

Use of Authentic Materials in Teaching English, Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions: A Case Study of a Secondary School in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: This study examines the use of authentic materials in Sri Lankan secondary school English teaching. Twelve teachers completed a survey questionnaire, with most favouring authentic materials. The findings suggest that authentic learning and a communicative approach are effective for students. The study has important pedagogical implications, and future research could focus on using authentic resources for further training.

Keywords: Authentic Resources, Authentic Learning, Communicative Approach

I. Introduction

Since the 1970s, academics have debated using Authentic Materials (AMs) in English instruction to address the widespread use of written pedagogical materials. Authentic materials are essential for meaningful communication and should reflect real-world situations. Classroom activities should include real-world situations, focusing on the message rather than the medium. Reading should serve the same functions as real-life reading.

Richard (2006) is of the view that authentic materials offer exposure to natural language, cultural information, and a creative approach to teaching. However, critics argue that they contain complex and irrelevant language. The digital transformation era has revolutionized education by making teaching and learning English easier and more accessible. Teachers use the internet to download resources, update expertise, and create presentations. Students' learning styles have also changed, allowing them to learn the language both inside and outside the classroom.

The study examines secondary school English teachers' perceptions of authentic materials in Colombo, Sri Lanka, identifying reasons for using or not using them and identifying training needed. The study also examines English teachers' perspectives and attitudes on using Augmented Reality (AMs) in the classroom. It contributes to literature by synthesizing frameworks and serves as a practical guide for teachers and practitioners. The findings can help establish appropriate learning activities and inform policies for promoting AMs in local government schools.

II. Literature Review

The Definition of Authentic Materials

Language is a means by which individuals can communicate with one another. Communication is how they exchange ideas and information (OgliJoraboyev, 2021). Ogly (2021) further stated that there are 6500 languages are still spoken today, encouraging people to learn new languages. To design a practical method for acquiring new language skills, linguists have turned to the field of applied linguistics (Oura M.K. 2001), moreover, as stated by Peacock.M (1997) the English language has a lot to offer in terms of productivity. English is the world's most frequently spoken official language by a significant margin, and it is the world's fourth most widely spoken native language. In international politics, English is the most used language. Teaching different languages in the current world has suitable material teaching methods that better meet the requirements and expectations of today's learners as mentioned by Eveland and Scheufele (2000).

Learning a second language requires mastery of various abilities in the target language, which can prove challenging for students when confronted with real-world communication scenarios for students who have access to a wide range of resources, authentic materials greatly aid their ability to acquire new concepts, Oura, 2001. Teachers

can use natural material as an additional resource to help students enhance their general learning abilities. As Ogly (2021) elaborated with the use of authentic materials, teachers can reinforce the learning elements and give different assignments to the students. Ogly 2021 further stated that as a result, the students find these authentic materials fascinating as their needs and interests are considered when teachers select them. Thus, they can participate with incredible excitement and focus on any work assigned to them. Teachers in English language courses employ various authentic materials to help their students learn the language more effectively. When teaching English, there are many conversations about what "authentic" means. This chapter will examine how the following experts define some of the most common ways to use the term.

- Nunan (1989) says that authentic materials were made for reasons other than language teaching.
- According to Stubbs (1996), authentic texts are "real, attested, and such that there are real, authentic examples of use."
- Jordan (1997) says that authentic texts are not made to teach.
- Carter and Nunan (2001, p. 68) say that authentic materials are "ordinary texts that were not made just for language teaching."
- Herod (2002) says that authentic learning materials and activities are made to be like situations in the real world.
- Jacobson et al. (2003) say that authentic materials are printed materials used in the classroom the same way they are used in real life.

Ferit Kilickaya (2004) said that the standard definition of an authentic text is "exposure" to natural language and its use in its community. He noted that many teachers have talked about how the English used in the classroom should be realistic and not made up for teaching. This usually means real newspaper articles, magazine articles, advertisements, authentic cooking recipes, horoscopes, etc.

Also, he says that authentic texts are "appropriate" and "qualified" in terms of the learner's goals, objectives, needs, and interests and "natural" in terms of real-life communication. Harmer (1991) says that "authentic texts" are written for people who speak the language as their first language. Jordan also said, "authentic texts are ones that were not written for teaching language." Berardo's (2006) study on the use of "authentic" materials in teaching reading concluded that "authenticity" is the most critical part of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), which means that students learn the same language as native speakers. One of the main goals of using authentic materials in the classroom is to expose students to as much natural language as possible, even if the school is not a real-life situation.

Considering what has been said so far, the writer thinks authentic materials could be written for native language speakers and not for language teaching purposes. Harmer was right when he said that the original text is written for native speakers, not language students.

Types of Authentic Materials

Choosing suitable materials to teach and learn another language is a crucial step. These days, everyone has access to the materials they need to prepare. People think of the Internet as a significant and rich source of accurate information. Gebhard (2006) says that anything that is used to communicate is a piece of authentic material. It could be a newspaper, a magazine, a TV or a radio show, a movie, a song, an ad, or a book. In his book from 2006, Gebhard wrote the following about the three kinds of authentic materials:

Authentic Listening and Viewing Materials

It includes silent films; TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news comedy shows, dramas, movies, and soap operas; radio news, theatres, and advertisements; professionally audiotaped short stories and novels; pop, rock, country, and film songs; home videos; professionally videotaped travel logs, documentaries, and sales pitches.

Authentic Printing Materials

It contains newspaper articles, cartoons, advertising, movie advertisements, sports reports, weather reports, TV guides, and tourist information, among other things.

Realia Utilized in EFL/ESL Classrooms

It contains images, artworks, signs with symbols, postcards, and picture books, among other things.

Advantages of Using Authentic Materials

Teachers choose authentic materials based on the needs and interests of the students to get them interested in learning English language skills and using their skills in and out of the English language classrooms. These

materials are often used to teach the English language using real-life situations. Using authentic materials in ELT classrooms has several benefits.

Content is focused on student needs and interests. They help students relax. They teach situational language. Realistic settings are used. They are cost-effective for ELT courses. Teachers have easy access. They're widespread. They boost social language skills and promote comprehension. They improve critical thinking. They inspire creativity in kids and instructors. They help professors teach several classes. They emphasize verbal skills and encourage students to read for fun. They're ubiquitous and motivate students. They help slow learners. They support average students. They strengthen students' communication skills. They promote aesthetic ELT. They improve teaching and learning. They boost students' confidence. Materialistic options are better for teachers. They offer several settings, registers, genres, and written and spoken dialogue styles. They help less-educated people more. They communicate successfully. They engage students. They help teachers create student-friendly materials. They help contextualize ESL. They inspire students. Learners' analytical and problem-solving skills increase. They're often augmented with sound and pictures. They increase classroom participation. They raise kids' social awareness.

Disadvantages of Using Authentic Materials

Richards (2006) explains the disadvantages of using authentic materials: Authentic materials frequently contain complex language, unneeded vocabulary items, and complicated language structures, which can often cause problems. Occasionally the vocabulary may not be relevant to the learner's needs, and too many structures can be problematic". While Harmer (1989) suggested that providing pupils with reading materials would help them become better readers, the more reading they do, the better they will become. It does not imply that using only authentic materials in teaching reading skills is a good idea. The teacher's function and using authentic materials suited for their students is crucial; otherwise, it will impact student motivation for further information on using simple text.

Gebhard's book from 2006 talked about the problems with using natural materials, especially if the teacher can't choose the text to be used. First, there is the possibility that teaching beliefs could lead to a clash of ideas. Most readers are based on what the author or publisher thinks about how to teach. For example, some text writers believe students should memorize words and grammar rules before practicing speaking, writing, or reading. Others believe that practice in meaningful context is much more critical. When teachers get a text from the author or publisher, they must agree. This disagreement could hurt the way things are done in the classrooms.

Second, when teachers blindly stick to the texts they've been given, they might make the experience too easy for the students. And if we teachers think our job is to walk students through a book step by step, "the teacher's role is diminished to that of little more than a technician, and the level at which we teach is reduced to a very superficial one."

Lastly, commercially made textbooks or materials that aren't real are made for and forced on a large group of people who come from different cultures and live in other parts of the world. So, the things that give teacher-made materials authenticity and relevance for specific audiences are usually taken away. Teachers should look at the beginning of the textbooks to find out whom they were written for. Many ESL books shouldn't be used in EFL classes, and the same goes for the other way around. The problem with using original materials is that finding them takes time and work. Making authentic materials and media easy for students to understand is also challenging. Students won't see authentic materials and media as valuable learning tools if they can't understand them.

Selecting Authentic Materials

In most instances, "authentic" refers to materials used for instruction that were not initially intended for that purpose. Therefore, original content is:

1. Design for native speakers.
2. Written or uttered for a real communication purpose by individuals with a message to convey.

Even this simple description is problematic, as there are things on the Internet and obviously on the radio that is written with a genuinely communicative aim but also streamlined to appeal to and be understandable by non-native English speakers.

A language-training institution publishes a typical example of the written material to provide information (e.g., a prospectus), outline policies, and so on (e.g., school rules, codes of conduct, payment terms, and so on). Nevertheless, these texts may be simplified for non-native speakers, but they all serve a real communicative purpose. They are authentic in intent, yet to a native speaker, they may appear manufactured and unauthentic.

Materials that are spoken can also be simplified for a non-native audience, as the BBC World Service frequently did. According to McGrath (2002), while selecting relevant, authentic texts, there are eight criteria to examine. These

include relevance to the course book and student needs, Topic interest, Cultural suitability, Logistical issues, Cognitive demands, Linguistic demands, Quality, and Exploitability.

"Suitability of the material, exploitability, and readability" are the three primary criteria for selecting and gaining access to books for classroom use. (Nuttal, 2000) Suitability is regarded as the most crucial characteristic, as it implies that reading materials must stimulate the learners' attention, suit their needs, and inspire them. Readability refers to the difficulty and complexity of a book, whereas exploitability refers to how the text is used to improve students' reading skills. The reading material must not contain words and structures that are excessively complex or demanding. It must also correspond to the trainees' English proficiency. Otherwise, it could discourage the students and have a negative impact. Berardo (2006) adds that when selecting authentic materials, teachers must consider two other essential criteria: variety and presentation. Using a combination of text formats helps to make reading assignments more engaging. In addition, providing the subject in an authentic environment is a crucial feature for gaining the attention and interest of learners. This includes the use of coloured images, diagrams, photographs, etc. Some instructors may argue that they cannot teach using purely natural materials and ignore the non-authentic activities set in the course book. In this instance, Foppoli (2006) argues that instructors can instruct the course-book-assigned assignments using natural materials to promote and increase students' learning.

At which levels may authentic materials also be used?

Many academics support using authentic materials while teaching a second language, but we should consider whether it is appropriate for all students at all levels. An important consideration when employing real materials is the level of the learners. This is essential for maximizing the benefits of using real resources in the classroom. In other words, if the resources are beyond the skill or level of the learners, it could lead to demotivation and discourage them from learning the target language. Kilickaya (2004) states that only advanced and intermediate-level learners can use authentic materials.

Some researchers believe authentic content can be used with learners of any level. Teachers must be aware that they can only benefit from authentic resources if they are utilized in the classroom in the same context for which they were intended, i.e., in the real world. That a text can only be authentic in the original context in which it was created.

The research emphasizes the importance of authentic materials in communicative language teaching, particularly in classroom activities. Students are prepared for real-world communication, and reading should be based on real-world contexts. CLT involves effective learning tasks and exercises that encourage meaningful interpersonal exchange and negotiation of meaning. Authentic materials motivate teachers in engaging classroom activities, motivating learners in specific language areas.

III. Research Methodology

Research Design

This is qualitative research. This study is qualitative. Qualitative research is a sort of research in which conclusions are reached without employing statistics or other quantitative methods (Basrowi&Suwandi, 2009). The study is a qualitative investigation that aims to offer a thorough analysis. I gathered the information via a questionnaire.

Brief Introduction about Location and Participants

This research was conducted at YasodaraVidyalaya in Colombo. It is a secondary school supported by the government in Colombo, Sri Lanka. There were nine English teachers who participated in this research. The first reason I selected this school is that this school is situated in the heart of Colombo. The second reason is that the researcher has a personal connection with some of these English teachers who are willing to support me and have a strong desire to learn the attitude toward using authentic materials of English teachers. Teachers were eager to take part in my research in a more cooperative manner.

Data Collection Method

The researcher used the questionnaire to collect data for the research to gain a deep understanding of using authentic materials for teaching purposes.

Participants

Nine English teachers were selected purposely for the study. All participants are female teachers. They were chosen on purpose under the presumption that since they had been teaching English for more than five years, they had "rich information" regarding views toward using AMs in English teaching. Additionally, all their school experience has been in English. The participants' demographic information is listed below.

Table 1: *Details of Participants involved in the research*

Participant	Gender	Years of experience	Teaching periods	Educational qualifications
Teacher 1	Female	More than 20	30	G.C.E. A/L
Teacher 2	Female	16 -20 years	30	B.A. English M.A. Linguistics
Teacher 3	Female	More than 20	20	G.C.E. O/L
Teacher 4	Female	More than 20	35	G.C.E. A/L
Teacher 5	Female	10 – 15 years	30	G.C.E. A/L
Teacher 6	Female	10 -15 years	30	G.C.E. A/L
Teacher 7	Female	More than 20	30	B.Ed (English) Diploma in Teaching English (PCOE)
Teacher 8	Female	More than 20	30	G.C.E. A/L
Teacher 9	Female	6 – 10 years	30	Bachelor of Arts Post Graduate Diploma in TESOL

Procedure and Instrument

A qualitative approach was used, and a questionnaire was distributed manually to the nine teachers to gather information about attitudes and beliefs toward using authentic materials in teaching English in Sri Lankan schools. The questionnaire survey consists of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Both types of questions collected information on personal profiles, including years of experience, education qualifications, and attitudes toward using authentic materials in the classroom.

The questionnaire was distributed among nine participants, and they could choose more than one answer according to their understanding. Also, they could add any comment they wish to share with society. They were asked to return the questionnaire within a required time framework, and the questionnaire results were analyzed in frequency and percentage.

Data Analysis

The results of the questionnaire were presented using descriptive statistics. Any significant discoveries, such as distinctive patterns in their response, were highlighted and investigated. One can get a greater understanding by carrying out each of these steps.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and examines the findings about English teachers' views toward using AMs in the classroom. As stated, before in this paper, the purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

- What are the attitudes of English language teachers about the use of AMs?
- Do the teachers like to use authentic materials in the classroom? Why?
- Do they need any training to improve to handle authentic materials? If so, what kind of training is required?

Teachers' views on using authentic materials in the English classroom

All participants were aware of the importance of using authentic resources when teaching English, as indicated by the findings. They were familiar with the items because they were familiar with authentic materials, real materials made for native and real-world purposes without being deliberately designed for educational purposes.

One teacher stated, "to make variety in my teaching, to create an interest in the students, to make the lesson more real to achieve the objectives. "Teacher 2 stated that "the learners are stimulated, the learners elicit genuine responses. It is helpful to create a real-world situation in the classroom. The learners will engage in the learning process more effectively."

In addition, all respondents described using authentic materials in their classrooms, even at varying frequencies. All participants reported using authentic materials frequently, occasionally, and infrequently.

Teacher 1 asserts that she utilizes authentic materials in her classroom more frequently. On the other hand, Teachers 2 and 3 reported using authentic materials seldom and infrequently, respectively. In general, although there were differences in the frequency of utilizing authentic materials, all participants had a good impression of using authentic materials in English teaching, as evidenced by their awareness of utilizing authentic materials in their education.

Elaborating on the reasons for using AM in teaching English regarding the use of authentic materials as teaching materials in teaching English, all the participants stated that they had utilized the materials in their classrooms, but not always. They used the materials for a variety of teaching purposes. According to statements made by the three participants, there were numerous reasons why they employed authentic materials in their classrooms, including:

One teacher stated, "any kind of thing that can be used in the classroom to improve the quality of teaching and learning."

Another teacher stated that "AMs motivate learners to communicate and create a more meaningful experience."

A second reason why the participant used authentic materials to teach English was that using authentic materials as learning materials was more engaging for students than textbooks.

Teacher 1 stated this explanation.

"They provide real-life examples of language used in everyday situations; they can be used to add more interest for the learner."

The results revealed that another rationale for adopting natural resources while teaching English is that the materials are engaging for students. She used authentic materials to support the learning topic she would lead, according to Teacher 3. By employing the tools, she and her pupils would be able to meet the learning objectives of the teaching and find learning more pleasurable. She stated, "I occasionally use the materials, such as English songs, to teach, since the materials may make learning enjoyable for students."

Generally, they use all types of materials to teach students, including audio, video, printed materials, songs, movies, books, newspapers, etc. Most teachers tend to use materials that are readily available and not expensive.

Most participants shared a similar point of view regarding the criteria they used to select authentic materials for their classrooms. In the teaching and learning process, they adhered to the standard that authentic resources must be relevant to the essential competencies, learning objectives, student's level, and requirements. In addition, the contents of authentic learning materials must be culturally relevant, easy to understand, and appropriate for the student's level and learning needs.

Furthermore, all participants expressed satisfaction with how their students reacted to the items they used and presented in class. All participants acknowledged substantial differences in students' reactions when using authentic materials. Students were more excited and enthusiastic about learning after using the resources. They were more driven to learn and were not bored because the materials were more appealing to them.

Challenges of using authentic materials in the classroom

Generally, most participants stated that the syllabus does not provide any room for the use of authentic materials. The limited time allocated for the syllabus will make it challenging to use authentic materials and further extend the lesson. The use of authentic materials is not a requirement from the administration. Most of the teachers stated that availability, lack of time, and quality of the material would stop them from using authentic materials. One teacher said that for some students, it is difficult to understand the text when it is authentic.

Many have stated that the government is not providing necessary training on using authentic materials and that many students in the classroom will also make it difficult to use materials.

IV. Conclusion

Finally, there are some important conclusions that the research might briefly describe in many areas below:

1) All participants had a favourable attitude toward the use of authentic materials in English instruction. Even though they did not always use materials in their teaching classroom, they were aware of their definition and usage.

They believed teachers and students could improve their varied teaching and learning strategies, activities, and tasks by employing real content.

2) This research found that all English teachers considered employing authentic materials because authentic materials are actual, engaging, and entertaining resources to be used as teaching materials in teaching English. The utilization of materials can assist students in learning real-world English usage contexts and increase students' interest and enthusiasm in learning English.

3) The researcher discovered that the most authentic materials used by all participants in their teaching classroom including listening-viewing, and visual and printed media, are readily available on the Internet, in the surroundings, and on tape recorders. Furthermore, the Internet was a source of authentic resources to which participants had easy access.

4) The findings revealed substantial changes in students' reactions when participants used authentic materials in their classes versus when they did not. When teachers used natural resources, pupils were more motivated, enthused, and engaged in learning English, and vice versa.

5) The difficulties encountered by all participants in using authentic materials were the lack of students' English vocabulary mastery, technical problems such as unworkable media in presenting the materials, a lot of time consumed in using authentic materials, and the lack of resources.

V. Recommendations

The researcher recommends that the government train teachers in selecting, designing, and using authentic materials. Teachers should provide more opportunities to create their lessons rather than completing the syllabus. More attention should be given to production. Teachers should be encouraged to use more authentic materials in the classroom. The government should also provide necessary resources for teachers. When preparing the syllabus, using authentic materials should include an administrative requirement, where teachers will have more opportunities to use authentic materials and make an effective classroom environment.

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