

## **“What I see, I understand”: Attitudes of Selected University Undergraduates towards the Utilization of Authentic Materials in Teaching in an ESL Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

Authentic materials are those materials in the form of radio and songs, visual materials in the form of TV shows and movies, printed materials such as magazines, posters, and maps, and reader real-world objects such as dolls used for teaching. This study primarily examined the attitudes of English students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka regarding the use of authentic materials in learning English as a second language. The research involved focus group discussions, where 10 students in each of the four levels of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria were selected through a purposive sampling technique making a total of 40 students. Discussion on authentic materials was recorded, later played back, and analysed from the point of view of micro-interlocutor analysis. It was observed that many of the students from all levels of the Department were ignorant of the use of authentic materials in learning English. While students especially at the 200 level accepted that they use authentic material in the form of audio in the language laboratory during their phonology classes, students at other levels claim ignorance of the knowledge or use of authentic materials by their lecturers. This study is a clarion call for the need to inculcate the use of authentic materials in teaching especially in an ESL classroom since they facilitate learning, make it interesting, and easy, and expose the learners to real-world learning materials. Real-life materials are, therefore, considered suitable materials for language learners as they reflect the originality of language, raise the curiosity of learners to learn, contain cultural content, and encourage proficiency in the use of the language. While non-authentic materials remain useful as they cannot be completely ignored, efforts should be made by institutions of learning to provide authentic materials so that the teachers will be encouraged to use them during teaching and learning in ESL classrooms to facilitate learning.

**Keywords:** Authentic materials, Non-authentic materials, ESL, Effective communication, Micro-interlocutor analysis

### **Introduction**

In a second language classroom situation, searching for appropriate and

effective teaching materials for teaching English occupies a great space in teaching and learning. According to

Fontiveros-Malana (2018), “learning a second language encompasses a wide variety of situations which may be in the forms of acquisition through direct conversation with native speakers, reading judiciously plenty of published materials, watching regularly some movies...” (p. 1).

The issue of the use of authentic materials in teaching English has become a subject of research in recent times because of the challenges associated with learning a second language. Very often, textbook materials are modified for heterogeneous classes to make some degree of difference, and to introduce elements of choice and individualisation. Therefore, authentic materials are resources introduced by teachers into their teaching to aid and enrich English lessons. These materials get the learners exposed to the language as it is used in the real world. For Prasad and Akhtar (2019), authentic materials develop creativity among teachers as well as learners and are highly motivating. They provide knowledge of real situations in life and make learners aware of these situations.

Genhard (1996) sees “authentic materials as materials that contextualise the language learning process and help to bridge the gap between the language being taught in the classroom and the language used by real people in real situations in the real world” (p. 3). For Hyland (2003), authentic materials provide language learners with models of target-like language use which can promote their ability to use the language in real-life situations (p. 94). This, in turn, “triggers the process of natural

language acquisition” (Hwang, 2005, p. 3).

The benefits of using authentic materials over non-authentic materials in teaching are enormous. While non-authentic materials are textbook materials that are “planned, designed, and produced based on the curriculum and policy in each country (Febrina, 2017, p. 3), authentic materials in the form of real-world materials keep students informed so that they can have the fundamental educational value and appreciate the reflection of language change in the materials used. This helps teachers and students to stay informed about the most recent facts. In addition to this, scholars like Moya (2000 In Saleh, 2017, p. 64) believe that authentic materials “can lower the degree of anxiety when students face new situations in the target language”. Even, Kiliç & Ilter (2015) in their investigation into the attitudes of students in EFL classes on the use of authentic materials showed that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards the use of authentic materials. In summary, therefore, the use of authentic materials in the classroom by teachers gets the learners’ attention for real-life learning, motivates the learners, encourages teachers to adopt effective teaching methods, and presents information about culture in its authentic form.

It is important to state that before the commencement of the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect data for the research, the participants were ignorant of the meaning of authentic materials. In explanation, the students only admitted that they use

audio materials only in their phonology classes. Other authentic materials like TV shows, cartoons, newspapers, and magazines, among others, were not known to them. Therefore the questions raised during the focused group discussions helped the students to express themselves on the issue of authentic materials and how happy they will be if their lecturers incorporate them during teaching. Thus, this research sets out to examine the extent to which undergraduates of the English Language Department, University of Nigeria are exposed to authentic materials and their attitudes (opinions) concerning the use of authentic materials in an ESL classroom.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Scholars like Dörnyei (2002), and Sun (2010), among others, see the use of authentic materials in the classroom in teaching the English language as an effective way that will facilitate learning. Every institution, therefore, that wishes to improve the standard of learning, especially the English language, is expected to inculcate the use of authentic materials in teaching and learning. However, researchers: Boyle (2011), and Alsharif (2016), have shown that in many schools, most teachers rely on note-taking and abstract lecturing to teach the English language. The use of authentic materials such as projectors, audio-visual tapes, charts, and the like is lacking. This is not unconnected to the fact that they may be lacking the information needed on the effects of the use of authentic materials in teaching the English language in the classroom. Several scholars have carried

out studies on the use of authentic materials in teaching the English language in the classroom. For instance, Genhard (1996), Shrum and Glisan (1994), and Febrina (2017) among others have written extensively on the positive effects of the use of authentic materials on teaching and learning the English Language. Nevertheless, the researcher sees the need to investigate the attitudes of students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nigeria, towards the use of authentic materials by their lecturers in the teaching of English as a second language.

### **Authentic Materials vs. Textbook-Based Materials**

Velazquez and Redmond (2007) opine that foreign language teachers normally apply two kinds of texts for instruction; either authentic or simplified. To Velazquez and Redmond both kinds of texts are valuable. They value simplified texts compared to authentic texts because they consider them as easy-to-comprehend language that is tailored to students' language ability at a specific level (p. 135). They further argue that simplified texts can reinforce vocabulary and grammar and prepare learners for reading authentic texts. Unlike Velazquez and Redmond (2007) who favour contrived materials in textbooks, Shrum and Glisan (1994) highlight that: "Unfortunately, many language textbooks contain poorly motivated and illogically sequenced texts and dialogues that do not reflect real-world language or situations, although they usually contain multiple examples of the

grammar being presented" (Shrum and Gilsan, 1994, p. 28).

Su (2007, p. 23) concludes that textbook-based materials are far from reflecting real language use and they are teacher-centered rather than learner-centered. Also, learners are poorly motivated when working with such materials. More so, Berardo (2006) criticizes non-authentic materials for being unnatural unlike what learners will encounter in the real world. He believes that for teaching reading skills such materials are not suitable. Therefore, a study like this into the students' attitude to the use of authentic materials by teachers in learning becomes important since in this part of the world, learning and using English appropriately and effectively is essential because English is the official language of the country where this research is based.

### **Literature Review**

The study of the use of authentic materials in Hadero Secondary and Preparatory School is the basic objective of Gencha, Daniel & Limore (2019). They investigated the use of authentic Materials in English lessons. The researchers used quantitative and qualitative (Mixed) type of research designs. Using questionnaires, interviews, classroom observation, and textbook analysis helped the researcher to triangulate the data easily. Eighty students were selected from grade eleven as participants of the study. Forty-four of them were male students and thirty-six were female students. The findings from the questionnaire submitted by the students show that the

majority of the students responded that their English teachers never use authentic materials during English lessons. Aside from the students, the teachers were also interviewed. 11 teachers were interviewed. Based on their response, most of the teachers (i.e. 8 teachers) responded that they hadn't used authentic materials in English lessons because of inaccessibility (T5, T6, and T10) and the huge contents of the text (T1, T3, T4, T7, and T8).

On the other hand, Febrina (2017) examines the usefulness of authentic vs non-authentic materials in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia. The researcher observed that there is a gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language used in real life. In fact, according to him, many university students in Indonesia are still reluctant to speak in English. After critically discussing the issue surrounding the use of authentic materials and non-authentic materials, Febrina (2017, p. 10) suggested that both authentic and non-authentic materials are effectively implemented in English language classrooms as they positively support the teaching and learning process of English classrooms.

Peacock (1997), examined the use of authentic materials and their implication towards the South Korean university students.' His study involved 31 university students who were divided into two experimental classes. He applied both authentic materials and artificial materials such as course books in the two classes. Peacock (1997) in this study discovered that authentic materials can improve learners'

motivation and participation in the classroom. The data showed that students on task behaviour and motivation increased during the meeting when genuine materials were delivered. He argued that the learners are being triggered to be involved in the classroom when the teachers use authentic materials. Therefore, as their motivation increases, their participation in the classroom grows as well.

The present study shares some commonalities with Peacock's (1997) above. For instance, the present study was not limited to studying how the use of authentic materials motivates the students, but their panoramic attitudes towards the use of authentic materials were examined. Secondly, his subjects were South Korean university students while the present study has the English student of the University of Nigeria as its object of study.

A quasi-experimental study was carried out by Gilmore (2007) to examine the impact of implementing authentic materials and their relation to communicative competence. Like Peacock (1997), the participants of Gilmore's (2007) study, were also university students. Both studies were conducted in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries. The participants in Gilmore's study above were 62 university-level students in Japan. Gilmore compared the communicative competence of both the control group which used textbooks and an experimental group which used authentic text as materials. The communicative competence was analysed through eight tests: a listening test, a pronunciation test, a C-test, a

grammar test, a vocabulary test, a discourse completion task, an oral interview, and a role-play. The findings of Gilmore (2007) indicate that students who use authentic materials develop their communicative competence better than students who do not (p. 99). Another study by Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler (2002), which had participants of 159 adult literacy students in the United States shows that authentic materials facilitate learners' literacy development.

The study reveals that authentic materials and authentic activities in the classroom have a better positive effect on the literacy of adult learners who have also become used to reading and writing more complex materials outside the classroom after the introduction of authentic materials. Additionally, Baghban and Ambigapathy (2011), who study the effectiveness of using authentic materials in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses review authenticity and authentic materials as opposed to textbook-based materials. They focused on the nature, quality, as well as approaches that support the use of authentic materials such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI). Baghban and Ambigapathy above, reviewed many studies carried out by many scholars and came to the conclusion that "textbook-based materials are far from reflecting real language use and they are teacher-centered rather than learner-centered" (Baghban & Ambigapathy, 2011, p. 6). Also, learners are not adequately motivated to work with textbook-based materials. Thus, they argue that even

though authentic materials are ample, the selection to inculcate them into the learning/teaching context is not accomplished without hard work by the parties involved.

In conclusion, all the studies reviewed have attempted in one way or the other to examine how the use of authentic materials can benefit learners, especially in either English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) situations. Having therefore placed this study side by side with the already reviewed studies, this study will contribute a lot towards the advancement and improvement of the use of authentic materials in ESL and EFL situations like Nigeria, having exposed the extent to which students are ignorant of the use and why they must be incorporated into teaching and learning since they facilitate learning.

#### **Analytical Approach For the Study.**

This study benefits from Onwuegbuzie *et al* (2009) Micro-Interlocutor Analysis. Onwuegbuzie *et al* (2009) propose Micro-interlocutor analysis as an alternative form of data analysis in a focused group discussion. In micro-interlocutor analysis, “meticulous information about how a participant responds to each question, the order in which each participant responds, response characteristics, the nonverbal communication used, and the like are collected, analysed, and interpreted” (Onwuegbuzie *et al* 2009, p. 1). It is necessary to point out that Micro-interlocutor analysis is an analytical approach under conversational analysis. Conversational analysis is a qualitative framework for collecting and analysing

Focused Group data in social sciences research. Since “conformity of opinion within focus group data is an emergent property of the group context, rather than an aggregation of the views of individual participants” (Sim, 1998, p. 348). Onwuegbuzie *et al* (2009) therefore, suggest that “in addition to providing verbatim statements (quotations) made by focus group participants, whenever possible, researchers delineate information about the number or proportion of members who appeared to be part of the consensus from which the category or theme emerged” (p. 8). He furthermore advises that “researchers should specify the number or proportion of members who appeared to represent a dissenting view (if any) as well as the number of participants who did not appear to express any view at all” (p. 8).

The use of Micro-Interlocutor analysis therefore becomes valid for this study because it became the basis for the analyses on focus group discussion with students since it specified the number or proportion of participants who represent a dissenting view as well as the number who did not express any view at all.

#### **Methodology**

The data for this study was collected through a focused group discussion (FGD) with the students of the English Department of University of Nigeria Nsukka. The students were randomly selected in their lecture classrooms from across the four levels of the students of the department- first, second, third, and final year students- and were invited to

the faculty of Arts Quadrangle where discussions took place.

Ten FGDs were selected from each of the levels through a Purposive Sampling technique making a total of 40 FGDs. A tape recorder was used to record the focused group discussions. Some questions were raised by the researcher based on the subject of the research and discussions opened up from there. See appendix (i) for the questions. The Purposive Sampling technique becomes necessary to select the discussions that are useful for the study because not all the students who took part in the FGD paid full attention. After playing back the discussions, the analysis was done in sequential order following the questions that led to the group discussions. Simple Percentage was used to draw conclusions.

The simple percentage Formula =  $\frac{\text{No. of participants}}{\text{Total no. of participants}} \times \frac{100}{1}$

**Data Presentation**  
**Frequency Distribution of the Focused Group Discussion Using Simple Percentages**

- Question 1: Do you know about teaching and learning with authentic materials in English Language Classrooms?**

**Table 1: Question 1**

Levels	No. of Students	No Positive (Yes)	% Positive	No Negative (No)	% Negative
Yr1	10	0	0%	10	100%
Yr2	10	10	100%	0	0%
Yr3	10	3	30%	7	70%
Yr4	10	3	30%	7	70%

**Question 2: Having been intimated about what authentic materials are, would you prefer them to non-authentic materials?**

**Table 2: Question 2**

Levels	No. of Students	No Positive (Yes)	% Positive	No Negative (No)	% Negative
Yr1	10	10	100%	0	0%
Yr2	10	10	100%	0	0%
Yr3	10	8	80%	2	20%
Yr4	10	7	70%	3	30%

**Question 3: What kinds of authentic materials would you prefer?**

**Table 3: Question 3**

Total No. of Students for all Levels - (40)	No. for Radio	No. for TV Shows	No. for Magazines	No for Songs	No for Audio Tapes
	10	40	30	38	35
<b>Percentages (%)</b>	25%	100%	75%	95%	87.5%

**Question 4: In which course(s) would you prefer the use of authentic materials?**

**Table 4: Question 4**

Total No. of Students for all Levels - (40)	All English Courses at all Levels	%	Some Specific Courses in Yr1/Yr2 Like Phonetics and Phonology	%
40	35	87.5%	5	12.5%

**Discussion**

It is obvious from the data in **Table 1** that year two students of the Department of English and Literary Studies, UNN had the highest

percentage of participants (100%) who claimed to know about authentic teaching. This is because it is at this level that the students are taken to the language lab for drills on sound articulation. This is as opposed to Year 1 students who claimed not to have any knowledge of the use of authentic materials by their lecturers. However, for Year 3 and Year 4 students, only 30% claimed to know about authentic materials. At these levels, many of the students claimed not to know about the use of authentic materials by their lecturers. It is also obvious from the focused group discussion that this was the students' first exposure to the concept of authentic materials. For the Year 2 students, they agreed that audio tape is the basic type of authentic material used in their language lab classes for the whole of the academic session.

In **Table 2**, the students were asked if they would prefer the use of authentic materials to non-authentic ones having been intimated about what they are. 100% of Year 1 and 2 participants agree that they prefer the use of authentic materials over non-authentic materials while 80% of Year 3 and 70% of final year students preferred the use of authentic materials. The students here stated that the use of authentic materials makes learning fun and easy. The other 20% and 30% of Year 1 and Final year students respectively were of the view that they prefer non-authentic materials. One of the participants remarked that what matters most is the competency and communicative skills of the lecturer and that this, to a great extent, determines

the bulk of the issue. A competent and highly communication skilled lecturer is an authentic material himself, he said.

In **Table 3**, the participants were asked the kinds of authentic material they would prefer for teaching them. 25% of the participants went for radio sets, 100% went for the use of TV Shows in teaching, 75% went for magazines, 95% went for the use of songs as authentic material, and 87.5% of the participants went for audio tapes. It is obvious that from the analyses in **Table 3**, the students will be more in love with the TV shows for teaching than other forms of authentic materials probably because they are already comfortable with watching TV shows and see it as relaxing. However, the use of the radio set as an authentic material seemed not to go well with the participants since only 25% of the participants preferred it.

Finally, in **Table 4**, the students were asked the course(s) they would prefer the use of authentic materials. While 87.5% of the participants stated that they would prefer the use of authentic materials in all courses and levels of the Department, while 12.5% of the participants said that they would prefer them in some specific courses like Phonetics/ Phonology for Years 1 and 2 students. In summary, the students who had witnessed the use of audio tape and phonetic devices during their Spoken English laboratory drills agreed that:

1. It helped them to master the correct pronunciation of the native speakers of the language.
2. Authentic based textbooks recommended for the course



like Peter Roach's *Phonetics and Phonology* and *Spoken English Dictionary* facilitate their transcribing competency.

3. It made their classes quite interesting and fun and therefore captivating.
4. It exposed their unidentified weaknesses as regards to sounds and sound patterns of English.
5. It motivated them to aim for perfection towards the mastery of the language as the native speakers themselves. One of the participants remarked, 'I want to one day, teach the native speakers their language'

### Conclusion

Authentic materials are widely appreciated by scholars as a beneficial medium in English language classrooms as this is of great advantage "for English language teaching in terms of incorporating up-to-date content and effective teaching approaches in the curriculum to fulfill the 21<sup>st</sup>-century teaching and learning goals..." (Mai, 2018, p. 134). Moreover, the purpose of learning a foreign or second language is to be able to use it effectively in real life. Real-life materials are, therefore, considered the appropriate materials for language learners as they expose the originality of language, raise the curiosity of learners to learn, contain cultural content, and encourage proficiency in the use of the language. Although the use of non-authentic materials such as textbooks is not as

natural as authentic materials, their use in the language classroom is also prominent since both materials (authentic and non-authentic) can be combined because of the different roles they play in the English language classroom.

### Pedagogical Implication

The study therefore suggests that efforts be made by institutions of learning to provide authentic materials so that the teachers will be encouraged to use them during teaching and learning in ESL classrooms to facilitate learning. However, while non-authentic materials remain useful as they cannot be completely ignored, authentic materials have proven to make teaching and learning easy, productive, and interesting to ESL users who find it difficult to effectively and appropriately communicate in English.

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