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ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *The use of authentic materials in EFL has long been acknowledged to be advantageous to learners as they provide real-life experience in the language classroom. However, many of the existing definitions which most teachers are utilizing to select appropriate teaching resources present a strong bias toward the notion of “native speakers’ production”. In this paper advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials in teaching English as a foreign language will be discussed. A number of studies point out that the use of authentic materials is regarded a useful means to motivate learners, arouse their interest and expose them to the real language they will face in the real world.*

Introduction

The use of authentic materials in the language classroom has been widely considered to be beneficial to the language learners in different aspects. Efforts have been made in investigating the advantages that the authenticity of language materials may bring and positive results have been reported. Harmer (1994) states that authentic materials can provide great benefits to learners in the production and acquisition of language with a boost in their confidence in real-life use. Additionally, Peacock (1997) claims that learners’ levels of on-task behavior, concentration and involvement can be increased by using authentic materials greater than employing artificial ones.

Placing too much emphasis on the characteristic of authenticity in choosing teaching materials, some researchers and teachers, however, tend to take the authority of native speakers in the production of the selected materials for granted. Accordingly, they avoid employing those not produced by native speakers in their research and teaching practice.

Martinez (2002), defines authentic materials as the materials which are prepared for native speakers and not designed to be used for teaching purposes. Kilickaya (2004) has another definition for authentic materials, which is "exposure to real language and use in its own community." Nowadays, preparing students for real

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life situations is of utmost concern for English language teachers, especially in EFL classes. Therefore, like other teachers around the world, especially in places where English is a foreign language, our Uzbek teachers need to adopt effective teaching materials, in order to help their students learn English better, as well as prepare them to communicate with the outside world.

2. Definition and types of Authentic Materials:

Let's look at some of the common definitions of the term "authentic materials", from the point of view of the following writers:

1. Herrington and Oliver (2000) suggested a new pedagogical term, called "authentic learning". This term is directly related to the students' real life and prepares them to face and deal with real world situations.
2. According to Herod (2002) authentic learning materials and activities are designed to imitate the real world situations.
3. Nunan (1988) defines authentic materials as the materials "which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language".
4. Jordan (1997) defines authentic texts as the ones which are not designed for pedagogical aims.
5. Jacobson (2003, p. 1) sees authentic materials as printed materials, which are used in classrooms in the same way they would be used in real life.
6. In other words, Stubbs (1996) defines authentic texts as "actual, attested, and such that they have real authentic instances of use."
7. According to Carter & Nunan (2001, p. 68) authentic materials are "ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes."

Teaching materials are a very essential part of teaching and learning a foreign language. These days, the resources for teaching materials are available for everybody. The internet is regarded as a very important and rich source for authentic materials. Genhard classified authentic materials into three categories as follows:

1. Authentic listening materials, such as radio news, cartoons, songs, etc.
2. Authentic visual materials, such as street signs, magazines and newspapers pictures, post cards, etc.

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3. Authentic printed materials, such as sports reports, newspapers, restaurant menus, train tickets, etc.

2.1. Advantages of using authentic materials

Going through some empirical studies conducted concerning the effectiveness of authentic materials, it is obvious that authentic materials had a positive effect on learners' achievement. For instance, Otte (2006) studied the effect of aural authentic texts on listening comprehension skills of a number of students involved in a study at a university in USA.

He noticed that authentic materials developed the students' listening comprehension skills and their motivation as well. In addition, it's a fact that a number of researchers have confirmed the role of authentic materials in developing reading skills through introducing learners to new vocabulary and expressions. Harmer (1994) states that authentic material has positive effects on learners, in that it: (1) helps learners to produce better language. (2) helps learners to acquire the language faster (3) makes learners more confident to deal with real life situations. Furthermore, Philips and Shetlsworth, Clarke, Peacock regard authentic materials useful in language teaching, for the following reasons: (1) they expose learners to real language; (2) they are more related to learners' needs; (3) they have a positive effect on learners' motivation; (4) they bring cultural information to the students' attention. They encourage teachers to adopt creative teaching approach. "Authentic texts can be motivating, because they are a proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people." (Nuttall 1996, p.172) Although the authentic materials play an important role in supporting students' learning of a foreign language by giving them an opportunity to deal with situations similar to the real world situations outside the classroom, there are many difficulties that hinder the use of such materials by teachers. Teachers might say that they cannot depend only on authentic materials in teaching Reading. Nunan (1999), states that teachers cannot depend only on authentic materials for teaching in the classroom. Therefore, they can use both: authentic and artificial (non-authentic) materials, because learners need to get accustomed to both types.

Researchers such as Gilmore (2007) and Sherman (2003) believe that authentic materials have a strong positive effect on motivation. Motivation is regarded as the key element in the success of learning in general, and in learning languages in particular. For his part, Kilickaya (2004) states that using authentic materials helps

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increase learners' motivation for learning a language, because they feel that they are practicing a real language used beyond the classroom. In addition, some empirical studies conducted by Thanajaro (2000) and Otte (2006), concluded that authentic materials have a positive effect on learners' motivation and encourage them to learn better. Berardo (2006) experienced using authentic materials and notices that they contributed in increasing his learners' motivation and he himself, likes using them. Sherman (2003), mentions that the importance of authentic materials reside in the fact that "it is a window into culture." Finally, Garcia claims that using authentic reading materials helps to improve the learners' cultural awareness. To conclude, it is obvious from the previously mentioned arguments that authentic materials have a positive contribution in the field of language teaching and learning. Hence, it merits to be adopted by language teachers to enhance their learners' learning progress. 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." (Senior 2005, p. 71) One more point to be stated here is that learners will learn better and benefit from the use of authentic materials, if they get sufficient support from teachers.

2.2. Disadvantages of authentic materials

Although a lot of researchers argue that authentic materials have made a noticeable contribution in foreign language teaching and learning, there are some scholars who are against the use of this kind of materials claiming that they have no value. For instance, Kilickaya (2004) claims that authentic materials add a burden on teachers, as they may contain difficult vocabulary and structures which need more effort to be simplified and explained, in order to make them appropriate for their learners. Mihwa (1994) found that the level of reading comprehension of weak ESL learners was not affected by the text, regardless of its type, authentic or non-authentic. In addition, Kienbaum state that there are no significant differences in learners' performance: between learners using authentic materials and others whose traditional materials. Furthermore, it is a challenging issue for teachers to search for suitable authentic materials to design tasks for their learners. Miller (2005) also states that authentic materials are "too difficult and time consuming to select, edit and prepare." In addition, Martinez (2002) argues that authentic materials are regarded too culturally biased and difficult to

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comprehend by learners in the classroom. He also adds concerning the cultural effect, that "authentic texts from one culture may give a false impression to students from another, unless they are presented in an authentic context which makes it clear precisely what they exemplify." Kilickaya(2004) believes that using authentic materials with weak learners frustrate and de-motivate them, because they lack the required skills and vocabulary to deal with presented text, successfully. Guariento and Morley (2001, p. 347) assert "At lower levels... the use of authentic texts may not only prevent learners from responding in meaningful ways, but can also lead them to feel frustrated, confused and... de-motivated."

Conclusion

After going through the related literature, it is obvious that the use of authentic materials in language teaching is supported by many researchers. They regard the use of this type of materials as a useful means to motivate learners, arouse their interest and expose them to real language they will face in the real world. In addition, authentic materials encourage learners to learn a particular language successfully, because they notice they are dealing with the language in real life. authentic materials help to motivate learners learn the language by making them feel they are learning the 'real' language.

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