

EXPLORING THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ESL/EFL
CLASSROOMS: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

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Annotation: The study involved 16 adult English language learners enrolled in an intensive English program. Observations of reading classes and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Results indicated that the use of authentic materials leads to many social and academic benefits, such as increasing students' motivation and their cultural awareness. Findings also suggest that the use of authentic materials are encouraged as they bring the sense of authenticity and reality to the language classrooms.

Keywords: ESL, EFL, English teaching method, English reading.

Introduction

The purpose of reading in English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) classes is to improve students' skills so they can have access to the literature written in the target language (Nation, 2008). As such, students have been exposed to divergent reading materials to develop their reading skills. In particular, Singhal (2001) noted that some reading strategies emphasize the use of non-authentic or constructed texts. These texts can provide more meaningful and constructed language, helping to enhance many aspects of students' language learning, such as in grammar and vocabulary (Singhal, 2001). On the other hand, some recent reading strategies focus on providing students with texts that are directly taken from native speakers' daily lives.

This method was used to link ELLs to the real language spoken by native speakers (Gilmore, 2007). Accordingly, Peacock (1997) mentioned that the reading materials used in ESL/EFL classes can be classified into two different types of texts. The first type includes constructed or non-authentic texts. Peacock explained that these texts are designed especially for learning purposes and the language of these texts differs from the real-life language because it might be simplified, artificial, or concentrated on developing grammatical structures rather than reading skills. The second type of reading materials includes authentic texts. Harmer (1991) defined authentic reading materials "designed for native speakers; they are real text; designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language" (as cited in Kilickaya, 2004. p. 1). Similarly, Zyzik and Polio (2017) defined authentic materials as "those created for some real-life purpose other than language learning, and often, but not always provided by native speakers for native speakers." (p. 1). Tomlinson (2011) shared a more detailed definition of authentic materials that are the use for educational purposes:

A text which is not written or spoken for language teaching purposes. A newspaper article, a rock to.tg, "novel, a radio interview and a traditional fairy story are examples of authentic texts. A story written to exemplify the use of reported speech, a dialogue scripted to exemplify ways of inviting and a linguistically simplified version of a novel would not be authentic texts. (p. ix)

In other words, the differences between authentic and non-authentic materials are the audiences. Some examples of authentic texts, which teachers can use in ESL reading classes, are recent newspaper articles, daily magazines, advertisements, movie reviews, train schedules, and nutrition labels (Polio, 2014). Although much research was done regarding using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classes, it is important to understand language learners' perceptions of using these materials, which is the focus of this study. There is a dearth of literature that examined how language learners perceive the written materials that are used in English classes. Hence, there is a dire need to explore these perceptions in hope of understanding the benefits and challenges of using these materials from students' perspectives. It is hoped that this will lead to enhancing the teaching methods that are used in English reading classes.

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