condition that they must reflect the students' life experiences and include appropriate features that may improve comprehension at this beginning level. The current study's result contradicts Soliman's (2013) study that the majority of his participants were in favour of using authentic materials from intermediate level and upwards, not with beginners. While in this study only 17.6% of the participants prefer the use authentic materials with intermediate students, followed by 11.8% who use it with advanced students. This result is further reinforced by Kilickaya (2004) that authentic materials can be used with advanced and intermediate level learners only. Other scholars such as Guariento and Morley (2001) claim that authentic texts are appropriate for 'post-intermediate' level, because at this level, most students master a wide range of vocabulary and structures in the target language. However, for beginner level 'even with quite simple tasks' they may feel discouraged and bewildered when these materials are used. Additionally, Hadley (2003) considers the use of authentic materials with the beginners impractical; thus, it should be avoided. Therefore, while using authentic materials, in order to obtain the highest level of benefit, the learners' levels must be borne in mind. That is to say, if the materials are beyond the students' abilities or levels, it might lead to demotivation and counter productivity.

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To conclude, it may not be wrong to state that authentic materials should be used with any levels but with caution while choosing materials and activities. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) suggest that with lower-level classes items of realia, such as menus and timetables to be used that do not contain much language but generate good discussion. This may bridge the gap between the competence and performance of the language learners, which is a common problem among the non-native speakers.

6. What are the sources that you would use to obtain authentic materials?
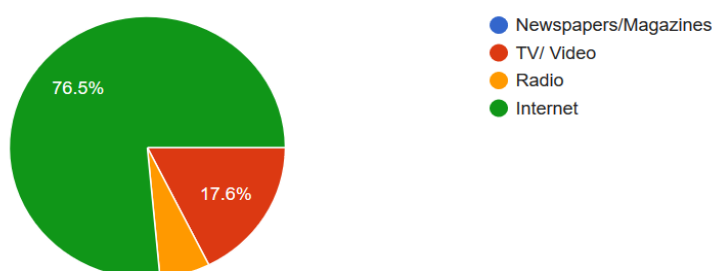
17 responses

Chart Six: Sources of Authentic Materials

The responses indicate that the majority of the participants (76.5%) would use the internet as the major source for obtaining authentic materials. The results stand consistent with todays' technology advancement. Nowadays, anyone with the internet connection has more spoken and written authentic data at their fingertips; this leads to make the internet a primary source for authentic materials. Obviously, with the development of technology and the accessibility of all sorts of materials (authentic or artificial), teachers benefit from the internet source; they can get access to multiple teaching aids that enhance the student's learning process. Thus, the use of the internet "has enabled teachers to find authentic written, audio, and visual texts on almost any topic imaginable … [that is side by side with] means to access online dictionaries, grammar and style checkers, and concordances" (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011: 199). The teachers simply upload the lectures and recommend numerous sources of materials that are authentic, now more than ever. Following the internet source, is the TV/Video which came in the second place as most used source to obtain authentic materials. Just like the internet, TV/Videos are pillars in today's technology advancement that almost everything is recorded and accessible to almost everyone. They range from programs and documentaries to entertaining and personal videos, even pieces of literature are turned into movies and documentaries which are more enjoyable than words on paper. These sources of authentic materials and their use help "to overcome the typical problem that students cannot transfer what they learn in the classroom to the outside world" (ibid). In addition, it also assists in making students more motivated and interested to learn. It is claimed that using audio-visual materials is beneficial since it will prevent students, especially beginners, from being frustrated about authentic materials. Materials such as popular and traditional songs, movies, TV shows will help to create a non-threatening environment. This view is also further reinforced by Kellerman (1991) that showing various natural gestures and facials expressions in videos and films would be beneficial for learners to promote their communicative abilities.

7. What criteria of selection would you follow?

16 responses

Legend:
- ● Language level. (Vocabulary & grammar)
- ● Length of the text
- ● Students' needs and interests
- ● Course objectives
- ● all above -except 2 -because they are interrelated. The option 2 is odd here.
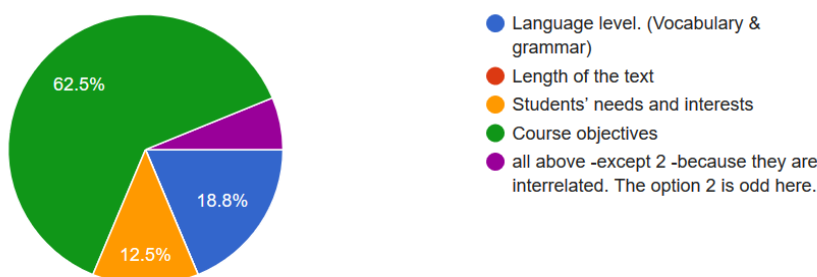
Chart Seven: Criteria of Selecting Authentic Materials

Item seven answers illustrate that the majority of the lecturers focus on the vitality of course objectives while selecting teaching materials as 62.5% of the participants chose this option. What's more, language level (vocabulary and grammar) occupied the second position (18.8%) in the participants' answers.

Undoubtedly teachers have crucial roles in selecting the authentic materials that meet the objectives of the course. These materials' characteristics should match with the course objectives. This paper's results about vitality of course objectives agree with Berardo (2006) that selecting materials should follow some procedures. Firstly, suitability of content can be considered as the most important one in which the materials should be relevant to the course objectives. In addition, the materials should be useable and exploitable. In other words, the materials should be used to develop the students' language competence and performance which is the core objective of any course. If not, then the materials are not usable or exploitable. Possibly for the abovementioned reasons, course objectives came in the first place and have vital role in selection criteria of teaching materials. Language level (vocabulary and grammar) occupied the second-best choice in selecting teaching materials. This describes the combination of structural and lexical level of the materials, their difficulties as well as referring to the amount of new vocabulary and grammatical forms present in the materials. The results match those of Kilickaya's (2004) views that the authentic materials chosen by the teacher should be apt based on student's level, ability, interest, and most importantly appropriate to the curriculum. In case of beginner students, the language might be simplified and rough-tuned so it is comprehensible and not unnatural (Harmer, 2007a).

8. Do you think you need training in using such materials?
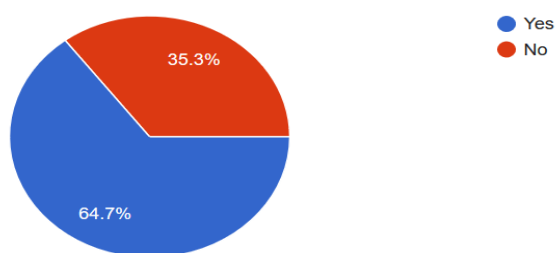
17 responses

Chart Eight: Need for Training

The responses to item eight indicate that almost two thirds of the instructors (64.7%) believe that they need trainings to enhance their abilities to use authentic materials successfully in the class. This denotes that the participants not only acknowledge the important role of authentic materials in their classes but also realize the hard work it takes to select the materials and design the activities. Tomlinson (2012) contends that all materials and tasks in class should be authentic. So, the teachers need pedagogical support to use such materials in terms of training. The reason is possibly that the development for courses based on authentic materials requires longer time frames and more complex designs than it does for textbook-based courses. In contrast, many instructors might be discouraged from using authentic materials because of the initial investment of time that may not be viable or realistic in the instructors' teaching situation. Each instructor must make a decision on how important authentic material is to a particular course, based on the course's goals. In contrast, just over one third of the participants (35.3%) claim that they do not need trainings to use authentic materials. This is probably due to their self-reliance in improving their abilities to design authentic activities and use them successfully in their teaching.

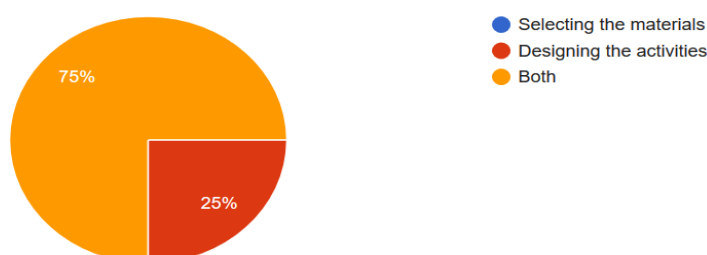9. If so, what type of training do you need?

12 responses

Chart Nine: Types of Trainings Needed

Exactly three fourth of the participants (75%) believe that they need trainings for both selecting the materials and designing the activities. It is noteworthy that it is vital for the teachers to know how to select their teaching materials and also how to design the activities in order to ensure best learning outcomes. Both types of trainings work as two sides of a coin; the materials should be properly selected and the activities to be designed in a way that match one another. Otherwise, it is inevitable

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that learners will face difficulties. This reaffirms Harmer's (2007a) view that authentic materials which have been carelessly chosen can be extremely demotivating for students since they might not understand it, may not serve to achieve the goals of the course, not be of interest to the learners, and/or not suitable for their levels. It can be concluded that selecting the appropriate materials and designing the appropriate tasks are challenging and time consuming, even though very fruitful if selected and used appropriately by the teachers.

8. Conclusion

The study has come up with a number of conclusions that obviously answer the research questions: firstly, the majority of Charmo University EFL instructors have positive views about the use of authentic materials in their classrooms. Secondly, the instructors prefer to use such materials in the class since they believe that using such materials would help the students learn the real language and bridge the gap between the language used in the class and the one used in the outside world. Thirdly, the study participants use authentic materials with all levels (i.e. beginner, intermediate and advanced) and for both skills reading and listening. Fourthly, Internet is the major source for obtaining authentic materials followed by TV/Video as the second source. Finally, the participants need training courses to enhance their abilities to select such materials and design authentic activities in the class.

9. Recommendations

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, presidency of universities and English departments are recommended to run training courses and workshops to their EFL instructors. These training courses and workshops should aim at raising the instructors' awareness about the significance of using authentic materials in the class and enhancing their abilities to select appropriate authentic materials and design authentic activities in the class.

EFL instructors are also recommended to broaden their horizons regarding the use of authentic materials in the class as this would enhance both learners and instructors' abilities in terms of cultural awareness and using English practically in the outside world.

Finally, Curriculum reformers and syllabus designers in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and presidency of the universities and colleges are also recommended to incorporate authentic materials in the syllabus that is taught at the English departments.

Pedagogical Implications

It is clear that teaching materials play paramount roles in the process of teaching, including teaching English. This paper concentrated on the vitality of using authentic materials in EFL classes. It took the perspectives of Kurdish EFL instructors at the University of Charmo about using such materials.

This paper is considered of vital importance to both EFL students and instructors. It acquaints the instructors with what authentic materials are, their advantages and disadvantages, their sources, how to use them, for what skill(s), what level(s), how to select appropriate materials and design authentic activities in the class. Moreover, it is also beneficial for EFL students as it raises their awareness about the importance of listening to/reading authentic materials in the process of learning English as it assists much to bridge the gap between competence and performance.

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Appendix 1

EFL Instructors' Questionnaire

Dear EFL Instructors,

We are conducting a research entitled "The Perspectives of EFL Instructors on the Use of Authentic Materials in the Classroom: Charmo University as a Case Study". Authentic materials are produced by native speakers for non-teaching purposes. These materials reflect the real world language. Such materials include TV commercials, films, news items, weather forecasts, radio talks, songs, interviews, articles, train timetables, advertisements, brochures, menus and application forms. Kindly fill in the questionnaire items and add comments when necessary. Your answers will be used for academic purposes only.

Thank you!

Specialization

[ ]

Years of teaching English experience:

- ○ 1-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ 10-15
- ○ 16-more

1. Would you prefer to use authentic materials in your classes? If your answer is 'Yes', move to item no. 3.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

2. Why do not you prefer to use authentic materials?

- ○ Time consuming (in terms of selection and preparation).
- ○ Difficult for the students to comprehend.
- ○ Due to syllabus constraints.
- ○ Other: [ ]

3. Why do you prefer to use authentic materials?

- ○ Expose students to real language
- ○ Motivate the students
- ○ Improve the students' skills
- ○ Administration requirement
- ●
- ○ Other: [ ]

4. In teaching which skill(s) would you use them?

- ○ Listening
- ○ Reading
- ○ Both

5. At which level(s) would you use authentic materials?

- ○ Beginner
- ○ Intermediate
- ○ Advanced
- ○ All levels

6. What are the sources that you would use to obtain authentic materials?

- ○ Newspapers/Magazines
- ○ TV/ Video
- ○ Radio
- ○ Internet

7. What criteria of selection would you follow?

- ○ Language level. (Vocabulary & grammar)
- ○ Length of the text
- ○ Students' needs and interests
- ○ Course objectives
- ○ Other:

8. Do you think you need training in using such materials?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

9. If so, what type of training do you need?

- ○ Selecting the materials
- ○ Designing the activities
- ○ Both

2. **Final Comments:**

………
………
………
…………………………………………………….

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