Difficulties faced by Iraqi Teachers of English in using Authentic Materials in the foreign language classrooms

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Abstract :

   In recent years, there has been growing interest in the use of authentic material in foreign language teaching. Recording of spontaneous speech expose learners to the rhythms of natural every day English in a way that scripted materials cannot. Furthermore, authentic passages where the language has not been graded to reflect the learners' level of English afford a listening experience much closer to a real life one.

      Nevertheless, there are some obstacles that may be faced by Iraqi teachers of English in using authentic materials in teaching.

  Therefore, this study has tackled some of these difficulties. It also aims at identifying and classifying these difficulties.

    To fulfill this aim, a sample of (100) teachers of English from the directorate- general of Education of Diyla are considered to be the subjects of this study. A scaled questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this study to be an investigatory tool.

   The results prove that the hypothesis of this study, which reads that Iraqi teachers of English faced difficulties in using authentic materials is verified and accepted.

Section One :
1.1 The statement of the problem and its significance.

      The issue of using authentic materials in language classrooms has been influential over past two decades. Moreover, many practitioners involved in foreign language teaching and research have argued about the benefit of using authentic materials. These benefits may range from highlighting comprehension,   presenting   real   language,   providing

opportunities to introduce cultural issue, to enhance motivation and create language awareness.

The relentless push since the mid 1970s towards communicative approaches to language teaching has brought along with it aneed to develop students' skills for the real life. Teachers, therefore, must stimulate this world in the classroom. One way of doing so is to incorporate the use of authentic materials. Scholars argue that the use of authentic materials help to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and students' capacity to participate in real- world events. In other words, incorporating authentic materials helps the students acquire an effective communicative competence in the target language. (Guariento and Moreley, 2001: 347)

Since most EFL learners learn the target language in their own culture, practice is available only in the classroom. So, a key factor in L2 or foreign language development is the opportunity given   to learners to speak in the language – promoting interaction. Learners a willingness and need or reason to speak. A possible way of stimulating learners to talk might be to provide them with extensive exposure to authentic language through audiovisual stimuli and with opportunities to use the language. (Richards and Renandya, 2002: 208)

McNeill (1994:130) indicates that the use of authentic texts is now considered to be one way for increasing students' motivation for learning since they give the learner the feeling that he/she is learning the real language – the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it.

Nunan (2001:212) indicates that the authentic material helps bring the content of life and ultimately makes learning and using language more meaningful, but authenticity is a relative issue, i.c, modification also sometimes, have to be made because speakers have used low frequency vocabulary or unusual grammatical structures that will district or confuse the listener or the speaker. So this study has been tackled to identify the main difficulties encountered by Iraqi teachers of English in using authentic materials in foreign language classrooms.

1.2 The Aim of the Study.

The present study aims at identifying and classifying the main difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers of English in using authentic materials in foreign language classrooms.

1.3 The Value of the study.

The present study is expected to be of a great value for Iraqi teachers and all who are specialized in ministry of education since this new trend provides benefits in teaching.

1.4 Hypothesis.

 The present study is hypothesized that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in using authentic materials in teaching.

1.5 The Limits of the study.

  The present study is limited to the difficulties in using authentic materials in teaching of Iraqi teachers of English of the primary and the intermediate schools from the directorate – general of education /|Diyala for the a academic year 2010-2011.

1.6 Procedures.

To achieve the aim of the study, the following procedures are adopted:

1-   A through survey is done concerning the topic under investigation.

2-   A sample consists of the teachers of English from the directorate –general of educational Diyala is selected as the subjects of this study.

3-   A questionnaire is constructed under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine the validity of its items and make comments, suggestions and modifications if necessary.

4-   The responses of the questionnaire are analyzed and then computed using statistical techniques.

1.7 Definition of Basic Terms.
1- Difficulty

 Webster (1976:630) defines difficulty as a thing, hard to be done or overcome, something that causes labor or perplexity and requires skill and perseverance in mastering, solving or achieving a hard enterprise.

Liter (1964: 54) defines it as any obstacle that prevents achieving certain objectives and incentive that challenge and requires a great deal of efforts and thinking.

2- Authentic Materials.

Authentic materials are defined as real life texts, not written for pedagogic purpose.(Wallace, 1994:145)

Beckman and Klinghammer (2006:84) defines authentic materials as the used in the target culture for actual communicative needs. They should enable the learner to hear, read and produce language as it is used in the target culture.

Bailey (2006:300) adds that authentic materials are oral and written texts that occur naturally in the target language environment and that have not been created expressly for language learners.

Section Two :

2.1 An Introductory Note.

This section deals with the presentation of the impact of the authentic materials on foreign language and the criteria for the selection as well as the use of authentic materials. The purpose of this section is to provide classroom background information on the major theoretical issues that will be referred to in the empirical part of the study.

2.2 Authentic materials.

The term authentic material has been defined in different ways throughout the literature. What is common in these definitions is the exposure to real language and its use in its own community.

2.3 The impact of authentic materials on FL teaching.

Although the use of authentic materials in the classroom has become common practice during the last 20 years, the issue of authenticity in FL teaching has been one of the most datable aspects in the field. However, the need for and usefulness of authentic materials have been increasingly acknowledged. Empirical studies have confirmed positive results obtained by the learners who have opportunities to interact with and utilize authentic texts.

In addition to that these studies show that oral language development is improved when the practice incorporates authentic materials.

(Bacon and Finneman :1990:283)

They(ibid: 293) add that authentic materials can increase reading development by introducing students to new vocabulary and expression.

Incorporating authentic materials in teaching FL offers more than linguistic advantages. McNeil (1994:143) indicates that the use of authentic texts is now considered to be one way for increasing students' motivation for learning since they give the learner the feeling that he or she is learning since they give the real language- the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it.

On the other hand, some scholars do not see the value of using authentic materials.

Clark (1983:114) claims that media do not affect learning under any conditions, thus, the question of authentic versus non-authentic makes no difference. KilicKaya (2004:132) further points out that authentic texts are random in respect to vocabulary, structures, functions, contents and length. Teachers face challenges regarding access to authentic materials, the time required to find an appropriate authentic text and design suitable pedagogical tasks.

In conclusion, the benefits that authentic materials, bring to the FL classroom greatly outweigh the challenges. Thus, integrating authentic materials will merit the extra time and effort required of FL teachers.

2.4 Selection of authentic materials.

Berardo (2006:62) provides three criteria for choosing authentic texts. Suitably of content, exploitability, and readability . Suitability of content indicates that the text should interest the students as well as be appropriate to their needs and abilities. Lee (1995:325) states that a careful and a wise selection of materials focused on learners is a must if we want a positive response from them. Meanwhile exploitability refers to how the text can be used to develop the students' competence and how

the text can be exploited for teaching purposes. Finally, readability refers to   the language of the text, including thestructural and lexical difficulty as well as the amount of the new vocabulary and grammatical forms.

The text must be compatible with the course objectives- i.e, it can improve the language skills educators want the learners practice. In addition, the teachers must consider the length of the text and their teaching approach. Further, a variety of text types must be selected, such as articles, advertisement s, weather forecasts, interviews, poems, radio talks, applications forms, train timetables and brochures.

2.5 Sources of authentic materials.

Gebhard (2006:103) classifies authentic materials that the teachers   use in teaching English foreign languages/ English second language asfollows :

1- Authentic listening /viewing materials like cartoons, silent films, TV commercials, movies, dramas, radio news, ads, novels, pop, rock, children's' songs and sales pitches. Etc……

2- Authentic visual materials like slides, photographs, sketches, drawings by children, stick- figure drawings, silhouettes, pictures from travel, popular magazines, stamps.

3- Authentic printed materials like newspaper printed, advertisements, sports reports, science math, history books, lyrics to popular, university catalogs, business cards and relief maps etc.

4- Realia used in EFL/ESL like doll, puppets, key rings, scissors, combs ,balls, toy animals, balloons, umbrellas, wallets, plants, stones, masks and mannequins, etc…

In using internet, the teachers have at their disposal large amounts of texts, visual stimuli, and much more. There are endless lists of useful materials for the language classroom. It provides easy access to different types of materials as compared with other sources.

So the sources of the authentic materials (whether spoken or written) are infinite. The most common sources are newspapers,

magazines, TV, video radio, literature and the internet.
(Ibid:104)

2.6 The use of authentic materials in EFL classrooms.

One of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to expose the learner to as much real language as possible. Even if the classroom is not a real- life situation, authentic materials do have a very important place within it. It has been argued that by taking a text out of its original context, it loses it authenticity. *(Wallace, 1992:79)*

Nuttal (1996:172) asserts that authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real- life purposes by real people.

The main advantages of using authentic materials in the classroom therefore, include:

1- They can reinforce for the students the divest relation between the language classroom and outside world.

2- They offer away to contextualize language learning. When lessons are centered on comprehending a repair manual, a TV weather reports, a documentary, or anything that is used in the real world, students tend to focus more on content and meaning than on language.

3- They offer the students a valuable source of language input, since they can be exposed to more than just the language presented by the teacher and text . *(Gebhard, 2006:105)*

Whereas the main disadvantages of using authentic materials in the classroom are summarized as follows:

1- Authentic materials take time and effort to locate.

2- They may be too culturally biased, so un necessarily difficult to understand outside the language community.

3- The vocabulary might not be relevant to the students 'immediate needs.

4- To many structures are mixed so lower levels have a hard time for decoding the texts.

5- Many different accents can be found in listening.

Section Three :
Methodology and Procedures
3.1 Population and sample selection.

The population of study is the teachers of primary and intermediate schools from the directorate – general of education Diyla for the academic year 2010- 2011.

The total number of the teachers is (100).

3.2 The instrument of the study.

In order to achieve the aim of the present study, which is identifying and classifying difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers in using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms, a questionnaire has been constructed by the researcher.

The type of the questionnaire that used in this research is rating scales questionnaire. A strength of this type of questionnaire is that it elicits responses to specific question in the form of scaled, quantifiable data which can then be subjected to powerful statistical analysis.

(Backman and Palmer, 1996:243)

The items of the questionnaire   has been collected on the basis of related literature, interviews, the open- ended questionnaire and the experts' opinions since this questionnaire was exposed to a jury of experts specialized in English language teaching and linguistics.

3.3 Description of the questionnaire.

To fulfill the aim and verify the hypothesis, rating scaled questionnaire has constructed by the researcher.

The questionnaire consists of (14) items. They represent the most major difficulties or obstacles that may be faced by Iraqi in using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms. These items are supposed to elicit these difficulties by three rating scales:

- I agree.
- I partially agree.
- I disagree.

Table -1- The Questionnaire

The researcher intends to carry out a research entitled "Difficulties Faced by Iraqi Teachers of English in using Authentic Materials in the foreign language classrooms ".
Authentic materials are materials used in the target culture for actual communicative   needs.They should enable the learner to hear ,read and produce language as it is used in the target culture.

   You are kindly requested to go through the following items of the questionnaire and give your viewpoint of the adequacy of the items.

Item	*I agree*	*I partially agree*	*I diagree*
1-It is difficult to use authentic material in the classes.			
2-Teachers are obliged to use language above the level of the students.			
3-The use of authentic material in foreign language classrooms demands students'exposure to real language that is taken from real contexts.			
4-Using authentic material needs opportinuities to introduce cultural issues ;to enhance motivation,and creat language awareness.			
can be used 5-Authentic material with intermediate and advanced students only.			
6-Using authentic material at lower levels makes the students frustrated and de-motivated.			
7-Authentic material may cause a burden for the teacher in respect to structures ,functions,content			

Item	I agree	I partially agree	I diagree
and length.			
8-It is difficult for the teacher to find newspapers and magazines which are the most common sources to obtain authentic material.			
9-Texts that are used in authentic material should be appropriate to the students'needs and develop their competence as well.			
10-Using pictures ,digrams and photographs for authentic presentation may cause different interpretations on the part of the student.			
11-Many structures are mixed so lower levels have problems when decoding authentic texts.			
12-Time allotted for representing authentic texts is considered insufficient.			
13-Authentic material often cotain difficult language ,un needed vocabulary items and complex languge structures which create problems for the teacher.			
14-It is difficult with the opportunity to see language as it is used in real world to serve a real purpose.			

3.4 Face validity of the questionnaire.

The most important quality to be considered when selecting or constructing an evaluation instrument is validity. A cordoning to

Heaton (1975:153) validity of a test is "the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure and nothing else".

Face validity is the best type of validity in the case of self rating. (Nunnaly , 1972:353). In order to find out the face validity of the questionnaire, the items of the questionnaire have been exposed to six *jurors and experts specialized in English language teaching and linguistic.

 Each member of the jury was requested to point out his/her remarks and suggestions regarding the suitability of the questionnaire items.

 Accordingly, some items have been modified other have been excluded. The remaining are (14) which constitute the final version of the questionnaire.

3.5 The Pilot Administration of the questionnaire.

 After constructing the questionnaire, A pilot study was required to find out exactly whether the questionnaire is well constructed or not.

Fifteen teachers from the primary and intermediate schools from directorate – general of education in Diyla have been chosen for the pilot administration of the questionnaire.

 Results of the pilot administration can be considered a good indicator for making any necessary modifications in the final version of the questionnaire and to determine the effectiveness of the items in the light of the subjects responses.

3.6 Final Administration of the questionnaire.

 The final version of the questionnaire was distributed to the subject in April, 2011. The teachers were asked to give their views regards the items according to scale of three dimensions. The teachers' responses have been utilized by the researcher.

* The names of the jury member arranged alphabetically.

1- AmthelMohmmed.Ph.D.College of Education (for human sciences) university of Diyla.
2- Khalil Ismail R.Ph.D. College of Education foe human sciences university of Diyla.

3- Salam Hamed Ph.D. College of Education (Ibn Rushed) university of Baghdad.
4- Ena'amYousif. Ph.D. College of Basic Education university of Diyla.
5- Arwa Abdel- Rasool. Ph.D. College of Education (for human sciences) university of Diyla.
6- Liqa'aHabeebAbood. M.A. College of Education (for human sciences) university of Diyla.

3.7 Overall Performance.

In order to investigate the hypothesis of the study which reads "difficulties faced by Iraqi Teachers of English in using Authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms".

The responses of subjects were investigated by using the mean and the theoretical mean formula. The mean score of the subjects was (34.2) compared with the theoretical mean (28). This result indicates that the mean is higher than the theoretical mean. This proves that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulty in using authentic material in the foreign language classrooms. Accordingly the hypothesis   that mentioned above is verified and accepted.

Section Four :
Result Analysis Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions for further Research
4.1 Result Analysis

After presenting the difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers of English in using authentic materials in foreign language classroom throughout the procedures of this study, the researcher considered the weighted mean of the items considered that ranges from (45% to 89%) as difficult topics. Consequently, items or topics were considered to be difficult as it is shown clearly in table (2)

Table -2-
Weighted mean of the questionnaire items

Weighted mean	I disagree	I partially agree	I agree	Item No.
45%	20	35	45	**1**
55%	5	40	55	**2**
89%	2	9	89	**3**
80%	5	15	80	**4**
55%	10	35	55	**5**
70%	10	20	70	**6**
79%	4	17	79	**7**
50%	20	30	50	**8**
63%	10	27	63	**9**
65%	5	30	65	**10**
72%	6	22	72	**11**
83%	5	12	83	**12**
79%	3	18	79	**13**
40%	25	35	40	**14**

Conclusion remarks can be clearly pointed out as follows:
1-   Item number (3) which reads (the use of authentic materials in foreign languages classrooms demands students' exposure to real language that is taken from real contexts) constituted the most difficulty for the students. It got weighted mean (89%).
2-   Item number (12) which reads (Time for presenting authentic texts is considered in sufficient) constituted the second difficulty for the students. It got a weighted mean (83%).
3-   Item number (4) which reads (Using authentic materials need opportunities to introduce cultural issues, to enhance motivation and create language a awareness) constituted the third difficulty for the students. It got a weighted mean (80%).
4-   Item number (7) which reads (Authentic materials may cause a burden for the teacher in respect to structures, functions,

content and length). Authentic materials often contain difficult language needed vocabulary items and complex language structures which create problems for the teachers.constituted the fourth difficulty for the students. It got a weighted mean (79%).

5-   Item number (11) which reads (many structures are mixed so lower levels have problems when decoding authentic texts) constituted the fifth difficulty. It got a weighted mean (72%).

6-   Item number (6) which reads (using authentic materials at lower levels makes students frustrated and de- motivated). Constituted the fifth difficulty. It got a weighted mean (70%).

7-   Item number (10) which reads (using pictures, diagrams and photographs for authentic presentation may cause different interpretations on the part of the students). Constituted the seventh difficulty for the students with a weighted mean (65%).

8-   Item number (9) which reads (Texts that are used in authentic materials should be appropriate to the students need and develop their competence as well). Constituted the eighth difficulty. It got a weighted means (60%).

9-   Item number (2) and (5) which reads (Teachers are obliged to use language above the level of the students) and (Authentic materials can be used with intermediate and advanced students only) respectively constituted the ninth difficulty with a weighted mean (55%) for each.

10-   Item number (8) which reads (It is difficult for the teacher to find newspapers and magazines which are the most common sources to obtain authentic materials). Constituted the tenth difficulty with a weighted mean (50%).

11-   Item number (1) which reads (It is difficult to used authentic materials in the classes). Constituted the eleventh difficulty. It got a weighted mean (45%).

12-   Item number (14) which reads (It is difficult with the opportunity to see language as it is used in real world to serve a real   purpose). Constituted the last difficult item with (40%) weighted mean.

This study explored the difficulties faced by the Iraqi teachers of English in using authentic materials in foreign language classrooms. The study was conducted at

4.2General Conclusions.

One of the main reason for using authentic materials in the classroom is once outside the 'safe' controlled language learning environment, the learner will not encounter the artificial language of the classroom but the real world and language how it is really used. The role of the teacher is not to delude the language learner but to prepare him, giving the awareness and necessary skills so as to understand how the language is actually used. Davies (1984: 192) states that it is not that a text understood because it is authentic but that it is authentic because it is understood. Everything the learner understands is authentic for him.

Authentic materials may also work as a motivating feature and as a link between students' general knowledge of language and their professional language needs.

4.3 Recommendations and Suggestions.

In the light of findings achieved and conclusions derived, the following pedagogical implications and recommendations are drawn:

1- The selection and accessing of authentic materials may be a very challenging activity. The choice of such materials should meet the objectives of the lesson. The criteria such as learners' age level, interests, needs, goals and expectations must always be met.

2- The complexity level of the materials must be slightly beyond learners' level if there is an aim in increasing motivation, awareness and curiosity.

3- The focus of authentic materials in not on full understanding but on the message which is to be conveyed, hence, the teacher may act as an interpreter of the materials by using techniques such as paraphrasing, providing synonyms, miming and using

pictures in order to get the message across and enhance learners' comprehension.

4- It weaver considering the early stages of learning and for low proficiency learners, it is still possible to use such materials if they are chosen from the learners' own subject area and if they are used according to the learners' ability by designing appropriate tasks modified to the understanding- level.

5- Furthermore, such criteria like learning environment, teacher-learner relationship and social values and attitudes need to be considered when using authentic materials.

Suggestions for further research.

1- An experimental study can be conducted to investigate difficulties faced by the students at the college level in using authentic materials.

2- Investigation   female teachers attitudes towards using authentic materials at the primary schools.

3- Investigation teachers' opinions about how authentic materials can develop productive skills.

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