

Developmental Features of Using Authentic Materials in Teaching English to Non-Native Speakers

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ABSTRACT

The use of authentic materials has become an important approach in teaching English to non-native speakers because it provides exposure to natural language and real-world communication contexts. This study aims to examine the developmental features, benefits, challenges, and pedagogical considerations of using authentic materials in English language teaching. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed through a literature-based review of relevant studies concerning authentic materials in EFL and ESL contexts. The findings indicate that authentic materials, including videos, newspapers, podcasts, advertisements, interviews, and everyday dialogues, contribute to vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking skills, reading comprehension, communicative competence, learner motivation, anxiety reduction, and cultural awareness. Authentic materials also help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and practical language use. However, their linguistic and cultural complexity may create difficulties for non-native learners. Effective implementation therefore requires careful material selection, adaptation, scaffolding, and appropriate technological support. Authentic materials can provide a meaningful, development-oriented approach to English language teaching when used appropriately aligned with learners' proficiency levels and learning objectives.

Keywords: *Authentic Materials, English Language Teaching, Non-Native Speakers, EFL, Communicative Competence.*

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1. | INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to non-native speakers requires learning materials that not only support linguistic accuracy but also provide meaningful exposure to language as it is used in real-life communication. Traditional classroom materials often emphasize controlled language and textbook-based exercises, which may create a gap between classroom instruction and practical language use. In this context, authentic materials have become increasingly relevant in English language teaching because they expose learners to natural language, real-world contexts, cultural expressions, and communicative situations (Richards, 2017; Nunan, 1999). Authentic materials include resources created for native speakers, such as newspapers, advertisements, podcasts, interviews, videos, television programs, and everyday dialogues. Their use can therefore provide learners with language input that is more closely connected to actual communication.

The use of authentic materials is particularly important for developing communicative competence among non-native English learners. Authentic materials provide language in context and can introduce vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, pronunciation, accents, and cultural nuances that are often less visible in conventional textbooks. Mishan (2005) emphasizes that materials reflecting real-life language can increase learner engagement and motivation, while Tomlinson (2012) highlights their contribution to cultural awareness and language learning. Similarly, Ahmed (2017) indicates that authentic and culturally appropriate materials can enrich traditional English lessons and make learning more meaningful. These perspectives support the view that authentic materials can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

Empirical studies further demonstrate the developmental benefits of authentic materials. Polat and Erişti (2019) found that authentic video materials significantly improved listening skills and reduced listening anxiety among learners with different levels of English proficiency. Namaziandost et al. (2022) reported improvements in reading comprehension and reading motivation, as well as reduced reading anxiety among learners exposed to authentic materials. Treve (2023) similarly found that learners exposed to authentic materials demonstrated improved language learning outcomes compared with those relying on traditional textbook materials. In the context of engineering education, Saienko and Shevchenko (2020) showed that authentic videos substantially improved engineering students' listening and speaking skills while also strengthening their understanding of specialty-related vocabulary and topics. Shorakhmetov (2024) further emphasizes that authentic materials support language acquisition, communicative competence, engagement, retention, and overall language proficiency.

Despite these benefits, the use of authentic materials among non-native speakers also presents challenges. Authentic resources may contain complex linguistic structures, unfamiliar cultural references, idiomatic expressions, or vocabulary that

exceeds learners' proficiency levels, potentially causing frustration or disengagement (Gilmore, 2007). Febrina (2017) also notes that although authentic materials reflect natural language, their complexity requires careful consideration in tertiary EFL contexts. Therefore, their effective implementation requires appropriate selection, adaptation, and pedagogical scaffolding. Afitska (2016) emphasizes the importance of context- and language-specific materials and scaffolding to support both language and subject learning, while the integration of technology can further assist teachers in adapting authentic materials to learners' needs.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on the developmental features of using authentic materials in teaching English to non-native speakers. It examines their contribution to vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking skills, communicative competence, motivation, and cultural awareness, while also considering the challenges and pedagogical strategies required for their effective integration into EFL classrooms. The study aims to highlight how authentic materials can provide a more contextualized and meaningful approach to English language learning while remaining responsive to learners' linguistic proficiency and educational needs.

2. | RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the developmental features of using authentic materials in teaching English to non-native speakers. The method was selected to enable an in-depth description and synthesis of the benefits, challenges, and pedagogical considerations associated with the integration of authentic materials in English language instruction. The study focused specifically on authentic materials such as videos, newspapers, advertisements, podcasts, interviews, television programs, and real-world dialogues that provide learners with exposure to naturally occurring language and communication contexts.

The data were obtained through a literature-based review of relevant academic publications addressing authentic materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. The reviewed literature included studies discussing the effectiveness of authentic materials in developing language skills, communicative competence, motivation, cultural awareness, and learners' affective aspects. Particular attention was given to studies involving non-native English learners and, where relevant, university or tertiary-level contexts. The literature included studies by Saienko and Shevchenko (2020), Shorakhmetov (2024), Polat and Erişti (2019), Namaziandost et al. (2022), Treve (2023), Febrina (2017), and other works concerning materials development and pedagogical scaffolding.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis. First, relevant information from the selected literature was identified and organized according to the main focus of the study. Second, recurring findings were compared to identify common developmental benefits of authentic materials, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking skills, reading comprehension, motivation, anxiety reduction,

communicative competence, and cultural awareness. Third, challenges associated with authentic materials were examined, including linguistic complexity, unfamiliar cultural content, and the need to adjust materials to learners' proficiency levels. Finally, pedagogical strategies for addressing these challenges were synthesized, particularly material selection, adaptation, scaffolding, and the use of technology.

The findings from the reviewed studies were then interpreted comparatively to identify consistent patterns and provide a contextualized understanding of how authentic materials can be effectively integrated into English instruction for non-native speakers. This procedure enabled the study to connect empirical findings with pedagogical considerations while maintaining its central focus on the developmental features of authentic materials in English language teaching.

3. | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature analysis indicates that authentic materials have an important developmental role in teaching English to non-native speakers because they provide learners with exposure to language as it is naturally used in real-life contexts. Unlike highly controlled textbook materials, authentic resources such as newspapers, advertisements, podcasts, interviews, videos, television programs, and everyday dialogues expose learners to natural vocabulary, expressions, communication patterns, and cultural contexts. This exposure helps bridge the gap between classroom instruction and actual communication (Richards, 2017; Nunan, 1999). The reviewed literature consistently suggests that authentic materials can make English learning more contextualized, meaningful, and closely connected to learners' communicative needs.

One of the most evident benefits concerns vocabulary development. Authentic materials present vocabulary within meaningful contexts rather than as isolated words, allowing learners to encounter collocations, idiomatic expressions, specialized terminology, and expressions associated with particular communicative situations. Guariento and Morley (2001) found that authentic materials can support vocabulary development because learners encounter language through contextualized tasks. Ahmed (2017) similarly explains that authentic and culturally appropriate materials enrich conventional English lessons and provide meaningful language-learning experiences. This finding is particularly relevant for non-native speakers because contextual exposure can help learners understand not only the meaning of vocabulary but also how particular expressions are used in communication.

Authentic materials also contribute significantly to listening and speaking development. Audio and audiovisual materials expose learners to natural pronunciation, accents, intonation, speech patterns, and communication styles that may not be adequately represented in scripted classroom dialogues. Gilmore (2007) reported that learners exposed to authentic audio materials performed better in listening activities than learners who primarily practiced through scripted dialogues. Polat and Erişti (2019) likewise demonstrated that authentic videos were effective in improving foreign-language listening skills and reducing listening anxiety among learners at

different proficiency levels. Their findings further indicate that improvements in listening were associated with the development of other language skills, including reading, writing, and speaking.

The effectiveness of authentic videos is also evident in specialized higher education contexts. Saienko and Shevchenko (2020), focusing on engineering students, found that regular use of authentic videos substantially improved listening and speaking performance. Their study also showed improvements in students' overall language achievement and understanding of specialty-related vocabulary and topics. These findings indicate that authentic materials can be particularly useful when their content is connected to learners' academic fields, as they simultaneously provide language input and opportunities to engage with subject-specific knowledge.

Another important result concerns reading comprehension and learner motivation. Namaziandost et al. (2022) found that exposure to authentic materials improved reading comprehension and reading motivation while also reducing reading anxiety among EFL learners. Similarly, Treve (2023) reported that learners exposed to authentic materials achieved better post-test outcomes than those relying on traditional textbook materials. The improvement included vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, and overall language proficiency. These findings suggest that authentic materials can contribute not only to linguistic development but also to learners' willingness and confidence to engage with English.

The literature also identifies motivation and engagement as important developmental outcomes. Mishan (2005) emphasizes that learners tend to become more engaged when learning materials reflect real-life language use. Shorakhmetov (2024) similarly reports that authentic materials can improve engagement, retention, communicative competence, and overall language proficiency. Because learners encounter language in situations that resemble communication outside the classroom, authentic materials can provide a stronger sense of relevance and purpose. This relevance may encourage learners to participate more actively and develop greater confidence in using English.

Cultural awareness represents another important contribution. Authentic materials contain cultural references and social practices embedded within language use, enabling learners to understand how language operates within particular cultural contexts. Tomlinson (2012) argues that materials development should consider the relationship between language and culture, while Ahmed (2017) emphasizes the importance of culturally appropriate authentic materials. Authentic videos, travel content, advertisements, news reports, and other real-world resources can therefore expose learners to cultural norms, values, expressions, and communication practices that cannot always be adequately represented through conventional textbooks. This exposure can support intercultural competence and prepare learners for communication across different cultural contexts.

However, the results also demonstrate that authentic materials are not automatically effective simply because they are authentic. Their linguistic and cultural complexity can create difficulties for non-native speakers. Gilmore (2007) notes that learners may experience difficulties when authentic materials contain unfamiliar vocabulary, expressions, accents, or cultural references. Febrina (2017) similarly identifies a gap between classroom English and real-life language use in the Indonesian EFL context, while emphasizing that the complexity of authentic materials needs to be carefully considered. Martinez (2002) also points to the difficulty of adapting authentic resources for classroom purposes when their original structure does not correspond directly with instructional objectives.

Consequently, effective implementation requires careful selection and pedagogical adaptation. Materials should be matched with learners' proficiency levels, learning objectives, and contextual needs. Afitska (2016) emphasizes the importance of academically appropriate, context-specific, and language-specific materials, as well as scaffolding to support learners' language and subject development. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis provides a relevant theoretical basis because learners benefit from comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their existing proficiency level. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory further supports the importance of interaction, context, and scaffolding in enabling learners to engage meaningfully with language.

Technology can strengthen this process by enabling teachers to adapt authentic resources to different learning levels. Captions, interactive materials, guided questions, vocabulary preparation, and structured discussion activities can help learners overcome linguistic complexity while maintaining the authenticity of the original resource. The reviewed literature therefore indicates that authentic materials are most effective when authenticity is combined with appropriate pedagogical support rather than being presented without adaptation.

Overall, the results demonstrate that authentic materials provide multidimensional benefits for non-native English learners, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking development, reading comprehension, motivation, anxiety reduction, communicative competence, and cultural awareness. At the same time, their effectiveness depends on appropriate material selection, contextual relevance, scaffolding, and adaptation. The findings support the central argument of this study that authentic materials can provide a more meaningful and development-oriented approach to English language teaching by connecting classroom learning with real-world language use, while pedagogical intervention remains necessary to ensure that learners can engage with authentic content effectively.

4. | CONCLUSION

The study concludes that authentic materials provide significant developmental benefits in teaching English to non-native speakers by connecting classroom learning with real-world language use. Materials such as videos, newspapers, podcasts, advertisements, interviews, and everyday dialogues expose learners to natural

vocabulary, expressions, pronunciation, communication patterns, and cultural contexts. The reviewed literature indicates that their use can support vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking skills, reading comprehension, communicative competence, learner motivation, and cultural awareness, while also contributing to the reduction of language-learning anxiety. Authentic materials are particularly valuable because they provide contextualized language input and opportunities for learners to engage in communication that mirrors real-world situations. However, their effectiveness is influenced by the linguistic and cultural complexity of the materials. Non-native learners may experience difficulties when materials contain unfamiliar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, accents, or cultural references. Therefore, authentic materials should not be used without pedagogical consideration. Effective implementation requires careful selection according to learners' proficiency levels and learning objectives, together with appropriate adaptation, scaffolding, and technological support. Overall, authentic materials can serve as an effective and meaningful approach to English language teaching when their authenticity is combined with appropriate pedagogical guidance. This approach enables learners to develop language competence while becoming more prepared to communicate confidently and effectively in real-world contexts.

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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