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## Yemeni University Teachers' Perspectives on the Use of Authentic Materials in English Language Teaching and Learning

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### **Abstract:**

*The current study aims to investigate the opinions of the Yemeni university teachers on the extent to which they and their learners use authentic materials in the teaching and learning of English. These opinions can reveal whether these materials are adequately used in English Education or not. To attain the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was administered via Google Forms to the teachers of English in the faculties of education in three Yemeni universities: Lahej, Aden and Abyan. A total of fifty-six teachers participated in filling out the questionnaire and their responses were analyzed. The findings of the study disclosed that the Yemeni university teachers of English are aware of the importance of authentic materials, whereas their learners show limited awareness. Moreover, the teachers' use of authentic materials is restricted by the learners' weak level in English and the unavailability of the equipment necessary for using them in the classroom. The study recommends to supply the Yemeni universities with the suitable equipment for using authentic materials and improve EFL learners' level to make the use of these materials possible to gain their advantages.*

**Keywords:** authentic materials, English, Yemeni universities, classroom equipment.

### **Introduction:**

Many EFL teachers and learners may mistakenly believe that the world of teaching and learning English is limited to the materials presented in the classroom, particularly those prescribed in the English syllabus. Consequently, they assume that mastering vocabulary items, rules, and expressions in these materials is sufficient to accomplish the learners' ultimate goal, i.e. using English like its native speakers. In fact, understanding the English spoken by teachers and classmates, and producing comprehensible responses, does not necessarily prove mastery of the language. EFL learners have also to understand the English spoken by its native speakers and

communicate with them effectively when they are involved in real-world conversations. The real use of English requires that the learners have to be frequently exposed to authentic content of English which can be largely different from their teachers' and classmates' output in speed, pronunciation, intonation, variety of vocabulary items and expressions.

The range of using English in real world is broader than its limited use in the classroom; it opens new horizons for EFL learners to see how English is used outside their small world, i.e. the classroom, and how their English has to be in order to be acceptable to the native speakers of this language. The real use of English can be illustrated to EFL learners through the use of authentic materials which cover, according to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2002), any materials taken from real world resources, like newspapers, magazines, TV shows etc. These materials are not originally produced for the teaching purposes, but the educational institutions and teachers make use of them in the instruction of language to illustrate its real use. It is widely believed that authentic materials are highly beneficial because they expose learners to a variety of words, expressions, and how language is used in real situations.

#### **Statement of Problem:**

The researchers interviewed three Yemeni university teachers of English about their learners' level, and the teachers reported that a large number of the learners struggle to understand the materials used in classroom learning tasks. They spend considerable time trying to understand even simple words, either by checking dictionaries or asking their classmates and teachers. Furthermore, the learners' vocabulary items and expressions included in their output seem to be limited and restricted to what is learned in the classroom. This situation raises questions about the extent of the learners' weakness and the degree to which the teachers and learners use authentic materials in English teaching and learning at the Yemeni universities. These questions motivated the researchers to investigate the issue further in order to obtain deeper insights and offer possible solutions.

#### **Significance of the Study:**

This study is significant because it provides useful information on the place of authentic materials in the field of the English language pedagogy in the Yemeni universities, and the obstacles faced in this aspect. Moreover, it shows the teachers' evaluation of the EFL learners' abilities to produce good output with sufficient vocabulary items and expressions. All of this can help build a clear image of the role and use of authentic materials in English education at the Yemeni universities.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

The study attempts to explore:

1. The extent of using authentic materials by the Yemeni university teachers of English in the classroom.

2. The difficulties the Yemeni university teachers of English face in using authentic materials.
3. Whether the Yemeni university teachers of English think that their learners use authentic materials in their study of English.
4. The opinions of the Yemeni university teachers of English on their learners' output, particularly the use of various vocabulary and expressions.

### **Literature Review:**

Davies (2007), Richter (2006) and Wallace (1992) defined authentic materials as those materials taken from the real-life language resources and employed in classroom language pedagogy. Actually, these materials are not produced originally for language pedagogy, but their use in the classroom can help learners get language more efficiently. There are many examples of authentic materials, and the list includes TV and radio programs, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, movies and songs. Moreover, the literary works are considered good authentic materials for language learning (Nasu, 2015; Teranishi, Saito & Wales, 2015).

According to Gebhard (1996), authentic materials can be classified into four types: realia, visual materials, printed materials and listening materials. In detail, realia include real objects such as dolls, while authentic visual materials and authentic printed materials can take the form of pictures and newspapers respectively. For authentic listening materials, they may include recordings of real conversations and radio programs, or audiovisual resources such as movies. The second type of authentic listening materials, i.e. audiovisual materials, is widely used; Chan, Lei & Lena (2014) found that language teachers depend a lot on video clips to teach listening skills to learners as such clips are available on the Internet and can be easily downloaded. The researchers emphasized the importance of such clips, not only in developing the learners' listening skills, but also in understanding the body language of the native speakers of the target language. All types of authentic materials are now common in daily life, and technology plays a crucial role by providing abundant resources that make language learning more accessible and engaging (Chapelle, 2003).

Historically, the advent of the communicative teaching approach focusing on analyzing the learners' needs, delivering meaning and using communicative tasks, has drawn attention to the use of authentic materials in classroom. The connection between preparing learners to be good communicators of language and the situations taking place in real life seems to be stronger in this approach. In other words, learners have to be exposed to authentic language text from the real world and do authentic tasks to achieve the goal of using the language, i.e. to be mastered communicatively (Lynch & Mendelsohn 2020, Richards 2006, Trappes-Lomax 2004). The discussion above has disclosed that authenticity is not only restricted to the materials but it also covers learning tasks and tests such as cloze-test (Richter, 2006). For Breen (1985), he divided authenticity into four types:

- The authenticity of the language texts employed in the teaching-learning process in the



classroom.

- The authenticity of the interpretations of these texts got by the learners in the classroom.
- The authenticity of the learning tasks.
- The authenticity of social context of the language used in the classroom.

Many researchers have highlighted the role of authentic materials in the learning of language. Kot (2015) emphasized that the use of authentic discourses in language education helps learners to notice the real nature of language used in real world including various expressions, rich vocabulary that classroom language cannot offer. In this regard, Burns & Seidlhofer (2020, P. 253) argued that “Authentic texts can introduce students to a full range of transactional and interpersonal speech, as well as the reality, unpredictability and complexity of spoken communication”. Similarly, Wichmann (1997, p. xvi) stated that “the preference for ‘authentic’ texts requires both learners and teachers to cope with language which the textbooks do not predict”.

Bringing the real nature of language into the classroom allows learners to compare their performance of the language with that of native speakers. Such a comparison, in turn, is valuable as it directs their attention to their level, weaknesses and the type of remedy. However, Lynch & Mendelsohn (2020), in their article *Listening*, advised to avoid the use of fully authentic activities from the beginning and preferred their gradual existence. In the same vein, Rogers & Medley (1988) asked teachers to take into their consideration their learners’ levels and needs when they use authentic materials in the classroom, as using very difficult authentic materials can be frustrating. The positive effect of using authentic materials is not limited to the language competence, but it extends to the psychological side. Cakir (2006) and Prescott (2006) said that learners are more motivated when up-to-date authentic materials are used in the classroom and they show their pleasure to know the culture of the language to be learnt, and to get language exposure that is different than the usual one in the classroom. For Otte (2006), he emphasized that the use of authentic materials in language education reinforces learners’ confidence and improves their listening skills.

However, there is debate among researchers over the use of authentic examples and the nature of authenticity. One view, as stated above, praises the use of authentic examples in language education and prefers them to the artificial ones given by the teachers or/and the courses:

*It is now generally accepted that it is extremely difficult to invent examples which sound realistic, and which have all the features of natural examples. I am convinced that it is essential for a learner of English to learn from actual examples, examples that can be trusted because they have been used in real communication (COBUILD, 1990, in Sealey & Carter, 2004, p. 64).*

Similarly, Willis (1990) criticized the use of artificial examples under the pretext of simplifying language learning, and called instead for authentic materials because of their real context.

By contrast, Laufer (1992, in Fontenelle, 2011) argued that the examples invented by lexicographers can be more useful for language learners. In the same vein, Prodromou (1996) referred that authentic texts possess a quality of ‘here and nowness’, and using them out of context and time renders them inauthentic. Perhaps, Widdowson is the researcher who directed much criticism of authentic materials because of their lack of the real context:

*...I objected that one could not assume that what was real for users was also real for learners since what made the language real was not its occurrence as text but its use as discourse and this crucially depended on contextual factors that the corpus did not record and the classroom could not replicate. (2009: xxv).*

Richards (2006) summarized the main criticisms of authentic materials in contrast to the created (artificial) ones as follows:

- Created materials can stimulate the language learners like the authentic ones.
- Complexity and irrelevance are often found in authentic materials.
- Created materials can be graded better than the authentic ones.
- Teachers have to make more strenuous efforts when using authentic materials.

Despite these criticisms, Richards stated that the impact of the communicative teaching approach is still strong, so the use of authentic materials in language pedagogy is prevailing.

In light of the discussion above, it seems that using both authentic and created materials can be the best compromise between the two conflicting opinions regarding using authentic materials in language instruction. More importantly, learners need to understand how language is used outside their classroom through authentic materials.

#### **Method:**

##### **Participants of the Study:**

The study was conducted at three Yemeni universities: Lahej, Aden, and Abyan, during the second semester of the academic year 2024–2025. Fifty-six English teachers from the departments of English in the faculties of education in these universities participated by completing the study’s questionnaire. Their responses were analyzed to evaluate the use of authentic materials in the Yemeni context and to identify the obstacles hindering their effective implementation.

##### **Research Tool:**

The study followed the quantitative approach. A questionnaire of 17 items was administered via Google Forms to the teachers of the English language in the departments of English in the faculties of education in the three Yemeni universities. All questionnaire items were close-ended

except one item including the phrase “Other. Please specify...” which is considered open-ended. The items fell into two categories: rating scales and multiple-choice. The rating scales were “Yes – No” items and 4-point scales which, in turn, had two forms: “To a large extent, To some extent... etc.” and “Always, Sometimes... etc.”. To ensure face and content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts holding PhDs in Applied Linguistics. For reliability, it was established using Cronbach’s Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

## Results and Discussion:

This section presents the questionnaire results along with a general discussion of their implications. Inferences are then drawn in relation to the objectives of the study.

The first part of the questionnaire investigated the teachers’ awareness of the importance of authentic materials and their perceptions of the benefits of using them to English language education. Regarding awareness, the results revealed that the majority (75%) of the teachers considered authentic materials important *to a large extent*. 23% of them said that they are important *to some extent*, and only 2% chose ‘To a little extent,’ while none selected ‘Never’. These results indicate that the Yemeni university English teachers are generally aware of the significant role authentic materials play in language learning. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of the teachers agreed on the benefits of using authentic materials listed in Item No. 2 including ‘improving language skills, increasing learners’ engagement, increasing learners’ motivation, and enhancing the awareness of culture’. These benefits got 98%, 82%, 96% and 93% respectively. The results suggest that the teachers of English do not only recognize the overall importance of authentic materials but also have a clear understanding of their specific benefits to the teaching and learning process.

The subsequent items in the questionnaire shifted from the teachers’ attitudes toward authentic materials, i.e. the theoretical dimension, to the practical dimension, namely their classroom practices. First, the teachers were asked about the frequency of using authentic audiovisual materials, like movies, TV shows, etc., in their classroom. The results referred that the majority (87%) of them stated they *never* use authentic audiovisual materials, while the options: “Always”, “Sometimes”, and “Rarely” got 4%, 2%, and 7% respectively. This means that this type of authentic materials is largely avoided by the Yemeni university teachers of English, so the EFL learners have very little chance to benefit from these materials. For the place of the authentic listening materials received only by the auditory sense, like recordings of radio programs, it was slightly better than the one of the authentic audiovisual materials; the majority (70%) of the teachers stated they *never* use these materials in their classroom, and 14% said they *rarely* use them. However, “Always” and “Sometimes” got 11% and 5% respectively. The results showed that the use of the authentic listening materials does not normally take place in the classroom. These results show that authentic listening



materials are generally absent from classroom practice, which in turn limits opportunities for the learners to develop their listening skills through exposure to authentic input.

The items 5 and 6 in the questionnaire focused on authentic visual and printed materials. For the use of authentic visual materials, like pictures, in the classroom, the results were similar to those of authentic audiovisual materials; A large majority of teachers (84%) reported that they never use authentic visual materials in teaching English, while only 7% indicated that they always use them. In addition, 5% reported using them “Sometimes,” and 4% selected “Rarely.” According to the results, the use of authentic visual materials is little to a large extent and this can be probably attributed to that their major use is largely limited to show the meanings of new simple vocabulary items, and this function has almost no place in tertiary education, like the use of realia. Regarding the use of authentic printed materials, such as newspapers, in the classroom, the results indicated that their existence in the classroom is not widely different than the types discussed above. While 75% of the teachers reported never using authentic printed materials and 7% rarely, 11% said they always use them, and 7% selected ‘Sometimes’. The results clarify that despite authentic printed materials are normally available and do not usually require any equipment to be used in contrast to the types of authentic listening materials, the majority of the teachers still do not make use of them. Overall, these results, like those discussed above, are unfortunately, still discouraging.

Next, the teachers of English were asked whether they employ the social media applications in sharing authentic materials with their learners. The results showed that 54% of them *never* share authentic materials with their learners through social media applications, and 23% chose “Rarely”, while 9% and 14% reported ‘Always’ and ‘Sometimes,’ respectively. Hence, it can be said that the teachers’ tendency to use this way in their teaching of English is weak, although such a way can be easy and relaxing for both teachers and learners, and may not be restricted by time or equipment, like the situation in the classroom.

The questionnaire then explored the reasons behind the teachers’ practices regarding the use of authentic materials in classroom teaching. The teachers were asked about the ease of accessing the online resources of authentic materials. The results indicated that 46% of the teachers think it is easy *to some extent* to access the resources of authentic materials, and 43% think it is easy *to a large extent*, while 7% and 4% reported it was easy to a little extent or never, respectively. Hence, it can be noticed that it is relatively easy to access the online resources of authentic materials by the teachers of English. Then, the teachers were also asked whether it is easy to find authentic materials suitable for the topics to be taught, and the results were good and encouraging. Half of them said that this process is easy to a large extent, and 36% considered it easy *to some extent*, while 5% and 9% reported it was easy to a little extent or never, respectively. Thus, the teachers of English do not generally find difficulties in this area.

The relationship between authentic materials and the learners' level in English was also assessed. First, the teachers of English were asked to evaluate whether it is easy for them to find authentic materials suitable for their learners' level. The results illustrated that 45% of them think that finding such authentic materials is easy *to a little extent*, and 25% chose "Never", while the options "To a large extent" and "To some extent" got 16% and 14% respectively. Second, the teachers were asked to express their opinions on the learners' level in English. The results clarified that the majority (61%) of them deemed this level *weak* in comparison to 39% of them who stated it is *good*. This can be the reason behind the difficulty of finding authentic materials that fit the learners' weak level. Finally, the teachers were asked to state whether their learners' level in English affects their choice of authentic materials to be used in the teaching of English, and the results indicated that the majority (73%) admitted this effect, while the minority (27%) did not. Hence, it can be said that the teachers do not face difficulty in finding authentic materials that are suitable for the topics to be taught; however, the difficulty exists when the learners' weak level in English is taken into their consideration in the process of choosing the materials. This fact can make the teachers of English refrain from using authentic materials in the classroom.

There are two other factors that can control the use of authentic materials in the classroom, i.e. the availability of both equipment and time. The results regarding the equipment aspect showed severe difficulty as the majority (80%) of the teachers said that the equipment, like smart screens, projectors, required to use authentic materials in the classroom is *never* available, and 9% said that the extent of its availability is *little*. "To a large extent" option got only 4%, whereas "To some extent" got 7%. These results align with the results of authentic audiovisual materials, and refer that one main reason of not using this type of materials and authentic listening materials in general is the unavailability of the equipment. For the availability of time to use authentic materials in the classroom, the situation was different as more than half (51.7%) of the teachers said that the time is available *to a large extent*, and 17.8% selected "To some extent", while 12.5% and 17.8% reported it is available to a little extent or never, respectively. Thus, the Yemeni university English teachers report a lack of necessary equipment for using authentic materials, although time availability is generally not a problem. In fact, the lack of equipment, combined with learners' low proficiency, leads the teachers to avoid using authentic materials in their teaching. Authentic materials, such as audiovisual ones, require advanced equipment like smart screens; without it, the teachers cannot use these materials in the classroom.

The final part of the questionnaire dealt with the teachers' opinions on three aspects related to their learners. First, the teachers were asked whether their learners are aware of the authentic materials importance for learning of English. The results showed that the highest percentage (43%) of the teachers considered that the learners are aware *to a little extent*, 29% believed they were never



aware. The options “To some extent” and “To a large extent” got 23% and 5% respectively. Second, when the teachers were asked whether their learners actually make use of authentic materials in learning English, the majority (60.7%) of them reported never. Another 16% believed this occurs to a little extent. Regarding “To a large extent” and “To some extent”, the results were low as usual: 9% for the first option and 14% for the second one. Finally, the teachers were requested to offer their opinions on whether their learners’ output includes various English vocabulary items and expressions. The results were similar to the previous ones as the majority (55%) of the teachers rejected the idea that their learners’ output has various English vocabulary items and expressions, and 25% believed it does *to a little extent*. Again, “To a large extent” and “To some extent” options got low percentages: 7% and 13% respectively. The results of these three final items disclosed that the learners in general lack the awareness of the authentic materials importance, make little use of these materials in their learning of English, and their production of English does not include a wide range of English vocabulary items and expressions according to their teachers’ opinions.

In sum, most of the teachers of English in the Yemeni universities of Lahej, Aden and Abyan are aware of the importance of authentic materials for English learning. However, this awareness is not reflected in their practices in the classroom as their use of authentic materials is very limited for many reasons. Several difficulties are encountered and the list includes problems in finding the materials that accord with both the topic to be taught and the weak level of the learners. Moreover, the departments of English generally lack the equipment for using some types of authentic materials in classroom. Furthermore, the teachers do not generally think that their learners make use of authentic materials in their learning of English, and the learners’ output includes limited vocabulary items and expressions.

### **Conclusion:**

This study has shown that the use of authentic materials, particularly listening materials, in English teaching and learning at the Yemeni universities is limited, and identified the obstacles involved. Thus, to improve the use of authentic materials in English education in the Yemeni universities, the following is recommended:

1. Departments of English in the Yemeni universities should be supplied with the equipment required to use authentic materials in classroom, like laptops, smart screens, etc., as such equipment not only helps in this field, but also helps in giving lectures more effectively.
2. The Yemeni universities should facilitate the access of the teachers of English to the online resources to make the process of getting authentic materials easier. For example, the teachers should be granted free access to the Internet and free subscriptions to e-libraries.
3. The teachers of English in the Yemeni universities should be encouraged to use authentic audiovisual materials because of their positive role in enhancing the learning of English.

4. Social media applications should be employed by the university teachers of English to be a means of sharing authentic materials and of applying e-learning in general.
5. The university teachers of English in the Yemeni universities should be encouraged to use authentic printed materials as such a type does not require any equipment to be used in the classroom.
6. The Yemeni EFL learners' level in English should be improved by giving the learners varied extensive tasks focusing on all the skills of the English language, its vocabulary items and grammar.
7. The Yemeni EFL learners' awareness of the importance of authentic materials should be raised to help them learn English and its real use, and they should be motivated to use English constantly inside and outside the classroom.

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