

# USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' ENGLISH SKILLS

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, authentic materials are considered as important tools for the teachers in improving their EFL students language skills and moreover as an effective way in transmitting the knowledge to the students. In this paper, the writer will discuss more about how the authentic materials use can improve students' four language skills since there are number of studies proved that authentic materials is useful in motivating and improving their language skills. Furthermore, this paper also will show the effectiveness of authentic materials applied on listening, speaking, reading, and writing classes.

Key words :Authentic materials, Language teaching, Language skills

## INTRODUCTION

Language is not the main thing in communication, but also in our learning. You cannot communicate well and understanding of a subject. English is the language mostly learnt by EFL students plays a central role for students in their learning processes. Considering its importance, EFL teachers must prepare some strategies in order to improve students' English skills.

In order to achieve this purpose, some teachers use kinds of strategies such as using media, role play, using ICT, or using authentic materials. This discussion will be focused on the significant effect of the use of authentic materials. Based on Geoffrey M. Maroko (2010), authentic materials are not prepared for language teaching, but for real-life use for both interactional and transactional purposes. Authentic materials are not only useful for understanding the language but also introduce the socio-cultural background of the language they learnt.

Language has a social function where we establish relationship. This relationship is finally called as society. Language and Society is important for anyone who wants to understand the way in which languages function in society. It will help the students to acquire an understanding of the different concepts and methods used to analyze language within different social settings

(<http://programsandcourses.anu.edu.au/course/ling6002>).

English is not the first language of EFL students, so they seem need to understand not only the language but also the "society" built behind the language. Researchers claim that when authentic materials used in learning purposes, students will have a sense that the real language for communication is being learnt (Al Azri & Al Rashdi, 2014). Using authentic materials as the teaching media will bring them closer to the target language culture which indirectly will make their learning more enjoyable and motivating.

Learning a language through authentic materials possibly creates an enjoyable situation and motivates the students as well. Merck Bernaus (2014) stated that motivation is possibly the main factor affecting students' foreign language acquisition, followed by socio-cultural factors. Motivation gained by the students may affect their achievement in four English skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It will be the main discussion in this paper, how far the authentic materials affect students' achievement in improving their English skills.

Authentic materials use in EFL language teaching because it can improve students' motivation, creating an interesting learning situation, where

finally authentic materials will affect students four basic skills in English.

### **DEFINITION**

There are various definitions of authentic materials. Authentic materials are defined as language samples that are created by native speakers for native speakers of the language (MetineeThanajaro, 2000). Another similar opinion comes from Geoffrey M. Maroko (2010) which sees authentic materials are not for language teaching purposes, but designed texts used for real life use for interactional and transactional purposes.

At first, authentic materials were used for native speaker only, but since 1970s some teachers used it for teaching purposes. The development of ELT finally places the authentic materials not only for native but also for EFL as their learning media. According to Jacobson et al (2003, as cited in Maroko, 2010), authentic materials as printed materials, which are used in classroom in the same way they would be used in real life. For this development of authentic materials use, Stubbs (1996, as cited in Maroko, 2010) also added that authentic materials in classroom are stretches of real language, produced by real speakers or writers for real audiences and designed to convey real message.

Stubbs statement finally gave the language teachers a description of the use of authentic materials. Authentic materials used in the classroom of EFL students are considered to introduce them not only to the language their learnt but also to the “life” behind the language.

### **THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS FOR EFL STUDENTS**

Since English is not the first language of EFL Students, teaching English is not a simple thing for some of English teachers. They have to use materials or teaching media which may motivate the students. Without any of it,

the students will gain nothing. Some researchers suggest that using authentic materials significantly will motivate and make learning languages interesting.

One of the researcher stated that authentic materials help motivate students learn the language by making them feel that they are learning the “real” language (Guariento & Morely, 2001 as cited in Al Azri & Al Rashdi, 2014). Do Thi Thanh Tra on his research focusing on teaching speaking using authentic materials (2009) suggested that using authentic materials is one way to effectively increase student's motivation at TBU to learn speaking in particular and English in general.

Academics claim that the purpose of using authentic materials is to prepare students for their social lives. The authentic materials are used in order to close the language gap between classroom knowledge and real life. The real language here means learning the language is not only a language, but also the students need to consider all the things related how the language used in its “real society”.

Geoffrey M. Maroko (2010) proposed 5 advantages of using authentic materials both for teacher and students. First, authentic materials will expose the students to the natural business language which will be helpful on their workplace. Second, it will bring reality to the classroom and make interaction meaningful. Other advantage is authentic materials will make the assessment and teaching to focus on skill rather than the facts of language.

The fourth advantages still based on Geoffrey, authentic materials will be readily available and inexpensive teaching resources as well. Lastly, it adds variety to classroom activities and support more creative approach to teaching. The students in this case, will have a chance to practice the skills learnt in the classroom in real life situation.

Getting motivated by using authentic materials and also studying the real English language use in classroom, will both indirectly or directly improving students' listening, speaking, writing, reading, and writing skills in English.

### **TYPES OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS**

Authentic material can be broadly classified into three categories . (Genhard, 1996 as cited in Maroko, 2010), they are authentic listening materials, authentic visual materials, and authentic printed materials. Further, authentic listening materials are mostly in form of audio materials such as taped materials, radio, interviews, radio news, songs, etc. while authentic visual materials can be in form of television programming and pictures such as commercials, quiz show, newspaper posters, post card, etc. and the last type, printed materials can be in form of writing text, for examples like news articles, dialogues, newspapers, short stories, plays, etc.

Various kinds of authentic materials are unlimited. Teachers may choose types of authentic materials for their students. But in other hand, teachers also have to choose the authentic materials which may suit their teaching and learning purposes. It means that, authentic materials used in classroom have to materials that are able to motivate, made the learning process interesting, and finally improve students' English skills.

Based on Geoffrey M.Maroko (2010), authentic materials chosen by the teachers should functions as:

- a. Instrumental: it helps the students get what they want.
- b. Regulatory: it contains the information that the students may follow.
- c. Interactional: it maintains and establishes a personal relationship with someone.

- d. Personal: it can express the students' personal thought.
- e. Heuristic: it can help the students to explore the world.
- f. Imaginative: it helps the students to create the imaginative world for others.
- g. Informative: it provides the information which is needed by the students.

### **AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ENGLISH FOUR MAIN SKILLS**

#### **a. Listening skills**

Listening as the verbal communication plays an important role in daily life and educational processes. Listening is also the basic of four main skills in English. In acquiring a language, people tend to listen first before they start to speak.

Since listening skill is the basic skill before comes to the next skill, teachers have to apply a suitable strategies for the students. The media used for listening practice is mostly in form of audio or audio-visual materials. Now the discussion comes to the effectiveness of using authentic materials for listening skills. As the writer discussed earlier, authentic materials will motivate and build an interesting learning situation. Now, how some researchers show the effectiveness of it on students listening skills?

First research was conducted by MetineeThanajaro (2010), on his dissertation thesis, he examined how the aural authentic materials effect the ESL students' listening skills. MetineeThanajaro than revealed that the use of aural authentic materials in ESL classroom had a positive effect on ESL students' motivation to learn the language. He also added that authentic materials helped increase students' comfort level and their self-confidence to listen to the target language.

The other researcher is Leila Ghaderpanahi, an Iranian who conducted

a study related to the development of EFL listening skills by using aural authentic materials. Based on the findings, she (2012) stated that listening comprehension in EFL students appeared to have improved after they had experienced authentic listening materials in class. Furthermore, she suggested that authentic materials used in listening practice should be implemented in any-foreign language learning.

Using authentic materials on listening as the basic skill in English, exactly improved students' motivation and their self-confidence. Moreover, aural authentic materials will improve their listening skills.

### **b. Speaking skill**

The next stage of learning a language is speaking skill. Similar to listening skill, speaking also plays an important role in a communicative environment. A good communication will happen when the language users can apply their listening and speaking skills well. Most teachers use visual or audio-visual media for speaking skill.

There will be many advantages for both teachers and students when they use visual or audio-visual media with its authentic content. Katarzyna Chmielowiec (2009) found that authentic materials in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) seem more interesting for the students than the ones prefabricated especially for the purpose of learning, because they provide insight into natural everyday language and situations. Moreover, authentic visual materials raise students' motivation and students are more willing to participate in communicative activities.

One example of audio-visual media mostly used by the teachers is Film. Based on Sherman (2003, as cited in Hiral Joseph Macwan, 2015) film has high potential for teaching grammar, social language and pronunciation, and also for practicing notional areas to do with daily life and human behavior. Hiral

Joseph Macwan (2015) herself added that authentic audio-visual material will develop students' speaking skill since they will have a discussion and exchange thoughts after they watch video or film.

We can see here, both learning listening and speaking always go together. Listening authentic audio-visual materials will indirectly give the students the knowledge of language use in spoken form. Furthermore, an authentic film used as students' learning material will finally show them the "real life" of its language.

### **c. Reading skill**

Reading is another skill of a language which also we mostly do in our daily life. When a person reads a written text means she/he receives a message the writer wrote in her/his text. Based on Sacha Anthony Berardo (2006), the reason for reading depends very much on the purpose for reading, they are reading for survival, for learning or for pleasure.

Reading for survival means find out information and can include street signs, advertising, and timetables. Reading for learning can be considered as reading activities done in the classroom for educational needs. While reading for pleasure means read something for entertaining purposes.

Reading skills seem quite simple, but of course it is not as simple as people think. We will get a better understanding in reading, only when we have a good knowledge in language vocabularies, grammar, and its sociolinguistics. Using authentic materials for reading considered as good strategies for EFL students.

Related to improving reading skill, authentic materials also give the reader the opportunity to gain real information and know what is going on in the world around them. Moreover, they have something to say, giving information or a review. They also produce a sense of achievement (Sacha Anthony Berardo, 2006),

Different visual aids like pictures, videos and projectors help the students

to understand the abstract ideas of the text and help in learning reading the language. Furthermore, Visual aids create an authentic communication between the readers and the text. It makes the reading process faster and active (Hiral Joseph Macwan (2015)

#### **d. Writing skill**

The last skill and considered as the most complicated skill is writing skill. Writing is the most complex skill since in this activity, a writer should understand all the things related to what they write and also have to be able to deliver the information or message in their writing to the readers well. Some academics believe that in order to have a good writing skill, a person should also have a good skill in his listening, speaking, and reading skills.

There are two main purposes for writing namely, writing for academic purposes, and writing for functional or operational purposes. Some writing associated with the first purpose include expository, argumentative, and descriptive essays. While for functional purpose includes letters, memoranda, directories, signs, manuals, forms, recipes, and minutes.

Authentic materials are also needed in improving this skill. Hiral Joseph Macwan (2015) stated on her study, one watches a film his speaking, writing and listening skills are developed. Through the suitable authentic materials teacher can motivate the students to gather more knowledge about the outside world. Also, the students have the chance to share their predictions and thoughts to the other students and thereby gain confidence in being able to communicate in English (MethelaRahman, 2013). Methela also added that authentic materials used in writing class from teachers and students perspective authentic materials can bring effective writing classes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the beginning, authentic materials were made for native speakers only, and not for teaching language purposes. But in 1970s, some teachers started using authentic materials on their classroom. Some researchers also proved that authentic materials could increase students' motivation and also created an interesting language learning situation, until it finally improved students' language skills.

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are four English skills. Applying authentic materials in learning those skills bring many advantages. Students will not only become more motivated but also they will be getting used to the social use of it language. They will understand how to use the language in its real life. Finally, the writer herself agree that the use of authentic materials will improve students' language skills as long as the teachers are able to choose an appropriate authentic materials based on their students' need.

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