

A STUDY ON TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract - Language input (input) is a concept of Krashen that when learners are exposed to a suitable corpus after a certain time, they will be able to use the target language during language acquisition. Cell input language refers to the authentic document. Authentic documents show the usage of "real language" namely the communication behavior that occurs in specific situations and reality. If authentic documents are chosen carefully as well as can satisfy the needs of students, they will be an ideal tool for language teaching and learning programs. This paper aims to apply theoretical achievements of language acquisition and foreign language teaching theories towards communication approaches. Hence, our study approach is to examine the reality of using authentic documents in foreign language teaching by teachers through selecting and applying this type of document.

Key words - teaching materials, authentic, attitude, teacher, foreign language.

1. Introduction

According to communicative approach, the final approach of foreign language methodology is not only teaching learners basic knowledge of the new language but also teaching them how to use language as a communication channel through four fundamental skills: listening - speaking - reading - writing. Therefore, teaching approach has to use comprehensible input (According to Krashen's theory in 1985 about comprehensible input). Comprehensible input includes appropriate contents to learners' proficiency level and satisfies their need and motivation (which are basic elements that are suggested in Lamber's model). Moreover, comprehensible input has to reflect the original language – including the genuineness of the text as well as its change over time. One of the most effective ways to achieve that goal is effectively and scientifically using authentic materials in teaching and learning foreign languages. During teaching and learning process, authentic materials are used initially as a part of input language and then learners construct knowledge themselves based on those materials; and secondly, they are used as a language which learners have to approach to develop their language skills. The purpose of this study is to elicit teachers' attitudes and opinions in bringing input data namely authentic materials in teaching by selecting criteria and applying for skills in order to improve communication ability. Moreover, this study also put forward several suggestions to teachers for successfully applying these materials.

2. Authentic material in foreign language teaching

2.1. Definition and the role of authentic materials

Authentic materials are not generated for pedagogical aims, they come from daily communication of native speakers and when they are brought to classes, their linguistic and informational forms remain unchanged in comparison with original ones. According to Besse's definition, "*Authentic materials must be extracted from*

native speakers' conversations which are related to actual habits and communication ways. Authentic materials have to concentrate on the needs and interests of learners." [1].

The role of authentic materials in foreign language education have been concerned and analyzed in studies of Breen (1985) and Berardo (2006). They identify four main features of these materials namely (1) presenting new vocabularies and grammatical structures in proper context; (2) validating interactions in class; (3) belonging to real life and non-academic situation; (4) exposing culture information. These four features are used to guide teachers through selecting and examining authentic materials in foreign language teaching process.

Additionally, in 2010, Yestis's statement about researches on using authentic materials in education environment, especially in foreign language teaching, is "*to concretize and verify language; moreover, the aim of education is to train students' ability and proficiency to deal with complex tasks as well as offer them preparation for social life but not simply convey to them theoretical and unpractical lessons*".

As observed by Besse (1984), there are two reasons for utilizing authentic materials. The first reason for the usage is that authentic materials can reflect the use of real-life language, especially in daily communication behaviors and in specific situations. Secondly, when they are selected carefully and can satisfy learners' demands, they will be an ideal tool for constructing language courses and studying foreign language.

Furthermore, positive effects of authentic materials have been investigated in this study. In the paper "The Main Advantages of Using Authentic Materials", Philip and Shettlesworth (1978), Clarke (1989), Peacock (1997), Richards (2001), and Guariento Morley (2001) illustrated that authentic materials became more important because they create learning motivation and put learners into authentic language environment or class contextualization. These authors mention some advantages of authentic materials such as (1) to create positive effects on learners' learning motivation and bring authentic cultural information; (2) to expose real language; (3) to satisfy learners' needs; (4) to encourage teachers to adopt creative teaching approach.

2.2. Sources and criteria in selecting authentic materials

According to Berardo (2006), authentic materials must be chosen based on three critical criteria: suitability of content, exploitability, and readability. Suitability of content means the materials must be relevant to the learners' interest and needs.

The above definition demonstrates that authentic materials can be found easily. Many studies pointed out

several sources of authentic materials, such as printed materials (newspapers, magazines, brochures, and advertisement) and audio-visual materials (TV, podcast, movies, and song). In the digital age, the Internet is a significant and valuable source of material in teaching.

2.3. The usage of authentic materials

Many studies claimed the advantages of using authentic materials in foreign language educating such as creating learning motivation, interacting with real communicative context, and achieving communication skills. However, in order to exploit and utilize those materials effectively and reasonably, teachers have to concern about time of usage, amount of material as well as suitable applied level. According to Lee (1995), authentic materials can be only used for advanced and intermediate level learners while Tamor (2009) has another view. He states that materials can be used for every level of learners, including primary level.

3. Research design

The main purpose of this study is to elicit the attitudes of language teachers toward using authentic materials in class. The survey content consists of three parts: (1) Attitudes towards using authentic materials; (2) Reason for using, selection criteria and sources; (3) Advanced training recommendations.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, questionnaires were constructed and distributed to language lecturers of University of Foreign Language Studies – Da Nang University. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first one observes personal data and attitudes towards using authentic materials. In the second part, the researcher designs 09 questions related to the literature review such as the roles of authentic materials (Q2, Q3), selecting authentic materials (Q7), sources of authentic materials (Q6), the usage of authentic materials (Q4, Q5) as well as related suggestions (Q8, Q9). To answer the questions, participants are allowed to choose more than one answer for each question and add their comments to open-response ones (Q2, Q7).

Participants in this study are 49 teachers from 07 different faculties (English, English for specific purposes (ESP), Russian, French, Chinese, Japanese – Korean - Thai, and International Studies). The writer selects 07 teachers from each faculty and they are divided into three groups according to their teaching experience: Young teachers (with 1 - 3 years of teaching experience), senior teachers (with more than 10 years of teaching), and teachers who are managerial staff.

Descriptive statistics is used to display the result of the survey. After generalizing the answer of each question with relevant indicators, each indicator is analyzed in terms of percentage.

4. Result and discussion

Firstly, as is shown in the result of personal data section, 49 participants are from 07 faculties (English, ESP, Russian, French, Japanese – Korean, and Chinese). 30% of them have 1 - 3 years of teaching experience and the rest have more than 10 years of teaching (70%).

The next section contains questions about using authentic materials. The result show that most teachers have positive attitude toward using authentic material in class. By answering the first and third questions, all of the participants (100%) demonstrate that they prefer to provide authentic materials for students in order to expose them to real language (80.9%) and improve their skills (100%). Question two has no data in this analysis.

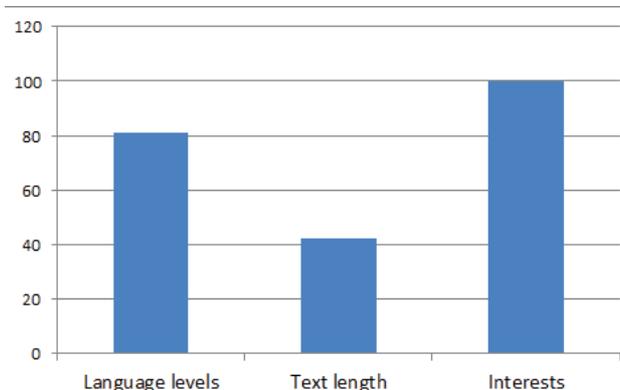


Figure 1. Teachers' attitudes toward reasons for using authentic materials

The findings of this study confirm the positive effects of authentic materials in improving students' receptive and productive skills. The analysis of teachers' responses shows that 90.4% of them will use authentic materials in reading and writing classes, while 76.1% will use them in listening and speaking classes.

The suitable level of starting using authentic materials is in question five of the questionnaire. Most participants agree to use such materials from intermediate level (80.9%) to advanced level (100%). The maximum ratio for using authentic materials at advanced level is affirmed by all teachers regardless of their teaching experience and working field.

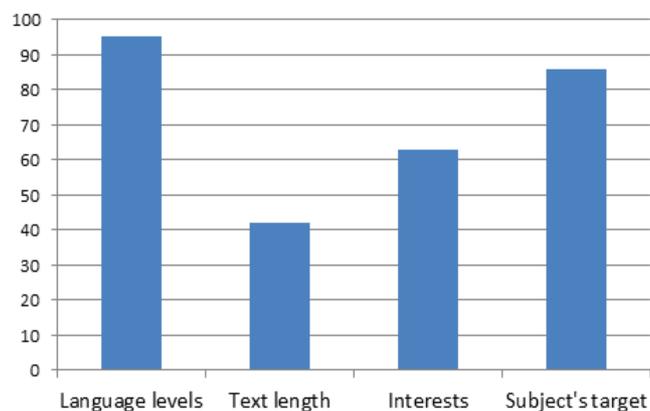


Figure 2. Teachers' opinions about authentic material selection criteria

Even though authentic materials can be found effortlessly, there are still differences between common sources as newspapers and magazines (90.4%), TV/Video (85.7%), radio (33%) and the Internet (93.3%). This finding completely matches the purpose of using authentic materials in reading and writing classes. The most common sources for teachers to gain authentic materials are newspapers, magazines and the Internet because they can provide literary text documents.

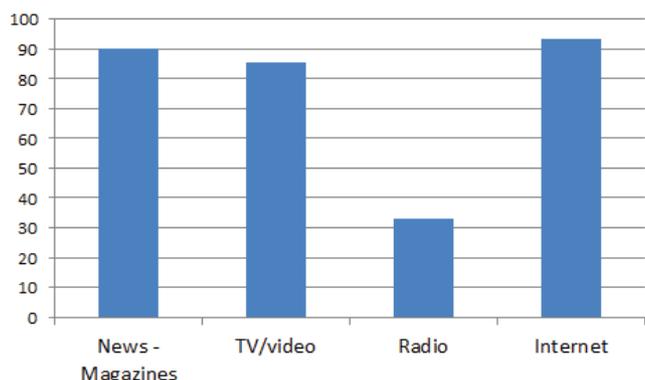


Figure 3. Teachers' opinions about sources of authentic materials

Furthermore, to answer the question about the need for additional training in using authentic materials, most participants agree on a need for training in designing materials (95%) and only 50% in selecting materials.

To sum up, it is obvious that authentic materials are necessary and useful; they help to expose learners to real language, motivate their learning and improve their skills, particularly through listening and reading activities. However, these materials are not always appropriate for all students at all levels. It is clear that the teacher has a role in selecting suitable documents at different proficiency levels for all learners.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the attitudes and comments of teachers toward using authentic materials in foreign language teaching and it was conducted in Da Nang University of Foreign Language Studies. The results reveal that a majority of teachers have positive attitudes toward providing authentic input in their classes, regardless of their length of teaching experience, working field or specialization. In order to exploit this type of materials effectively, most participants show a need for additional training. In addition, the reason for such an attitude is to expose students to social language, improve

skills, particularly in receptive and productive skills. Materials are selected mainly from newspapers, magazines and the internet according to professional criteria and methods of designing class activities from original materials. As mentioned above, the results of this study could be viewed as a starting point for further exploration into the usage of authentic materials in foreign language teaching.

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