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MERITS AND DEMERITS OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN TEACHING READING

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Annotation: *The author introduces the primary focus of the article, which is an exploration of commonly used materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, specifically reading texts, films and videos, and computer programs. The article aims to present a comprehensive list of advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of authentic texts and materials in the classroom and the significance of incorporating authentic texts into the classroom setting and highlights that these materials serve multiple functions.*

Key words: *reading, authentic materials, merits and demerits, teaching reading, reading texts; films and videos; computer programs*

Reading holds distinct meanings for individuals; for some, it is about recognizing written words, while for others, it is an opportunity to refine pronunciation and practice speaking. Regardless of its diverse interpretations, reading is a daily practice, integral to our lives yet often taken for granted. It's assumed to be a universal skill, but its purpose varies based on individual objectives.

In language education, the use of authentic materials in the classroom is a pertinent subject, especially for learners at the B2 level or for the lyceum students. These materials expose students to real language in real contexts, offering a practical approach to language acquisition. The advantages of incorporating authentic materials are manifold. They not only serve as powerful motivators, instilling a sense of accomplishment and encouraging further exploration but also reflect the evolving nature of language. With a wide variety of text types, these materials prove versatile, promoting different skills and allowing for repeated use and updates.

There is no doubt that today English teachers have a lot of choices in terms of teaching materials. Choosing them, we are to keep in mind that we should focus students' attention not only on grammar structures and vocabulary but prepare them for real communication where the knowledge of culture is sometimes crucial. Thus, the use of authentic materials can help solve this problem. The majority of scholars define authentic materials as materials, which are designed for native speakers; they are real texts,



designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. Basically, authentic materials provide the following benefits: motivation to learning; authentic cultural information; real language presentation; creative approach to teaching [1; 7-11]. There exist a lot of authentic materials like reading, newspapers, literature, video, TV, surveys, guest speakers, cultural quizzes / tests, role plays / dramatizations, songs, anecdotes, travel brochures, menus, catalogues, real estate pamphlets, phone books, CDs, the Internet, illustrations and so on.

In this article we are going to deal with the most commonly used materials at EFL classes: reading (texts); films and videos; computer programs and provide with the list of merits and demerits of using authentic texts and materials. The use of authentic texts in classrooms is important as it performs many functions: widening and reinforcement of language knowledge; language material training; development of abilities in oral speech; development of abilities in written speech [2; 1997].

When working with texts, a teacher can employ various exercises. These include pre-reading exercises, which focus on tasks such as title analysis, predicting contents, and exploring grammar and vocabulary. Another stage involves while-reading exercises, designed to enhance general perception, identify interesting segments for the reader, and select meaningful parts. Following the reading phase, post-reading exercises come into play. These exercises aim to check comprehension, interpret the text, and assess the ability to find specific information. Additionally, there are exercises specifically focused towards eliciting a personal response. These exercises aim to develop both oral and written abilities. The development of these skills not only assists teachers in structuring their lessons but also aids learners in comprehending the entirety of the text [3; 125-127].

Using video materials in the classroom environment can enhance students' motivation to learn a foreign language. This is because videos present real language and offer students an aesthetic insight into the culture. Video proves to be highly effective in teaching for several reasons. Firstly, it represents an authentic environment, providing a genuine context for language use. Additionally, videos offer examples of specific language functions in operation, allowing students to observe language use in practical situations. Videos also highlight authentic language interaction, capturing the nuances of communication that extend beyond mere words. Importantly, videos bring attention to nonverbal components of language, including eye movements, facial expressions, body language (such as various postures, gestures of the neck, hands, and limbs), and even the use of space. In terms of space language, the distance maintained during conversation often depends on the personal relationship between individuals. The spatial distance reflects interpersonal relations and the closeness of rapport [4; 1992].

Working with video, a teacher should include the following activities: pre-viewing (to acquaint students with the material they are going to watch, further better comprehension); while viewing (answer teacher's questions); post-viewing (discussions, role-playings, writing).

The idea of using computer programs into teaching is not a recent one. Its fundamental objective is to enhance the efficiency and productivity of both teaching and learning processes. By utilizing computer programs, students can assess their understanding, engage in various exercises, and communicate in written form. These tools offer a dynamic and interactive way to facilitate educational activities, providing



opportunities for self-assessment and fostering communication skills through digital platforms. The integration of computer programs aligns with the modernization of education, aiming to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

In addition to its benefits in communication, computer-mediated communication provides students with extra chances to plan and structure their discourse. It allows them to notice and reflect on language use within the messages they compose and read. With internet access, language learners can engage in communication with native speakers or other learners globally, offering a rich cross-cultural exchange. Moreover, the vast resources available online empower students to explore millions of files worldwide and access authentic materials that align with their personal interests. Examples of such authentic materials include newspaper or magazine articles, rock songs, novels, radio interviews, movie reviews, traditional fairy stories, and more. These diverse materials contribute to a comprehensive and contextually relevant language learning experience.

Using a computer program a teacher can easily notice the mistakes, which a student does. If the learner is in the habit of making the same mistakes then some extra exercises must be offered to him to avoid making them anymore. In addition, working with a computer provides the following opportunities. It can motivate the studying of different structures, grammar rules, and vocabulary by showing how they are needed in communication and it gives a student the ability to work in an individual way. There's a chance to return to any task that was left or omitted and correct the answer to any question and offers several exercises in which a certain structure is trained. The use of a computer provides a chance to involve every student of the class in a studying process. Results of the work are shown as soon as the task is done that gives the possibility to organize self-dependent work. But in spite of all these advantages the role of a teacher in the educational process is still important.

We should remember that a computer program, like any other tool used in teaching (e.g. textbooks, worksheets, newspaper, charts, bulletin boards, educational visual aids, realia, whiteboard, SMART board, overhead projector, tape-recorder, video tape, CD, computer, etc.), does not bring improvements in learning itself.

Moreover, there is no any unique book or computer program that can be suitable for every learner. That is why a teacher must select programs, which answer definite requirements. The requirements can be quite different depending on the aim which we set. For instance, the utilization of computer programs enables language learners to engage in grammar and vocabulary exercises, practice oral speech through listening and repetition, engage with short articles, texts, and articulate their opinions in writing. Therefore, when selecting computer programs to teach written communication skills, it is essential to consider specific aspects alignment of the program with a defined purpose, relevance to the studied topic, vocabulary, and grammar, user-friendly interface with clear task explanations, incorporation of essential rules for correct foreign language writing, and provision of relevant examples. Effective use of computer programs can significantly contribute to the development of language skills and the ability to express oneself in a foreign language.

Planning a lesson, a teacher should try to use authentic materials because they provide the opportunity to demonstrate language and speech material of a foreign language as well as widen learner's ideas about national peculiarities, mentality of other



people; help to know and compare customs and traditions of his own country and the country, which language a person studies; broaden the notion about surrounding world; give the source for a future utterance and the basis for the exchange of opinions [1; 7-11].

Despite these advantages, it's crucial to acknowledge that authentic materials may pose challenges, including difficult language, unnecessary vocabulary, and complex structures, especially in lower-level classes. To address these issues, teachers should carefully select materials suitable for their students' abilities, provide relevant exercises to overcome difficulties, and assist students in comprehending, remembering, and applying new material.

In summary, authentic materials play a multifaceted role in language teaching by enabling learners to engage with real language and content, transcending mere focus on form (grammar and vocabulary). The systematic integration of these materials in classes imparts the understanding to students that they are learning a language as it is authentically used beyond the classroom, thus preparing them for real communication.

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