



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING AUTHENTIC MATERIAL FOR IMPROVING THE WRITING OF ESL LEARNERS.

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Abstract

The study is based on the usefulness of authentic material in a writing classroom and it also explores how authentic material can be implemented in the ESL classroom. In this study, certain tasks for writing based on authentic material were designed by the researcher. In this way, researcher investigated how authentic material could be implemented in a writing classroom. The given study is based on both primary and secondary data. One of the study is based on the experience of observation of the researcher where researcher found out that authentic material stimulates the performance of the learners. Another study was conducted by Fazri and Dwi, where they employ quasi experimental design and statistically analyze using independent t-test and they found out that there was significant difference in the results of the students who were assigned authentic material and the students who were not. The authentic material adapted for this study will increase the motivational level of the ESL learners and expose the learners to the language they will use in the real world. This study will also prepare the learner to use the language in the real world context. A number of theoretical and pedagogical implications of the study, and its limitations, effectiveness, implementation and recommendations for further research, are presented.

Highlights

- I discuss the usefulness of authentic material.
- I explored the implementation of authentic material and design task for implementing authentic material in a writing classroom.
- I investigated the effectiveness of authentic material for improving the writing of ESL learners.
- Authentic material motivates the learners towards learning.
- Teachers must use authentic material in a writing classroom.

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Introduction:-

The concept of implementing authentic materials in the class is not new. It started since 1970s as a result of communicative language teaching. Since then, behaviorism was replaced by cognitivism, linguistic competence paved the way for communicative competence. With this movement of communicative language teaching, material designers and textbook writers felt the need of the material that could bring the real world into the classroom. Authentic materials include newspapers, magazines, letters, restaurant menus, hotel guides, television broadcasts,

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pop songs, bus tickets, advertisement; films and so on. Authentic materials are not used for pedagogic purposes rather they are used in real life for everyday communication. Authentic texts were valued because of its communicative nature. Henry Sweet was one of the first advocates of authentic material who made regular use of authentic text in his books. According to him, natural texts “do justice to every feature of the language” while artificial materials include “repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the vocabulary, certain combinations of words to the almost total exclusion of others which are equally, or perhaps even more essential” (Cited in Gilmore, 2004).

Writing is a cognitive process as it involves the process of thinking. It requires special attention and instruction. These days writing is important in every phase of life either it is college or school, or it is professional jobs or clerical jobs. Writing is a need of the hour. Therefore, it is important to provide ESL learners with suitable materials which would help them in improving their writing skills. Writing is permanent and more reliable in comparison to speech, however it is believed to play a significant role in educational system. Keeping in mind this scenario, this study aimed at investigating the efficacies of authentic material for improving the writing of ESL learners.

Literature Review:-

Matthew Peacock (1996), investigated whether authentic materials increase the classroom motivation of learners. For the purpose of this study, he implemented both artificial and authentic materials on alternative days. He recommended that teachers of adult EFL to beginners should use appropriate authentic material in their classroom as they increased their learners’ levels of on-task behavior, concentration and involvement in the target activity as compared to the artificial materials.

Sacha Anthony Berardo (2006) discussed the use of authentic material in the classroom. He remarked that students benefited from the exposure to real language when used in a real context. He also stated that authentic materials are highly motivating as it gives a sense of achievement and it also encourages further reading.

Asif Masood (2013), in his experimental study dealt with the efficacy of authentic materials for enhancing the writing skills of the second language assimilators at secondary level in Pakistan. He mentioned that authentic materials were full of meanings and it was easy for the learners to choose the topic of their interest. These authentic materials aroused a great deal of interest in them and also stirred their creative faculties.

Rashid Hamed Al Azri and Majid Hilal Al-Rashdi (2014), in their article gone through so many related literatures and they found out that the use of authentic materials in language teaching is supported by many researches.

Zerhan Varmis Kilic and Dr. Binnur genc Ilter (2015) also investigated whether authentic materials have a positive impact on developing the attitudes of 12th grade students in EFL classes. Their study was conducted for over 12 weeks. They concluded that authentic materials have marked a positive effect on the attitudes of students towards English course.

Definitions of Authentic Material:-

As defined by Little (Cited in Guariento and Morley, 2001), Authentic text is one ‘created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced.’ By exposing the learners to the authentic materials, they will build receptive competence in the target language.

According to Wallace (as cited in Berardo 1992, p.145), Authentic texts are real life texts, not written for pedagogical purposes. These authentic texts help learners participate in the real world events. They will bridge the gap between ‘classroom knowledge’ and the ‘knowledge of the real world’.

Alex Gilmore (2007) wrote: ‘An *authentic text* is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort.’ He also goes on to say that graded teacher talk, motherese, international business negotiations between non native speakers and scripted television soap operas are all considered as authentic.

Purpose of using authentic Material:-

Authentic materials expose the learners to the real language. Inappropriate material will make them face difficulties in learning a language. Authentic materials placed the students in the context which is related to their lives. It is

sometimes difficult for the students to grasp which is not relevant to them. They heed to the materials or to the facts which are known to them rather than to deal with the fictitious facts or to the fictitious people. It is necessary to choose the material which is motivating for them instead of choosing boring material. Authentic material is motivating for learners as it gives them the feeling that they are learning the real language and it also brings them closer to the target culture. As mentioned by Block (1991), students do appreciate the teachers who prepared the material for the class. He gave three arguments in favor of the materials prepared by the teacher. Firstly, he mentioned when the students themselves are contextualized in a particular situation they tend to learn more. Secondly, materials prepared by the teacher gave them more personal touch as compared to the course books and thirdly, most of the time these course books are boring for them. In this way, Block has also favored the use of authentic material. He considered authentic material more appropriate as compared to that of artificial material.

Nowadays, with the advent of communicative language teaching, it is necessary for the teachers to provide them with the materials so that they can cope effectively in their everyday communication. As Mc Donough and Shaw (2013) mentioned that the aim of English Language Teaching in Malaysia was “to create a society that is able to utilize the language for effective communication as the need arises and as a key to wider experiences. For those furthering their studies, the skills learned should become an instrument with which they may cope with the necessities of using the language.”

Teaching with Authentic Material:-

When dealing with authentic material then it is also necessary to consider what kind of authentic material one is choosing for different level of learners. Authentic material should be selected keeping in mind the level of learners. If these materials are too complicated, then the learners might feel frustrated, perplexed and de-motivated. Guariento and Morley (2001) believe that simplification is fine but these materials should not be given artificial ‘genuine-look’ in order to be accepted by the learner. Materials should be well executed. They mentioned that “at lower level, the use of authentic text may not only prevent the learners from responding in meaningful ways but can also lead them to feel frustrated, confused and more prominently, de-motivated.” Breen (1985) mentions in his article that any text is potentially authentic to the learner. He said that we should be willing to welcome in the classroom any text which will serve the primary purpose of helping the learner to *develop* authentic interpretations and gave primacy to the learner’s participation in the selection of text rather than the text itself. Kienbaum (1986) suggested that authentic texts cannot be artificially simplified, glossed or rearranged for the consumption of the learner rather it is the teachers’ task to choose from gathered material those which are appropriate for classroom use.

Use of authentic material in esl classroom:-

The term ESL which in other words means English as a second language is basically used for the people whose second language is English or they are bilinguals. Here, in this case of ESL learners, medium of instruction is also in English. In terms of Vivian Cook and David Singleton, second language user is used for ‘somebody who is actively using a second language other than their first.’ (2014, p: 4). In order for the learners to communicate effectively in second language, they must be exposed to the language as it is used by the native speaker.

According to Widdowson:

“Recent ideas about language use and learning insist on the primacy of communicative activities in the classroom.” (1990:67)

He also supposed that: *“the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Nowadays there are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic.” (1990:67)*

According to the well-known *Input Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982), *“we acquire by understanding language that contains a structure a bit beyond our current level of competence (i + 1). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information” (pp. 21-22).*

Krashen predicts that the simplified codes of foreigner talk and teacher talk will be useful to the L2 learner, just as caretaker talk or motherese is to the L1 learner. Krashen feels that if teacher/ interlocutor talk is adjusted for a group of language learners, the learners will select out their own comprehensible input. Indeed, most studies of input and second language acquisition focus on what Native speakers do to tailor the input for what they imagine to be the level of the learner’s competence. (Cited by Ruth L. Cathcart- Strong)

Effectiveness of authentic material in the Teaching Of Writing:-

Fazri and Dwi (2010), investigated the use of authentic materials in writing procedural text in English classes of a vocational school in Kuningan. They selected classes of eleventh grades students of Kuningan and employed quasi experimental design for their study. Their study revealed that authentic materials are considered effective in improving the students' writing skills. The statistical computation using independent t-test on post-test in his study showed that there is significant difference between the students who were assigned the authentic materials and the students who were not ($t_{obt} 10.909 > t_{crit} 2.000, r = 0.82$).

According to Allen, et al. (cited by Baird, 2004) strategies students develop in deciphering authentic texts can help them improve their writing proficiency in the target language.

One of my own experiences of observation of using authentic material during the practice teaching of M.A. English Language Teaching (ELT) students in the Deptt. Of English, AMU, Aligarh at undergraduate level. Practice Teachers were allotted to take six classes. During these classes, they provide the learners with the task of writing a job application. Initially in the first two classes teachers taught them with the help of traditional method but then in the third class, they implemented newspapers and advertisement. It was discovered that these authentic materials stimulates the performance of the learner and also motivates them towards learning as compare to that of traditional method and also enables them to use more learning strategies.

Implementing authentic material in an esl writing classroom:-

Implementing authentic materials require some preparation for the teachers. In order to implement authentic material in a writing class, it is necessary for the teachers to choose the material which interests the learners and which are familiar to the students which helps them to relate with their background knowledge. Lesson plan and appropriate materials should be prepared according to the needs of the learners. While using authentic material, teacher should be aware of the fact that these materials are not for language learners rather they are for native speakers as they may contain some idiomatic expressions or there might be some grammatical mistakes. Before employing authentic materials in an ESL classroom, teacher should consider these questions:

Q1: Is the content interesting or is it really relevant to learners?

Q2: Is the material fulfilling the needs of the learner?

Q3: Is the material has suitable length?

Q4: How difficult is the content of the material?

Q5: Whether the content is really acceptable educationally or linguistically?

Teachers can implement authentic material in various ways using different materials.

They can implement authentic material in these ways as given below:

TASK 1

Skill: Process Writing

Activity: Writing

Material: coffee package recipe

Time: 40-45 minutes.

Level of learners: Graduation students.

Exercise: Teachers may ask students to observe the process of making coffee as written at the back of its pack.

Teacher should monitor the class and help them to write another process.

TASK2

Skill: Summarizing

Activity: Writing

Material: Article of a newspaper

Time: 40-45 minutes.

Exercise: Teachers may ask students to read the article in the newspaper and then ask them to rewrite into their own words.

Conclusion:-

The use and purpose of authentic material with ESL learners has been discussed. Authentic materials benefits both learners and teachers. It helps teachers to develop their own material to teach in the classroom and prepares the learner to use the target language in the real world context. It motivates the learner by making them acquainted with

the culture of target language and enables them to use more and more learning strategies. Authentic materials actively engaged the learners during the process of learning as they draw their own inferences with the help of material. This study demonstrates how authentic material can be implemented in a writing classroom and how it is effective in improving the writing of ESL learners. These materials will help learners in choosing the topic of their own interest and they will also feel free to write in different directions.

Further Recommendations:-

Teachers can implement various authentic materials in their writing classroom and judge the performance of students whether they are really effective or not. In this way, teachers can also acquaint learners with words which are not available in formal materials but only exist in the target language.

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