

An Introduction to English Language Teaching

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First Semester
Lecture 12:

- **How Do Teachers Use Authentic Materials?**
- **What Problems Do Teachers Have with Materials?**



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The Need For Authentic Materials

Many English classes come with a textbook or curriculum for instructors to follow. This can be helpful when designing a course, determining learning outcomes, and assessing students. It also makes it easy for teachers to plan lessons and introduce concepts to students in a logical sequence.

There are many potential benefits to using prescribed curricula or materials to teach. However, these resources are not provided by every institution and even when they are, they often lack an authentic context in which students can practice English. In cases where these resources are not provided for a course, or where instructors wish to expose students to highly engaging opportunities to practice English, using authentic materials is an excellent option.

How Do Teachers Use Authentic Materials?



Teachers use authentic materials to get beyond the limitations of the textbook they are teaching. To do this, they need to go through the following steps:

1. Find an idea in the textbook that needs to be aided by authentic materials.
2. Locate the authentic materials that satisfy the students' needs and interests.
3. Create additional activities that make use of the authentic materials.

Selecting Authentic Materials



Authentic materials are an excellent resource in any teaching context. Sometimes educators work at institutions that provide lots of materials, while others may only provide a few or none at all. How to incorporate authentic materials depends on each teacher's preference and teaching situation. Materials can supplement an existing curriculum or textbook or can even serve as the basis for an entire course.

For instance, perhaps a textbook provides a unit on the **simple past tense** with practice dialogues and exercises for students to complete. An instructor could use different **news clips** or **articles** in English to have students apply what they learned about the simple past tense. Learners could watch the clips or read articles in small groups, and then use the simple past tense to write a summary of the news event to present to the class. A teacher might choose to use this type of activity regularly, perhaps as a weekly news overview that allows students to practice different targeted grammatical structures by presenting the news to classmates.

Using Authentic Materials To Develop Vocabulary

One challenge to consider when using authentic materials is that some of the vocabulary may be unfamiliar to your learners. For this reason, it is important to provide opportunities for students to learn new words and interact with them. Sometimes it is helpful for teachers to pre-select new words to teach students, and other times it is more beneficial for students to select the words themselves. Regardless, when special attention is given to unfamiliar words, authentic materials can provide a meaningful context for students to increase vocabulary.



Key Questions To Consider When Selecting Authentic Materials



There are some key questions to consider when selecting authentic materials to use with your students:

- What concept, skill, or language structure will students practice? How do I want my students to be able to use language, and how will this resource help them learn or practice?
- What is the language proficiency level of my students? What support will they need in order to access the content of the materials?
- What topics are interesting to my students?
- Do my students interact with English in their everyday lives? If so, in what contexts or settings do they use English? If not, what types of materials can I incorporate into instruction to motivate them to use English outside of the classroom?

Thinking about the answers to these questions will help you select materials that will allow students to practice targeted language skills, interact with English in a meaningful and relevant way, and maintain a high level of interest and motivation.

What Problems Do Teachers Have with Materials?



Based on Gebhard (2009), there are some problems that EFL/ESL teachers face include the following:

1. The teacher is forced to teach from the book: Some teachers are forced to follow a specific text. They are given actual lesson plans and supervisors make sure they follow all the steps. Unfortunately, some teachers just want to play safe by following the prescribed lesson plan. However, other teachers find their way to add additional materials while adapting the prescribed lesson plans. They might bring photos or pictures that correspond to the story line in a required reading, to make the reading more vivid. Some of them also negotiate an “authentic English” day with the students, providing students with a lesson based on authentic materials and media.

What Problems Do Teachers Have with Materials?



2. The teacher follows the textbook blindly: As it has been discussed before, following a textbook saves times, and beginner teacher can learn something about teaching from a text. But adhering to a textbook without considering the students' need may trivialize the experience for the students. But of course not all teachers just accept that as a problem without solution. Some of them want to be more than just technicians. They realize that the textbook should not be blindly followed as the only source of teaching.
3. The teacher lacks the experience to locate authentic materials: Novice teachers would like to aid their teaching with authentic materials. However, the lack experience in locating such materials. Likewise, some teachers find themselves in remote parts of the world where authentic English language materials are difficult to find.