

Applying Authentic Materials in Teaching English Grammar to Improve EFL Student's Skills (Teachers' Attitude)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is basically to analyze the use of authentic materials in improving the understanding of students by teachers in teaching grammar in English as a foreign language (EFL) to the first-year students of Abyan University in South of Yemen. The teachers of EFL from faculties of education in Zingibar and Lowder participated in the current study. The paper is divided in two parts that is; the theoretical aspects and the practical aspects. Under the theoretical part the researcher describes the term grammar and authentic materials and gives reasons as to why teaching grammar using authentic materials can be beneficial in the learning process. The practical part on the other hand focuses on conducting interviews to the teachers. The results of the study revealed that most EFL teachers hold a positive attitude towards using authentic materials in teaching grammar. Therefore, positive reflections are observed from teachers who approve on Teaching and learning grammar proficiency with the use of authentic materials.

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1. Introduction

Using of authentic materials in teaching English Grammar is one of the most imaginative and motivating technique of teaching high level courses with the aim of pushing the students towards getting to advanced levels in Grammar by assimilating English learners wherever it is required into using grammar appropriately, furthermore, assisting the students who have great problems in with respect to learning grammar. The teacher hence provides supplementary materials to overcome such problems. These supplementary materials are generally known as authentic materials. Azimov and Shchukin (1995: 34) defined authentic materials as "consider authentic materials – oral and written texts – to be the real product of native speakers which are not meant for educational purposes". This means that, these authentic materials are designed for the native speakers to communicate and for real-life goals. So, the teacher's role is to reflect and react along with these materials in order to facilitate the objectives of these materials to their learners and further improve their relationships in the real world.

The paper starts by notifying and discussing authentic materials in FLT (Foreign Language Teaching) followed by selection of Authentic Materials, Methodology, Participants, findings and discussions of the research. It describes the methodology of research, presents the results of teachers' interview, and provides guidelines for using authentic materials in teaching grammar to foreign learners.

The current study is an attempt to explore deeply the teachers' views in Abyan University towards using authentic materials in their EFL classes while teaching English grammar.

1.1 Authentic Materials in Foreign Language Teaching

The issue of using authentic materials as a means of teaching a foreign language or second language remains a controversy. Some believe that using authentic materials could be utilized as a means of developing language competency within learners; others have some suspicion about this. There are several definitions of the term authentic materials which have been given in the field of language teaching. Swan (1985: 85) states that, "authentic material gives students a taste of 'real' language in use, and provides them with valid linguistic data for their unconscious acquisition processes to work on". As a result, using authentic materials can make learners become motivated towards studying English language. In

contrast, using only the textbooks in teaching grammar make the students bored. In addition, the term "authentic text" is defined by Nunan as (1999: 80):

drawn from a wide variety of contexts, including TV and radio broadcasts, conversations, discussions and meetings of all kinds, talks, and announcements [as well as] magazines, stories, printed material and instructions, hotel brochures and airport notices, bank instructions, and a wide range of written messages.

Observances made in EFL classes using materials from origins of the native speakers give better results towards achieving results in teaching Grammar; it leads the learners towards attaining more motivation to learning and prepares them well in their social lives. As well as helps students to be confident to continue on their language learning and aids them to understand grammar terms easily and help to identify errors very much easily.

Eventually, the benefits of this method becomes to enhance the student's skills in understanding the rules of a language in a better way and helps to accept the foreign language in general as mentioned above. On the other hand, to what extent the use of authentic materials can particularly develop the students in grasping grammar is a concern for the study. For instance, according to Thornbury (2004: 79), he discusses the motivating factor for using authentic materials while he evaluates his grammar lessons based on the use of authentic materials.

1.2 The Selection of Authentic Materials

Using incorrect teaching materials makes the students face difficulties in learning a foreign language. There are many sources of authentic materials currently, of which teachers can use to teach their students. Nowadays, authentic materials become more accessible and easier to use in the class rooms. In fact, not all authentic materials can be used as supplementary material in an EFL atmosphere, the teachers should be aware about what they can use and their choice to using the authentic materials in teaching grammar because it gives a different atmosphere to the students while learning grammar as it can develop students understanding towards the topic, and easily avoiding students' being bored while learning grammar by using only their textbooks. Many scholars and for instance (Genhard, 1996; Berardo, 2006; Ianiro, 2007; Tamo, 2009; Jordan, 1997; Kilickaya, 2004 and Hedge, 2000) have mentioned two types of sources for authentic materials, the first one being such as printed materials, like newspapers, magazines, brochures, novels, short stories, and the second one being audio-visual materials such as TV and radio programmes, movies, songs, and even YouTube films.

2. Methodology

This study is descriptive research that Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 124) define descriptive research as "a collection of techniques used to specify, delineate, or describe naturally occurring phenomena without experimental manipulation". They mention many techniques to collect data such as tests, surveys, questionnaires, interviews and observations. The researcher is going to collect data by interviewed the teachers which help to investigate the problem.

a. Interview

An interview is a collecting data instrument in which the researcher meets the respondents and asks questions orally and records their answers. The purpose of using this tool is stated by Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 160), saying that "interviews elicit unforeseen data". In this study, an open semi-structured interview is used to validate collected data about teachers' and students' opinions and attitudes towards using authentic materials in teaching grammar during classroom practices.

The research was conducted in 2021 at the Abyan University. The study was designed by using qualitative research methodology. Teachers' interviews were used in the process of the current study. There were ten teachers of English Education who participated in the study see (Appendix A). This is so since, the effectiveness of the use of authentic materials in teaching grammar appropriately is the aim of this study and it was to find out the teachers' view on the use of authentic materials in teaching grammar. The researcher undertook the interviews of all the English Grammar teachers as the participants in this study.

b. Research Questions (Teachers' Interview)

- 1) What are the teachers' attitudes toward using authentic materials in teaching English grammar at Abyan University?
- 2) Do you prefer to use authentic materials in your class in teaching grammar at Abyan University? If so Why?
- 3) Do you prefer using authentic materials in earlier stages? If so Why?
- 4) What sources of authentic materials are available for you to use in teaching grammar?
- 5) What is the role of using authentic materials in teaching grammar?
- 6) Do you think using authentic materials need specific training?

7) When should authentic materials be introduced?

3. Finding and Discussion

As already mentioned, the next objective of this study is discussing the teachers' responses to the questions of the interviews. It conveys the purpose of this study, mainly to investigate the teachers' attitude towards using authentic materials in teaching grammar for EFL students in their first year in Abyan University. The teacher's interviews consisted of seven questions, the aims of which were to investigate the teachers' attitudes.

Accordingly the teachers' interviews produced results and the results of the first question show that teachers of English grammar believe that authentic materials support students' learning of a target language more sufficiently with resources to grasp the rules of grammar. Also they have positive attitudes towards using authentic materials with their students in classes. Furthermore, they consider authentic materials to help and motivate students to become perfect in grammar due to use of authentic materials which tend to encompass what the students need to use in their daily life endeavors.

Answers given to the second question teachers revealed their preference towards using authentic materials in teaching grammar, they continuously searched for the best methods while teaching grammar which they perceived to be adequate and efficient for their students. The teachers justified their answers by saying that, they believe that using such materials develop the student's grammar skills, it is a direct way towards providing the students with English language which they need to use in real life situations, further it increase the student's curiosity towards knowing their cultural variations as well as it leads towards motivating the students to learning English. In approval to this the participants are of the same view as Tomlinson (2012: 16), who argued that "authentic materials can provide meaningful exposure to language as it is actually used to motivate learners and help them develop a range of communicative competencies and enhance positive attitudes towards the learning of a language".

Regarding the third question about which level the teachers prefer to use such materials in teaching grammar, a considerable number of teachers tend in same education system in their country where only one language, they consider Translation should be positively used compared to the school other subjects that are taught by using students' mother tongue. On the other hand, the majority of teacher's responses in fact incline to that authentic materials can be used at the intermediate levels but differences between cultures should be taken in mind. That means the teachers should be aware in order to choose wisely for their students because some authentic materials may interfere in such a level. As a result, the students will attract interest in learning grammar. Moreover, the participants' answers were in accordance with Richard (2004: 110) who stated that: "teachers should use materials that are appropriate for the linguistic abilities of their students".

Concerning the fourth question, regarding to the sources of authentic materials available while teaching English grammar, as per previously mentioned the authentic materials are TV and radio broadcasts, conversations, magazines, stories, printed material and instructions. Teachers replied that they used different sources, such as audio, newspaper, magazines and mostly articles taken from the internet. Unfortunately, all teachers mostly used the printed and audio type of materials and they totally avoided the video type because there are no equipment available in their faculties.

In regard to question five of the Teacher's interview about the role of using authentic materials in teaching grammar, nowadays teaching and learning grammar in Yemeni context keep students remembering the grammatical rules only to do the exercises and pass the exam. As a result, the students are unable to communicate by the language and express what they face in their real-life. However, using such authentic materials lead students to grasp the knowledge of how they can learn English language and use as well as prepare the students towards communicating well in the language. Moreover, the teachers' view that less Translation and more use of authentic materials will be more meaningful for the students to use in learning grammar. So, using authentic materials is required to the students who are acquainted with the basics rule of Grammar.

Question six was about if using authentic materials need specific training, the teachers' answers were that they need the training for using such materials, they believed that training would help them enhance their teaching process and skills in delivering English grammar rules to their students at classes. Moreover, they suggested that it will be much more better if the materials are designed by the drafters of Grammar Courses in Abyan University to overcome the obstacles in selecting the appropriate materials. Moreover, they demanded holding workshops to guide them in selecting and adapting to authentic teaching materials that their students need.

Regarding the seven question there are several delays as for when should authentic materials be introduced, however, bringing in authentic materials is still a controversial issue in teaching grammar. Majority of the teachers tend to perceive that they use authentic materials during teaching, while some of them used authentic materials after teaching to increase the student's ability to stick the information in their minds. Teachers have more emphasis on guided learning. They do more work and repetition than using early Translation. They giving more presentation, authentic materials and activities like group work. All of the teachers agree that using such materials lead to the most important of the students' motivation and interest during learning of English grammar.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results obtained from the analysis of the study, it was discovered that the views of teachers toward using authentic materials in teaching English grammar with first level students of Abyan University in South of Yemen. Using authentic materials to emphasis on grammar is an essential method to show students how various structures by the native speakers are used in real language. The results of the current study reveal that all the teachers of English grammar tend to apply authentic materials in the early stages so as to give an opportunity to their students to learn English and further facilitate the use of English language early. Moreover, the result exposed that the teachers use different sources of authentic materials which are available such as printed materials; newspapers and magazines. Furthermore in some cases when used personally they use internet, audio and video. Additionally, the teacher participants demanded such items which require specific training to prepare them well on how they can choose such materials suitably to their student's level wise.

Finally, for the further research the researcher would like recommend on the emphasis of the use of American or British television programs along with their impact plus more frequent use of authentic language combined with the common language in English teaching to the pupils' increasing their ability to acquire English language.

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