



Using Authentic Materials in the Classroom to Develop Reading Skills of Professional Students

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Abstract: Authentic materials” are reading texts that were written by native speakers and published in contexts designed specifically for native-speaker consumption, with no thought given to non-native accessibility. The topics, language, syntax, structure, etc., are all pitched at a target audience of native speakers and offered through media intended primarily for native speakers.’ ‘The advantage of authentic materials is that they give higher-level students exposure to unregulated native-speaker language – the language as it is actually used by native speakers communicating with other native speakers.’ “Authentic listening” to speakers, ideally on video, in particular. But I don’t necessarily see authentic materials as a model for productive skills. “Authentic” materials – a contract or an email – are often a starting point for my advanced students/clients and myself to discuss how to communicate most effectively. Students will stumble over a phrase or expression and want to discuss the meaning & related intentions and connotations. The authenticity of the materials makes them authoritative. There is a certain enthusiasm when a less-than-university-educated aircraft maintenance engineer holds in his hands a tool which he uses every day, and tries to explain exactly how he uses it. He can manipulate it and (to a certain extent) demonstrate it while explaining. The others in the class (all grease under the fingernail types) are equally eager, and often there is a feeding frenzy of new language.’ To sum up the advantages, teaching colleagues feel that authentic materials:

- Help prepare learners for the ‘real’ world of communication;
- Guide learners toward the language they need for their particular context;
- Motivate learners to communicate, because they help make communication ‘real’.

Keywords: authentic materials, classroom, reading skills, professional, students, language, speakers.

Introduction

As language educators, we’re constantly mulling over this question.

We want our students to appreciate the language in its full color.

We want to make it so real they can practically taste it.

We want it to be so alive they can virtually greet it at the door and shake its hand. Authentic materials can be best understood by comparing them to another group of language teaching tools: instructional materials.[1,2]

Language textbooks, vocabulary flashcards, listen-and-repeat audio CDs and even grammar cheat sheets are all instructional materials. That is, they have been specifically made with the aim of teaching

a language. Language textbooks do the same, but in written form. Textbooks are carefully divided into logically sequenced chapters so that readers smoothly transition from one lesson to the next. Textbooks are a well-known example of an instructional material. Authentic materials, on the other hand, are materials intended for native speakers of the language. They differ greatly from instructional materials because of the implicit assumptions surrounding their existence. Authentic materials assume linguistic competence and comprehension. Authentic materials are what native speakers of a language encounter every day. Other examples include newspapers, magazines, TV shows and movies. So authentic French materials, for instance, would include French newspapers, French magazines, French TV shows and French movies. Authentic materials are language “live”! [3,4] Not set in the classroom, but language as native speakers wield it. Teaching the language as it’s really used is a good thing, but of course no teacher would want to overwhelm his or her students. We don’t want them staring at a newspaper article and understanding only one word per paragraph. Overwhelming our students with authentic materials can be easily avoided by choosing materials that are appropriate to the learner’s level. After all, you can’t expect a beginner in French to savor the full flavor of Shakespeare’s masterpieces in their French translations. Our duty as teachers is to provide appropriate material that both engage and motivate our students. Doing this is not actually too difficult. [5,6] For one thing, there’s something out there for everybody. So for absolute beginners, for example, you can bring in materials targeted at children who are native speakers, such as children’s stories and children’s TV shows. That way the difficulty level is manageable, but still challenging enough to give an idea of how the language is really used. The next advantage of authentic materials is that they are...wait for it...authentic. Meaning, they represent the target language in its normal form. (Not slowed down, artificially loud and emphasized in all the right places—those characteristics that are the hallmarks of language learning audio material.) But authentic materials pick up where instructionals leave off by showing what those bits and pieces look and sound like when native speakers communicate with each other. They sound more natural, more “real.” As a result, authentic materials create more of an immersive experience. And you probably already know how crucial immersion is to second language acquisition. (It’s right up there with opening one’s mouth.) Authentic classroom materials, like a foreign language broadcast of record-breaking weather or posts about basketball, are much more relatable and relevant for students. Authentic materials are everywhere. And we can pick from all the different formats: video, audio, print, apps, graphics, etc. Many English classes come with a textbook or curriculum for instructors to follow. This can be helpful when designing a course, determining learning outcomes, and assessing students. It also makes it easy for teachers to plan lessons and introduce concepts to students in a logical sequence. [7,8] There are many potential benefits to using prescribed curricula or materials to teach. However, these resources are not provided by every institution and even when they are, they often lack an authentic context in which students can practice English. In cases where these resources are not provided for a course, or where instructors wish to expose students to highly engaging opportunities to practice English, using authentic materials is an excellent option. One description of authentic materials says that their purpose is to communicate meaning and information and that they are produced for real communication rather than to teach language. Authentic materials for the English language classroom are often free and very easy to find online or perhaps in certain locations in your communities. [9,10] Here are some examples:

- TV shows, news segments, documentaries, movie clips and trailers, online videos, and commercials
- Radio broadcasts, songs, and podcasts
- Photographs, artwork, signs, postcards, maps, and advertisements
- Magazines, letters and emails, news articles, brochures, websites, blogs, and social media posts
- Recipes, food labels, bus and train schedules, menus, and price tags and product descriptions

We will also explore teaching strategies to use with these materials in the English language classroom. Activities will focus on activating and building students' background knowledge, increasing vocabulary, supporting comprehension, and including summative tasks. Ideas presented can be adapted to use with any type of authentic material you choose for your students.[11,12]

Discussion

In foreign language teaching, good, well-designed textbooks provide a lot of advantages: They follow a clear structure which usually adheres to CEF criteria or some other curriculum standard, they often present an attractive format which engages students and makes learning easier, and many textbooks also supply vocabulary glossaries or grammar sections for easy reference. And yet, there are still a lot of times when teachers (and the students themselves!) will want to diverge from the clear structure that a textbook provides in order to make learning even more interesting, effective and long-lasting. Using authentic language materials is a brilliant way to make the language come alive for students. Using authentic reading texts and other authentic materials can enrich the language learning experience immensely. Real-life materials in the target language can be used to supplement structures and vocabulary which have been presented in the curricula and textbooks with the aim of achieving an enhanced, synergistic learning effect. Such materials might include articles and other literature, videos, podcasts, songs, menus, etc., which address topics that have already been covered by textbooks. [13]

A simple approach would be to simply find authentic material in the target language which discusses a topic that was covered in the textbook, but from another perspective. Let's say that the textbook covers the topic of food and restaurants, presenting food words and the grammar of ordering. On the internet, it is amazingly easy to find a wealth of material in various levels of difficulty such as restaurant menus, articles about restaurants dining, restaurant reviews...the list goes on and on. You can then use these materials in a multitude of ways. Teach your students how to use internet search engines in the target language. Even though this might seem self-explanatory, in reality, many students are hesitant to perform searches in the target language and need a bit of guidance. Then, assign small groups the task of researching and presenting material to the rest of the class. [14,15] This approach will deliver a wealth of paybacks. In the above example of food and restaurants, each group could find authentic menus, online customer reviews, photos, etc. The classic teaching method of role playing a restaurant setting with waiters and customers (maybe even the chef could make an appearance following a customer complaint!) will be much more effective if the students themselves have researched and found the authentic materials in the target language. In-context reinforcement of target vocabulary and grammar structures will foster efficient and long-lasting learning effects. There is an old language teachers' adage that you need to use a new vocabulary word at least seven times in order to make it part of your active vocabulary. In my own experience of learning languages, it's more like fourteen times or even twenty-one times! In any case, finding opportunities to use the newly acquired word will help it to become a reliable companion in applying the language naturally. Regardless of how many times you may need to encounter the word, repetition in context is much more effective than rote repetition. Students will already have acquired a certain amount of confidence in a topic already discussed in the textbooks and they will be better equipped to explore further if they already have learned key vocabulary and structures. In other words, the teachers can assign students the task of finding their own materials on a particular subject.[16,17]

Because students already possess basic knowledge of topics, they will be better able to develop skills of reading or listening. This creates an environment where the skill of intelligently guessing at the meaning of a word or sentence from the context can be honed. This is also a good way to review topics already presented weeks or months before. Find an article which roughly matches a topic which has been covered in the textbook and choose a time to review when the topic is still relatively fresh. Repetition at this stage will firmly anchor learning effects in students' minds. The second approach entails using authentic materials to introduce students to real-world materials and to using the language in a completely natural way. This might involve presenting an article on a current event or presenting a popular song with video or audio and then studying the lyrics. Another activity might be to select a city in a country where the target language is spoken and then find out as much information as possible

about it, e.g., famous sights and museums, hotels and restaurants, history, etc. [18,19] Materials can be found to suit all levels, which is a great way to build confidence in real-world language use, even for beginners. Teachers can make use of language learning news sites, such as Newsdle for French and Spanish or The Chairman's Bao for Chinese, which present news articles for all levels on a variety of topics. These particular sites also offer vocabulary and grammar lists, authentic language audio, vocabulary trainers as well as context questions and testing, making it simpler for teachers to present the articles. Using this approach will sharpen students' curiosity about the target language and the countries in which it is spoken. Even if the students are pure beginners, this approach will present them with their first real-world success in using the target language. It's a great confidence builder. This approach of applying authentic language materials in class might furnish a welcome break from strictly adhering to textbooks. Such activities could be applied on a weekly basis, e.g., on Fridays.[20,21] Once again, this activity delivers great opportunities for groupwork. Different groups can select, research and read various materials on a single subject or on entirely different subjects. Finally, they can present their work to the rest of the class and possibly initiate a discussion. Once students have learned how to search in the target language and have discovered the best search engines to use for the countries in question, their curiosity will be whetted. Learn to use Google's (or other search engines') classification of results into news, videos, shopping, etc. Finding suitable news articles can be most challenging for students in the beginning stages of language learning. Teach students to use news sites which are designed for children who speak the target language as native speakers. Many countries also offer more-or-less official sites for learners of the language which present authentic reading texts in a simplified language, e.g., by the BBC for English learners.[22,23] Easy topics such as cooking or other tutorials would be suitable for beginners because they can follow the language on the video as it is being spoken. For example, try following the instructions in the target language to make, say, a paper airplane. Of course, there is also huge amount of content available for higher levels. YouTube videos tend to teach colloquial language and listening in context which are highly valuable and desirable to students. YouTube and other sites also usually offer automated subtitling of the videos in question. As a general rule, set the subtitles to the target language if the students can manage this; it's more effective for learning.[24,25]

Song lyrics can be taught in such a multitude of ways. Sometimes a teacher will simply want to use songs to teach culture and present songs which are currently popular in the countries where the target language is spoken. Songs can also be used to enhance or focus on certain vocabulary or structures which have been taught in curriculum. If the song is presented thoroughly and listened to several times, the targeted vocabulary and structures will stick in the students' brains forever! A lot of podcasts are presented in a conversational format, meaning that the authentic language includes natural language features such as pauses, reactions, repetitions, people interrupting each other, etc. Teachers can also access podcasts from language learning sites which also usually supply written transcripts of the podcasts, thus enhancing the learning effects. Find menus online from around the world. [26,27] This can be an excellent group work activity and there are endless possibilities for expansion such as assigning restaurant roleplays, researching ingredients, locating the restaurant on Google Maps, discovering online reviews, etc. Discovering recipes in target language from blogs online will reinforce vocabulary on a subject which is of great interest to most students. Of course, recipes also practice the grammar of the imperative. Many internet recipe blogs also present the instructions in videos on YouTube. This kind of simple video can be a very good method to instil a sense of success and progress in students. This activity has the advantage of being extremely simple and suitable for beginners, yet which can be expanded to suit all levels of learners. After all, each product is illustrated by photos. Find online prospectuses for supermarket specials or home delivery services. Send students on an imaginary shopping trip where they have a certain amount to spend – maybe to buy ingredients for the recipes they have researched! Research which events will be occurring in a certain city where the target language is spoken. This activity would be useful when reviewing dates and times. Or perhaps, a follow-up activity to a presentation of song lyrics might be to track the concert schedule of the group which performs the song. Cities usually have websites using simple language which describe sights, accommodations, restaurants, etc. Of course, this would be the most interesting in certain

touristic hotspots. The class could plan a virtual trip covering everything to hotels or hostels, local restaurants or markets to a daily itinerary of activities.[28,29] This would also be an excellent group work exercise, perhaps extended over several weeks. Board games in the target language are an outstanding source of authentic language. Playing familiar games such as Pictionary or Monopoly which have a certain amount of text involved would be an easy way to introduce this activity to beginners. Also try to find games popular in the country where the target language is spoken. More advanced students could be assigned the task of reading the instructions so that they can try to figure out the rules themselves! Graded readers from publishers of foreign language materials are always a good source of authentic materials in foreign language teaching. The simplified, abridged format is especially suitable for students in the early stages of learning and will allow them to experience success in reading comprehension at the same time they are building confidence. More advanced students could compare the graded reader with sections of the authentic, unedited text. [30,31] Finally, try setting up Alexa or Siri with a speaker system in the classroom and programming it (her?) to speak in the target language. This simple system is not only informative (Alexa: “Where is Tunisia?”) it will also be great fun for the student of all ages. Encourage students to apply the target language to ask Alexa questions directly and get instant results - that will truly create a feeling of success. If a foreign language class is limited to the textbook format, it will eventually pan out to be safe, predictable and mundane. By introducing authentic materials into the classroom, students will develop confidence and curiosity regarding the language as well as regarding the culture of the countries in which it is spoken. Eventually, perhaps sooner than you think, your students will be performing their own searches in their free time. The language will be truly merged with their own interests.[32,33]

Results

Authentic materials are audio, print and video materials that have not been designed for deliberate use in the English language classroom. Authentic materials may fall into two main categories - print and auditory. Let’s check out some examples of authentic materials from each category:

| AUTHENTIC PRINT MATERIALS | AUTHENTIC AUDITORY MATERIALS |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Job applications | TV commercials |
| Restaurant menus | Radio broadcasts |
| Food labels | Movies |
| TV guides | Podcasts |
| Magazines | E-books |
| Newspapers | Songs |
| Journal articles | |
| Blog posts | |
| Novels | |
| Leaflets | |

Hence, stretches of “real language”, for instance, from political speeches and audio advertising, are wholly detached from the contrived discourse often found in coursebooks. The purpose of an authentic text is to communicate information. In contrast, “imaginary” texts and dialogues found in textbooks tend to illustrate and expose specific language points. Browse a range of ELT coursebooks and you

will notice the traditional strategy they use - simplification. [34,35]Writers simplify input by making syntactic and morphological adjustments in speaking and writing. These changes include fewer clauses, adherence to canonical word order (SVO - subject-verb-object) and shortened sentences/utterances. [36,37]

Regarding phonology, native speakers tend to address non-native speakers unnaturally in coursebook dialogues. For instance, they tend to use more careful articulation, slower speech rate, less contractions and artificial stress and pauses to emphasise key words. Notice the use of contractions (aren't instead of are not) and the personal pronouns I and we. There are also plenty of collocations and chunks of language commonly found in spoken English. These include the phrasal verb fit in, get to know, do some sightseeing and stay the night. There's no better way to illustrate the advantages of using authentic materials than by presenting a selection of tasks which exploit authentic discourse types.[38,39]

The three tasks below appear in book: Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials.

Task 1

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Discourse type | Novel/story - section/s |
| Communicative purpose | Engaging |
| Authentic task type | Analysis |
| Level 6 up | |
| Aim: To raise insight into the versatility and meaning of delexical words (e.g. go, get/got, make) through double translation. | |

This task may be suitable for advanced level learners who share the same mother tongue.

Find a short passage from a novel where at least one delexical word is used with a number of different meanings (e.g. get/got might appear in the same passage as: got lost, got a letter, got to go).

Procedure:

1. Split the class into smaller groups
2. Pre-teach some delexical verbs that are used with a number of different meanings. For instance:
 - take - take a shower, take a photo, take a chance
 - have - have a conversation, have an argument, have a rest
 - get - get lost, got to go
 - do - do my hair, do the cooking
 - make - make noise, make a promise, make a suggestion
 - go - go swimming, go for a walk
3. Assign a target word to each group (e.g. get or go)[40,41]
4. Groups should find all occurrences of their target word, and analyse the meanings in context. They should note the various ways the word/s can be used
5. Encourage learners to think about how each use in context represents a certain language register and has implications for meaning
6. Groups translate the expressions containing the target word/s into their first language. Learners should pay heed to the meaning in context, register etc.

7. Groups then re-translate their translated items back into English. They should keep as close as possible to the foreign language word/s. For example, the English expression 'I don't get it' may be translated into Serbian as 'ne kapiram'. This re-translates into English as 'I have understood'.
8. Feedback stage - groups share their insights with other groups[42,43]

Task 2

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Discourse type | Newspaper photographs |
| Communicative purpose | Engaging/provocative |
| Authentic task typology | Inferencing |
| Level 2 up | |
| Aim: To draw inferences and stimulate discussion based on newspaper photographs. | |

Preparation:

This task suits pre-intermediate and intermediate level learners.

Cut out a number of striking or shocking photographs from newspapers.

Procedure:

1. Present each photo in turn to the class (use the originals if a single copy will be visible to the whole class - if not, duplicate the photo as closely as possible).
2. Elicit what the learners know about the story behind each photo (use - Who...? What...? Where...? etc.)
3. If applicable, ask learners to interpret the emotions of the subject/s in each photo - distressed, happy, embarrassed, proud etc
4. Elicit learners' own emotive reactions to the photo ('how does this photo make you feel?')
5. Discussion of ethics - should newspapers publish controversial photos (is it fair on the people/events they show or on the readers?)[44,45]
6. In small groups or as a class discussion, learners compare the ethics of the press in their own cultures

Task 3

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Discourse type | Novel/story - section/s |
| Communicative purpose | Engaging |
| Authentic task type | Analysis |
| Level 6 up | |
| Aim: To raise insight into the versatility and meaning of delexical words (e.g. go, get/got, make) through double translation. | |

Preparation:

Select a film with a significant opening sequence/scene. For example, it may show an important event or piece of action, or provide important background to key character/s.

Procedure:

1. Turn down sound, if there is dialogue
2. Show the sequence (without sound) and ask learners to speculate:

- Where the scene is taking place
 - What they infer about the character/s figuring in it
 - The genre of the film and the main plot
3. Learners can now speculate what is being said and produce a feasible dialogue in small groups
 4. Play the sequence with sound and compare learners' dialogues with the actual one
 5. If there's any music, elicit how it adds to the impact of the scene[46,47]

Here's a summary of the main advantages of using authentic materials:

- Authentic materials for non-linear syllabi - There's little evidence of a fixed acquisition order when it comes to authentic materials. Many teachers and scholars might repudiate the use of authentic texts on this basis. However, I believe that language acquisition does not occur in a magical linear fashion
- Integrative motivation - Genuine materials from the target culture provide learners with a crucial 'stepping stone' towards their own understanding of, and adaptation to, that culture
- Confidence levels rise when learners are treated as 'native speakers' - Distributing authentic materials in class might cause students to believe they are being treated as 'native speakers'. Therefore, their confidence levels rise and their overall learning experience is enhanced
- Enhanced engagement - Engagement in a text assumes a certain degree of empathy. Indeed, authentic materials tend to have great personal significance for learners.[48,49] Hence, a powerful argument in favour of utilising authentic materials is the increased levels of engagement they tend to foster
- Accessibility to low level learners - Low level learners can approach genres such as the television news bulletin with confidence. Learners should be familiar with the presentation and format of the news bulletin, mostly owing to its use of visual images. Instructors should teach low level learners how to recognise proper nouns (people and places) and 'international' words (e.g. airport, terrorism). Moreover, teachers should encourage learners to contribute their own knowledge about items in the news

The advantages of using authentic materials in the EFL classroom far outweigh the drawbacks.

- There is an argument that entire courses should revolve around authentic materials, even for lower level learners.
- So maybe directors of studies and teachers don't need to devise syllabuses at all.
- After all, language acquisition is haphazard and scatty, not formulaic and linear.[50]

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. 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 contend that authentic materials are capable of showing a strong positive impact on the learners. Language is acquired properly if the learner is motivated. Accordingly 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 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" 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 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.[51]

Conclusions

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. There are many situations in which we use more than one language skill, and for this reason alone, it is valuable to use authentic materials to support the integration of the language skills. Moreover, this study demonstrates that students will give positive responses as the authentic materials are selected properly based on their needs. Above all, integrating the skills means that teacher is working at the level of realistic communication, not just at the level of vocabulary and sentence patterns. Realistic communication is the aim of the communicative approach and it can be actualized by the use of authentic materials. Aside from the benefits verified in this research, it is strongly recommended that practitioners employing and implementing authentic materials in integrated skill based activities make appropriate preparation for the use of authentic materials in ELT as careless selection of authentic materials may discourage students, instead of encouraging them to understand the lesson. It is suggested that the materials selected is reviewed to ensure that they are suitable for the students need and potential problems that may arise can be altered through some strategies during the instruction. Additionally, the result also implied a need of development steps for the course book; one of which by adopting authentic materials considered more attractive for the learning process and genuine to real-life practices.[51]

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