

The Integration of Authentic Materials in English Language Teaching in Libyan Secondary Schools from a theoretical perspective

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ABSTRACT: The present study investigates the role and impact of integrating authentic materials into the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in Libyan secondary schools. Despite the mounting evidence for the efficacy of authentic materials in enhancing communicative competence and motivation in learning environments, the Libyan context faces a number of challenges in implementing these materials on a large scale and in a systematic manner. This present study explores the theoretical underpinnings of authentic materials, their benefits for Libyan learners of English as a foreign language, and the practical challenges that teachers face. The study also puts forward strategies for effective integration. The present study synthesises extant literature and studies conducted in Libya, with the objective of providing a comprehensive overview and offering recommendations for enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in Libyan secondary schools.

Keywords: *Authentic materials, communicative competence, English Language Teaching (ELT), Libyan secondary schools, teacher training.*

المخلص: تبحث الدراسة الحالية في دور وتأثير دمج المواد الأصلية في مناهج تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT) في المدارس الثانوية الليبية. على الرغم من الأدلة المتزايدة على فعالية المواد الأصلية في تعزيز الكفاءة التواصلية والتحفيز في بيئات التعلم، يواجه السياق الليبي عددًا من التحديات في تنفيذ هذه المواد على نطاق واسع وبطريقة منهجية. تستكشف هذه الدراسة الأسس النظرية للمواد الأصلية، وفوائدها للمتعلمين الليبيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، والتحديات العملية التي يواجهها المعلمون. كما تطرح الدراسة استراتيجيات للدمج الفعال. تجمع هذه الدراسة بين الدراسات الموجودة والدراسات التي أجريت في ليبيا، بهدف تقديم نظرة شاملة وتقديم توصيات لتعزيز ممارسات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT) في المدارس الثانوية الليبية. الكلمات المفتاحية: *المواد الأصلية، الكفاءة التواصلية، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، المدارس الثانوية الليبية، تدريب المعلمين.*

1. Introduction

The contemporary globalised world renders robust English language proficiency imperative for individuals worldwide, thus rendering effective English Language Teaching (ELT) a pivotal component of education systems on a global scale. In the Libyan context, where English is

designated as a foreign language (EFL), the mastery of this skill is imperative for academic, professional and global engagement. Whilst conventional ELT systems characteristically depend on the utilisation of textbook materials that have been simplified and specially designed, a mounting consensus is emerging within the discipline of language pedagogy regarding the substantial advantages of employing authentic materials. Authentic materials are defined as any spoken or written texts not created specifically for the purpose of language teaching, but for real-life communicative aims (Nunan, 1999; Harmer, 2001). Examples of these genres include, but are not limited to: newspapers, magazines, television programmes, songs, movies, brochures, advertisements, and online content.

In the context of contemporary Libyan education, there has been a discernible focus on the refinement of the curriculum and teaching methodologies in recent decades. This endeavour has placed a pronounced emphasis on the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), as evidenced by Alorebi & Carey's 2017 study. The use of real-world language is an integral component of CLT, which naturally facilitates the incorporation of authentic materials. However, despite the acknowledged theoretical advantages and the positive attitudes among a considerable number of Libyan EFL teachers towards authentic materials, the practical implementation of these materials in secondary schools remains a complex issue. The present study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the current state of affairs, the benefits, challenges, and potential solutions related to the utilisation of authentic materials in Libyan secondary schools.

2- Literature Review

2-1- Defining Authentic Materials in ELT

The notion of "authentic materials" has been the subject of extensive discourse and elucidation within the domain of English language teaching (ELT), with numerous scholars proffering nuanced perspectives. The concept of authenticity is fundamentally associated with a connection to real-world language utilisation.

Nunan's (1988–1989) definition of authentic materials as "spoken or written items not intended for the purpose of language instruction" provides a useful point of reference. In a similar perspective, Harmer (2001) characterises these materials as "texts designed for native speakers; they are real texts; designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language"(p.101). This notion has been previously articulated by Peacock in 1997 and Gilmore in

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2007, both of whom emphasised that authentic materials are produced for bona fide communicative purposes, rather than pedagogical ones.

In order to proceed with any academic investigation, it is imperative to distinguish between authentic texts and authentic discourse. Widdowson (1990) advances the argument that although a text may be considered a bona fide document of native speaker behaviour, it attains the status of "authentic discourse" only upon the engagement of a native speaker response. Breen (1985) goes on to provide a more detailed exposition on four categories of authenticity that ought to be given full consideration in any language learning context:

- *Authenticity of the texts used as input.*
- *Authenticity of the learners' interpretations of such texts.*
- *Authenticity of tasks conducive to language learning.*
- *Authenticity of the actual social situation of the language classroom.*

It can thus be concluded that authentic materials are not merely concerned with their provenance; it is also imperative to consider the manner in which they are used and the context they engender within the classroom environment. The resources encompass a vast range of materials, including:

- Print materials: Newspapers, magazines, brochures, menus, advertisements, comics, novels, short stories, weather forecasts, recipes.
- Audio materials: Songs, radio broadcasts, podcasts, authentic conversations, voicemails.
- Visual materials: Photographs, pictures, signs, maps, charts.
- Audiovisual materials: Movies, TV programs, YouTube videos, documentaries, news reports.
- Digital materials: Blog posts, online articles, social media content, interactive websites.

It is imperative to note that the fundamental characteristic of these materials is that they were initially developed for a non-pedagogical purpose, thereby reflecting natural language utilization in real-life contexts.

2-2- Benefits of Using Authentic Materials in Libyan ELT

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), the incorporation of authentic materials is known to confer a number of benefits, particularly for those learning English as a foreign

language (EFL) in locations where exposure to the target language may be limited beyond the classroom. A notable example of this is Libya, where the use of authentic materials in ELT has been shown to yield substantial advantages. The aforementioned benefits encompass a plethora of aspects pertaining to language acquisition and learner development.

2-3- Enhancing Motivation and Engagement

The utilisation of authentic materials within educational settings has been demonstrated to engender intrinsic motivation in learners by establishing a link between classroom learning and the real world (Martinez, 2002; Hwang, 2005). The engagement and relevance of the learning process can be optimised for students by providing real-life English exposure in various forms, including news reports, songs and movie clips. This pedagogical approach has the potential to establish a conduit between the confines of the classroom and the broader external environment, thereby enhancing the learner's experience and cultivating a favourable disposition towards the English language (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990; Otte, 2006). Research conducted in Libya, including studies by Soliman (2013) Belaid and Murray (2015) and Alzarga (2021), has revealed that Libyan teachers and students of English as a foreign language (EFL) hold favourable attitudes towards the utilisation of authentic materials. These materials are perceived to possess the potential to stimulate curiosity and offer a glimpse into authentic English usage.

2-4- Developing Communicative Competence

The overarching objective of the English Language Teaching (ELT) paradigm is to foster communicative competence. This endeavour aims to empower language learners to utilise English proficiently in authentic real-life scenarios. The utilisation of authentic materials in language education enables students to be exposed to natural language, incorporating idiomatic expressions, colloquial language, varying registers, and diverse accents – elements frequently absent in conventional textbooks. This pedagogical approach is designed to assist learners in developing the following competencies:

- *Improve listening comprehension*: The enhancement of students' ability to comprehend natural speech can be facilitated through the utilisation of authentic radio tapes or news broadcasts (Herron & Seay, 1991).
- *Enhance speaking fluency and accuracy*: The utilisation of authentic materials, particularly technology-based ones such as videos, has been demonstrated to exert a

favourable influence on students' spoken fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation (Sahboun, Razak, & Wahi, 2024, Alabsi and Wang (2020)). These materials offer students a concrete exemplar of target-like language use, thus encouraging students to apply language in pragmatic settings.

- *Expand vocabulary and grammar:* Authentic texts offer a more extensive array of context and cultural elements, thereby facilitating learners' exposure to a more diverse selection of vocabulary and grammatical structures in comparison to those present in simplified materials (Hyland, 2003).
- *Develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills:* Engagement with authentic materials often necessitates analysis and interpretation to facilitate problem-solving and the acquisition of knowledge, which reflects cognitive processes observed in real-life settings (Aziz, 2020).

2-5- Fostering Cultural Awareness

The utilisation of authentic materials has been proven to offer a direct insight into the cultural nuances of the target language. Through engagement with content created for native speakers, learners are able to gain insights into the customs, values and perspectives of English-speaking communities. Erbaggio (2012) posits that such cultural exposure has the capacity to enhance the learning experience, thereby facilitating the development of a more holistic understanding of the language in its cultural context.

3. Bridging the Gap Between Classroom and Real World

The utilisation of authentic materials in the classroom milieu has been demonstrated to engender a nexus between the didactic domain and the realm of practical, real-world language application. This pedagogical approach, underpinned by the employment of authentic materials, confers a distinct advantage, for it facilitates a seamless integration of classroom learning with authentic, real-world language use. This approach assists students in comprehending the practical application of their English skills beyond the academic environment, thereby rendering their learning more meaningful and purposeful (Peacock, 1997). In the absence of opportunities for direct exposure to English speakers, authentic materials can provide a valuable resource for Libyan students to experience English in its authentic form.

3-1- Promoting Learner Autonomy

When presented with a range of authentic materials, students can be encouraged to assume a greater role in their own learning. The selection of materials can be tailored to the individual interests of the learner, allowing for exploration of a variety of genres and the development of strategies for autonomous language acquisition. In particular, however, it should be noted that the internet offers an extensive and constantly updated source of authentic materials, thereby empowering learners to engage with current language and information (Berardo, 2006).

4. Challenges in Using Authentic Materials in Libyan Secondary Schools

Although there are indisputable advantages, the effective integration of authentic materials into Libyan secondary school English Language Teaching (ELT) is impeded by several significant challenges. It is evident that the obstacles in question are characterised by a high degree of multifaceted complexity. This complexity can be seen in three distinct areas: firstly, in the domain of pedagogy; secondly, in the domain of practice; and thirdly, in the domain of system.

4.1. Textbook-Oriented Curriculum and Examination System

The Libyan educational infrastructure has traditionally placed a considerable emphasis on the utilisation of standardised textbooks and a centrally administered curriculum. Despite the introduction of CLT principles and updated textbooks as a consequence of recent reforms, the prevailing textbook-centric approach continues to present significant challenges, as evidenced by the work of Belaid, Almrtdi and Murray (2022). It has been suggested that educators may feel constrained by the necessity to cover specific textbook content in order to prepare students for external examinations, which can result in a limited availability of resources and time to utilise authentic materials. The obligatory nature of textbooks has been demonstrated to constrain pedagogues' creativity and adaptability (Teachers' Use of a Compulsory EFL Textbook in Libya: A Mixed Methods Study, 2023).

4.2. Teacher Competence and Training

A salient challenge identified in studies concerning Libyan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is the inadequate language proficiency and pedagogical competencies exhibited by some teachers (Teachers' Use of a Compulsory EFL Textbook in Libya: A Mixed Methods Study, 2023; Shihiba, 2011). It has been observed that many EFL teachers in Libya may not have received adequate training in methodologies that emphasize the integration and exploitation of authentic materials. The following are possible manifestations:

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- *Lack of confidence*: Teachers may experience a sense of linguistic uncertainty when confronted with authentic materials, which frequently contain sophisticated vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, or culturally specific references.
- *Limited technical know-how*: In order to use technology-based authentic materials (e.g., videos, podcasts, and online resources) effectively, it is necessary to have digital literacy skills, which may be a barrier for some teachers.
- *Difficulty in adapting materials*: The selection of authentic materials, and the subsequent design of effective learning tasks based around mentioned materials, require significant planning and pedagogical skill. This process can, therefore, be time-consuming for teachers (Omar & Mekael, 2020).
- *Over-reliance on traditional methods*: It has been observed that some pedagogues may persist in favouring conventional teaching methodologies, such as memorisation and recitation, as opposed to embracing more communicative approaches that incorporate authentic materials (Salih, 2018).

4.3. Learner Proficiency Levels

Authentic materials are, by definition, not simplified. Learners with lower proficiency levels may experience considerable difficulty and feelings of helplessness (Peacock, 1997). It has been argued that exposure of students to material which falls short of their intellectual capacity can engender feelings of frustration and demotivation, thus counteracting the intended effect of facilitating learning. The selection of materials is of paramount importance, and is frequently a challenging process (Mahsefat & Sabet, 2012). The materials must be engaging, yet appropriate for the students' current skill level.

4.4. Limited Resources and Infrastructure

Many Libyan public schools face a scarcity of resources. This includes:

- *Inadequate teaching materials*: Beyond the prescribed textbooks, access to a diverse range of authentic materials can be limited, especially in print format.
- *Insufficient technological infrastructure*: The accessibility of technological resources such as reliable internet access, computers, projectors, and audio-visual equipment is not uniform across all secondary schools, which hinders the utilisation of digital and

multimedia authentic resources (Teachers' Use of a Compulsory EFL Textbook in Libya: A Mixed Methods Study, 2023).

- *Overcrowded classrooms*: The issue of large class sizes is a well-documented one, and the challenges experienced by teachers in delivering activities that require individualised attention or group work with authentic materials are well-attested.

4.5. Cultural Appropriateness and Sensitivity

When selecting authentic materials, educators must give due consideration to their cultural appropriateness and sensitivity for the Libyan context (Bacon & Finneman, 1990). It is important to note that certain materials, particularly those originating from Western cultures, may contain themes, images, or values that are not aligned with local cultural norms. This potential discrepancy could result in a range of responses from students and parents, including feelings of discomfort or resistance. In order to avoid such issues, it is imperative that content is subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

4.6. Time Constraints

The integration of authentic materials in the classroom setting necessitates significant investment from teachers in terms of time, effort and expertise to identify, select, adapt and create tasks that utilise these resources effectively. In view of the demands placed upon curricula and the time allocated for teaching, it is conceivable that educators may find it challenging to allocate adequate time for these extra preparatory measures.

5. Strategies for Effective Integration of Authentic Materials

In order to surmount the challenges and optimise the benefits of authentic materials in Libyan secondary school English Language Teaching (ELT), a multi-faceted approach is required, focusing on teacher development, resource provision, curriculum adaptation, and learner support.

5.1. Comprehensive Teacher Training and Professional Development

Investing in targeted teacher training programs is paramount. These programs should:

- *Enhance language proficiency*: In order to enhance pedagogical effectiveness, there is a necessity to facilitate opportunities for those engaged in the field of education to improve their proficiency in English. This should be especially focused upon in regard to the

enhancement of their ability to understand and interpret a variety of linguistic forms which may be considered authentic.

- *Develop pedagogical skills for authentic materials:* The following training programme is designed to equip teachers with the necessary skills to: The selection of appropriate materials is pivotal in achieving the desired outcome. In order to select materials for instruction, it is necessary to establish criteria for choosing materials based on learner level, relevance, interest, and cultural sensitivity (Mahsefat & Sabet, 2012).
- *Exploit materials effectively:* The provision of techniques for pre-teaching vocabulary and scaffolding complex texts has been identified as essential components. Furthermore, the design of engaging tasks such as prediction, gist reading, detailed comprehension and discussion has been recognised as crucial for effective pedagogy. The facilitation of communicative activities is also paramount in fostering a conducive and engaging learning environment.
- *Integrate technology:* It is imperative to provide practical training on the utilisation of digital tools, online platforms, and multimedia resources for accessing and presenting authentic materials.
- *Manage classroom dynamics:* It is imperative that teachers are equipped with effective strategies for managing large classes and catering to the diverse needs of their students, particularly when dealing with authentic materials.
- *Foster a culture of sharing:* The promotion of the exchange of successful authentic materials and lesson plans between teaching professionals within and across educational institutions is encouraged, with a view to the establishment of a collaborative learning environment.

5.2. Resource Development and Accessibility

Addressing the lack of resources is crucial:

- *Curated repositories:* The creation of centralised repositories, or the establishment of school-based repositories, is to be recommended. These repositories should be stocked with authentic materials that have been vetted, and they should be organised by level, theme, and skill focus. This will facilitate the process of teachers in finding suitable resources.

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- *Investment in technology:* It is vital to ensure that educational facilities are equipped with dependable internet connectivity, along with computers, projectors, and audio equipment. In order to ensure the effective maintenance and troubleshooting of this equipment, it is imperative to incorporate comprehensive training programmes as a fundamental component of the overall educational curriculum.
- *Local content creation:* It is imperative to promote and facilitate the production of materials with local relevance, such as short stories, interviews with local English speakers, and local news reports, in order to ensure cultural appropriateness and immediate relevance for students.

5.3. Curriculum Flexibility and Support

The national curriculum and examination system should be reviewed to allow for greater flexibility in integrating authentic materials:

Revised guidelines: It is vital to provide explicit guidelines on the integration of authentic materials into existing syllabuses. This will encourage teachers to supplement textbooks with such materials, rather than relying on them exclusively.

Assessment reform: The integration of authentic task-based assessments reflecting genuine real-world language usage is recommended, thereby fostering the utilisation of authentic materials by teachers in their pedagogical practices.

Collaborative curriculum development: The involvement of experienced teachers in the curriculum design process is imperative to ensure the integration of practical considerations and authentic material.

5.4. Learner-Centered Approaches and Scaffolding

Teachers are required to implement learner-centred approaches when utilising authentic materials:

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- *Needs analysis*: In order to ensure that material selection is more targeted, it is essential to conduct regular needs analyses. The purpose of these analyses is to understand students' interests and proficiency levels.
- *Scaffolding strategies*: It is recommended that educators employ scaffolding techniques to provide supplementary support to learners, with a particular focus on those who are at lower levels. The following may be included:
- *Pre-teaching vocabulary and concepts*: In order to ensure optimal comprehension of the subject material, it is recommended that the relevant terminology be familiarised with in advance of engagement. This process is particularly relevant in cases where complex concepts or background information are presented.
- *Graphic organizers*: The utilisation of visual aids to assist students in the organisation of information derived from the text is also recommended.
- *Chunking texts*: Break down longer authentic texts into smaller, manageable sections.
- *Simplified tasks*: The design of tasks should be such that they progressively increase in complexity. The progression of the inquiry should be initiated with straightforward inquiries that are readily comprehensible to the target audience. Subsequently, tasks should progress towards more complex analytical and communicative elements.
- *Repeated exposure*: Students should be permitted to listen to or read authentic materials on multiple occasions, focusing on different aspects as required.
- *Promoting learner autonomy*: Students should be encouraged to explore authentic materials outside the classroom setting, independently, for example by means of recommending English-language websites, songs, or films.

5.5. Fostering a Supportive School Environment

It is vital to acknowledge the pivotal role school administrations play in facilitating the use of authentic materials:

- *Encouraging innovation*: It is vital to establish an environment that fosters innovation and experimentation among teaching professionals, thereby facilitating the adoption of novel methodologies and resources.

Providing time for preparation: It is essential to allocate a specific time for teachers to prepare authentic materials and adapt them as required.

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Establishing resource centers: The establishment of school-based resource centres is recommended, with these being designed to facilitate teachers' access to, creation of, and sharing of authentic materials.

6. Conclusion

Theoretically, the incorporation of authentic materials into the teaching of English as a foreign or second language (TEFL) has been demonstrated to be advantageous. This principle is widely recognised on a global scale, and its merits are increasingly acknowledged within the Libyan context. The utilisation of authentic materials in the language learning process has been shown to engender a number of benefits, including heightened motivation among learners, the development of communicative competence, the cultivation of cultural awareness, and the establishment of connections between classroom learning and practical language utilisation. Studies conducted in Libya have indicated a predominantly positive attitude amongst teaching professionals towards these educational materials. These studies have also served to affirm the considerable potential attributed to these resources by the relevant parties.

The widespread and systematic integration of authentic materials in Libyan secondary schools, however, faces significant challenges. The curriculum is predominantly dependent on conventional textbooks; teacher competence and training in the use of authentic resources is variable; unsimplified materials pose a considerable challenge for lower-proficiency learners; technological infrastructure and general resources are limited. Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure that cultural appropriateness remains an integral consideration.

7- Recommendations

The present paper puts forward a series of crucial recommendations to stakeholders within the Libyan education system:

1- *Prioritize and Invest in Comprehensive Teacher Training:* The development and implementation of ongoing professional development programmes is to be undertaken, with a particular focus on the effective selection, adaptation, and exploitation of authentic materials. It is imperative that such programmes address both pedagogical competencies and technological literacy.

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2- Develop Centralized and Accessible Resource Hubs: The establishment of online and offline repositories of authentic materials, meticulously vetted to ensure their authenticity and quality, is imperative. These repositories ought to be meticulously categorised based on proficiency level, thematic focus, and the particular skill being emphasised. This comprehensive organisation ensures these repositories are readily accessible to all educators, facilitating effective utilisation in educational settings.

3- Invest in School Infrastructure: Secondary schools must be assured of sufficient access to reliable internet and the requisite equipment (i.e. computers, projectors, and audio-visual equipment). This is necessary to facilitate the use of digital and multimedia authentic materials.

4- Promote Curriculum Flexibility: A further recommendation is for the national curriculum guidelines to be reviewed and updated in order to explicitly encourage and support the integration of authentic materials as a supplement to, and not a replacement for, existing textbooks.

5- Encourage Local Content Creation: Initiatives must be supported for Libyan teachers and educators to create materials that are authentic and relevant to their local context, and which resonate with the experiences of students.

6- Implement Differentiated Instruction and Scaffolding: In addition, it is imperative that teachers are instructed in the effective implementation of scaffolding techniques to facilitate the accessibility and comprehension of authentic materials for learners at disparate proficiency levels, thereby averting feelings of demotivation.

7- Reform Assessment Practices: There is a necessity to gradually shift towards assessment methods that evaluate communicative competence in authentic real-world contexts. The utilisation of authentic materials in teaching should be encouraged.

8- Foster Collaboration and Sharing: The establishment of virtual spaces that facilitate the exchange of effective pedagogical methodologies, efficacious lesson designs and authentic educational resources among teaching professionals is paramount in fostering a cohesive and nurturing professional community.

By strategically addressing the challenges currently being faced and implementing the recommendations outlined, Libyan secondary schools can move closer to a more dynamic, engaging and communicatively-oriented English language teaching (ELT) environment. This will

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empower students with the practical English language skills necessary to ensure success in the 21st century. The ongoing process of integrating authentic materials in language teaching necessitates the commitment and sustained effort of all stakeholders to effectively link the classroom to the real world of English language use.

Delimitation of the current research

The present study was an examination of the extant literature on the use of authentic materials in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy. Moreover, it furnished a thoroughgoing analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the utilisation of these materials in secondary schools in Libya. It is recommended that subsequent research endeavours concentrate on conducting a comparative analysis of particular in-service textbook materials and the proposed authentic materials. This analysis would facilitate the identification and observation of the differences between the two sets of materials, thereby demonstrating the positive and negative aspects of both materials.

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