

# Authentic Material- a Challenge or an Opportunity

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*The sciences are primarily concerned with the world as it is, and the arts are primarily concerned with the world man wants to live in. Both require the same mental processes. Reason and a sense of fact are as important to the novelist as they are to chemist. Genius and creative imagination plays the same role in mathematics that they do in poetry. Laws and principles exist just as much in the verbal disciplines as they do in sciences. Precision, clarity and ability to reason are just as much the concern to the student of the humanities as it is to the student of science. Educational planners worldwide are putting great emphasis on producing engineers who besides having technical abilities are able to meet the demands of present working environment. Thus role of humanities and sciences in building competent engineers is a model for 21<sup>st</sup> century Engineering Education Curricula.*

*My paper will focus on how English can become a necessary tool in order to obtain a job, get promoted and perform effectively in the working world. Teachers and learners must be made aware of the specific requirements by categorizing language activities into English for Academic Purpose (EAP); English for Specific Purpose (ESP); English for Occupational Purpose (EOP); how the communicative activities should be divided in these different categories and make the entire process of learning language job specific. The use of authentic material makes the connection between the two worlds possible, the academic and the professional. The material is a challenge for many; it needs to be tackled by*

*academicians, teachers, and also the learners by bringing in the challenges they have encountered in the workplace to the class for discussion. The material needs to be planned in such a way that it goes from general to specific purpose courses.*

*Thus from the conventional approach of language learning where objective is of knowing everything about the language being studied to concentrating on those skills which are relevant to the workplace should be the motive of the material used in the classroom.*

English has become a necessary tool in order to obtain a job, get promoted and perform effectively in the working world. Educational planners worldwide are putting great emphasis on producing employees who besides having technical abilities are able to meet the demands of present working environments. Communication skills are ‘the lifeblood of a successful organization’, according to Watson Wyatt’s communication ROI study. Companies that promote Communication skills enjoy significant competitive advantage and achieve greater profitability overall, as they:

- Convey their vision more clearly

- Unite their employees around company goals.
- Improve productivity and reduce waste.
- Enhance customer service
- Make changes more easily

Communication skills can be learned systematically and mastered through persistent practice. It is a challenging training programme that incorporates material from many disciplines. It aims to make a substantial difference to each participant’s leadership, communication and relationship skills.

Three-point continuum of English language teaching that goes from

general to specific purpose course can be discussed under EAP, ESP, and EOP. Awareness of these will help teachers as well as students to encircle and abide by the academic objective of knowing everything about the language right from its grammar, structure, general vocabulary to concentrating attention on the skills most relevant within the workplace in the time allotted in the educational environment. The use of authentic material can make the connection between the two worlds possible, the academic and the professional, in a practical way. But first let us categorise the following:

#### **EAP (English for Academic purpose)**

- Awareness of the variability of language and communications forms in different geographical, social and environment.
- Sound knowledge of basic vocabulary, functional grammar and style, functions for language.
- Awareness of various types of verbal interaction (conversations, interviews, debates etc.) and the main features of different styles and registers in spoken language.
- Understanding the paralinguistic features of communication (voice quality feature, facial expression, postural and gesture systems).
- EAP beneficial for self learning.
- Language activities to be included: grammar, parts of speech, tenses, different sentence structure, antonyms, synonyms, confusing pairs etc.

#### **ESP (English for Specific Purpose):**

- Ability to communicate in written and oral form, and understand, or make other understand.
- Ability to distinguish in listening, speaking, reading, writing, relevant from irrelevant information.
- Ability to formulate one's arguments in speaking or writing, in

a convincing manner and take full account of other viewpoints, whether expressed in written or oral form; Language activities include: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, note making, note taking, mind mapping, argumentative writing, debates etc.

**EOP (English for Occupational Purpose):**

- The portion of the curriculum which prepares students for gainful employment in occupations ranging from low-skilled to sophisticated jobs in technical field.
- Use of authentic material so that the learners can apply the skills in the actual working world. Supported by Ellis and Johnson.
- Although all the four language skills are important skills for the workplace, these skills are not reflected in the English language skills assessed in the recruitment process by industrial sector. About 70% of English language skills assessed in interviews are based on speaking skills and 30% on writing skills.
- Productive skills will only come about in unison with proper grammar, acceptable pronunciation, effective listening and reading skills.
- Language activities include: teleconferencing, telephoning, informal work related discussion, chairing and speaking in meeting, oral presentation and public speaking, interviews, seminar and exhibitions and networking for contacts for advice and information.
- Written business Communication includes: exchange of written messages like letters, fax, telex, and emails; writing assessment and progress reports; quotations; informational and instructional memos; marketing proposal.

Students should be provided with sufficient hands on activities to use the language in real situations focussed on the evaluation of course materials.

Selection of appropriate material from known to unknown; sequencing of material; creating simulations to create real life situations and evaluating each activity according to the purpose it serves is the responsibility of a teacher.

In turn teachers need to be trained by industry corporate who explains them the entire inside scenario with different case studies and finally the passed out students who were trained with the material and are now a part of the industry are the people who can give the feedback based on which material can be improvised.

Few of the material used with their aim/purpose are discussed below:

- TV guide for a day's viewing; will provide practice in scan reading.
- A radio weather forecast; will provide practice in scan listening.
- E-mail message between friends; to identify some key features of informal written communication.
- Magazine Advertisement with its tag line; boost creative, innovative and critical thinking; and also gives practice in using conditions for making promise.
- An editorial from news paper; provides practice in inferring meaning from discursive text.
- A recording of someone speaking about a childhood memory; gives practice in listening for narrative gist.
- Reality TV Show; highlights the way in which body language and gesture supports oral communication.
- A time table for a package holiday; use of present simple to talk about future itineraries.

- Clipping of the talk show; give points for the argumentative writing.
- Business Report; gives idea about its format, vocabulary, clarity and brevity.

Most teachers throughout the world agree that authentic texts or materials are beneficial to the language learning process, but what is less agreed is ‘when’ it should be introduced and ‘how’ they should be used in the classroom. The approach to plan lessons with authentic material:

- 1). Read the text and decide if it will be of interest to your students.
- 2). Re-read the text carefully to decide if it is with the right language level for your learners.
- 3). Look for useful grammar or vocabulary that you can highlight in this text.
- 4). Edit the text if necessary, this mean cutting out some difficult

vocabulary or deciding to use only part of the text.

- 5). Create reading/ listening tasks for receptive skill practice and to ensure comprehension of the task.
- 6). Decide how you will focus on the language.
- 7). Think of the follow-up activity you could do to supplement further.

Regardless of few drawbacks like difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items, complex language structure, it has many advantages which support creative approach to learning language, gives exposure to real life usage , has positive effect on learner motivation and relate more closely to learner’s needs. When used regularly in the classroom gives good break from the course book; but sometimes it makes the teaching programme ‘bitsy’ and students don’t get a feeling they are working through a coherent syllabus. The

material which is used is very topical becomes relevant to the present generation but also dates very quickly. Under these circumstances the responsibility and work of the teacher becomes tremendous who needs to be very balanced in approach, up to date, and also time bound. Further let us focus on the role of a teacher in gathering such material, editing and combining well with the syllabus, making it comprehensible and interesting for the students, shifting the role where teacher facilitates and students talk, and make such activities valuable with marks. Each task given to the student is driven by detailed instructions, held accountable to a rubric. Grading rubrics for the assignment should be given to the student with the assignment. Peer review and reflection are as effective as instructor's feedback.

Teaching methods that emphasize language in context and meaningful communication naturally lead to the extensive use of authentic language and culturally appropriate materials that play a major role in developing student abilities. Teachers need to explore the range of materials available online, use of search engines to identify curriculum related content, select interactive model for reading/ listening texts as a basis for developing activities and finally examine number of follow-up activities.

Using authentic material with learners can add variety to a teaching programme but it needs to be introduced gradually and carefully; with full confidence a teacher needs to "sell" this product to students with guaranteed results. Variety of material should be brought to the classroom to keep up the interest. Each time evaluation of

the material should be taken by target students in terms of level of difficulty and interest. One should keep the record of their comments and at the end of the term see if any

pattern of evaluation could be drawn. Note the conclusions in the teaching log and continue improving it.

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