Investigating Kurdish EFL Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Authentic Materials in Learning English

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Abstract

A bulk of research and numerous experts in the field of language pedagogy endorse the idea of utilization of the authentic materials in second language teaching. Authentic resources offer several benefits to the learners, including motivation and interest in language learning, as well as the improvement of communicative competence. This study meant to explore the attitudes of Kurdish EFL university students about the use of authentic materials in learning English. To address its aim, the study used a quantitative research design in which data were collected using a questionnaire.150 learners (68 males & 82 females) comprised the study participants and the collected data were analyzed using SPSS. The results showed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents have a positive attitude towards authentic materials. The findings further uncovered that most of the participants are of the idea that authentic materials assist them to learn the language better and faster especially the communicative aspects of the language.

Introduction

English has been a part and an important component of the world. However, nowadays, the significance of this language is becoming more apparent (Barzani, 2020). This is due to numerous reasons, namely education, business, international tourism, politics and many more. Therefore, people are trying to learn this language worldwide (Fuad & Ulker, 2020). Every year different tools for learning a second language are appearing. New teaching materials are created to provide learners with enough access and to enhance their language learning ability. One of the well-known ways for learning a second language is using authentic materials. Numerous researches support the incorporation of authentic materials in teaching a second language in which it is more interesting for the learners. Nevertheless, there are some authors such as Wallace (1992, p. 145) who describes

authentic texts as real-life texts that are not written for pedagogic purposes. As a result, these materials are unlikely to be provided or intended for the purpose of teaching an additional language to non-native speakers. While authentic material can be any English-language material that was not produced with the intention of being used in an English language classroom, using it to teach English can make the learning experience more enjoyable, creative, and inspiring for students. Hereby, both students and teachers will benefit from authentic resources. These materials will provide learners with exposure to the target language in a real-world setting. Moreover, their ability to motivate learners in the process of learning particularly listening skill is one of the most significant positive points of these texts.

Accordingly, it is also assumed that authentic materials cross the distance between the usage of school languages and the use of real-life languages by taking familiar linguistic contexts and materials straight into the classroom. It is also believed that using such resources by teachers would support ESL students in making a successful transition into the second language culture.

Statement of the Problem

It is not a straightforward process to learn English as a foreign/second language. This takes efforts and time. Due to this, teaching English has experienced many methods and approaches as well as the inclusion of different materials. This is to make this process easier and faster for the learners. One very important source of material is the use of authentic materials. However, here in Iraqi Kurdistan region, students study English from first grade of primary school up to the 12 grades. Yet, the majority of them are not able to communicate. This might be due to many reasons, however one of the very important points might be the lack of authentic materials and the lack of knowledge of teachers of the significant of such materials. Therefore, the present study aims at addressing this issue with finding out the student's attitudes and preferences in terms of the utility of such materials inside the classroom.

Purpose of the Research

Studies show the significant and positive effects of using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classes. Therefore, the aim of this study is twofold: firstly, it aims to highlight the significant of such materials in enabling students with functional aspects of language. Secondly, as mentioned above, it endeavors to find out the Kurdish EFL learners' attitudes and preferences towards such materials.

Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of the current study and address the significance of authentic materials in language teaching, the study aims to find out answers for the following research questions:

1. What are the Kurdish EFL students' attitudes and preferences towards the use of authentic materials in classes?
2. Do Kurdish EFL students find authentic materials useful in language learning and improvement?

Literature Review

Authentic Materials

There are many studies on the use of authentic materials in teaching methods similar to the present research. Authentic materials are common texts which are not intended for educational purposes. "Authentic material provides the learners with many significant advantages and promotes learners with high motivation and interest in language learning (Soliman, 2013)." Authentic material is any content available in English that has not been produced for specific use in the classrooms. Using these materials to teach English will make the learning experience much more exciting, creative and inspiring for students. It can also be helpful to get true answers from the learners (Zazulak, 2017). Authentic materials are defined as written or spoken language data that have been generated in the context of authentic conversation and not expressly written for language teaching purposes by (Nunan, 1999). Students learn listening and interpreting actual such data from various fields, including TV and radio shows, conferences, conversations, and advertisements. Changing of address types, work submissions, lists, voice mail calls, Radio interviews, photographs are the examples of authentic materials that students face in their daily lives. Authentic materials are valuable instructional aids for teachers due to their authenticity, while they are not built specifically for using in the classroom (Ianiro, 2007).

Practicality of Authentic Materials

The use of real materials in EFL classrooms has recently been debated by researchers. Authentic materials can be added to EFL lessons in the classroom. The intention of learners is important while taking the authentic materials to the classroom, it can always be done with an intent as the senior found out, "...we need to have a clear pedagogic goal in mind: what precisely we want our students to learn from these materials." (Senior 2005, p. 71). The pedagogical assistance instructor is needed to make student feel comfortable in managing authentic materials. The capacity of students needs to be taken

into consideration in selecting authentic materials (Berardo, 2006). Soliman (2013) discovered that authentic material offers many valuable advantages to learners and attracts learners with strong enthusiasm and interest in language learning.

The main performances of the usage of authentic materials by teachers is that it can be found easily and quickly. Also, there are many interesting and important texts that teachers can find out from the magazines, internet, and newspapers etc. Authentic texts should be relevant and up to date. There is a feeling of accomplishment. Learners can imitate a story and reuse their vocabulary. Vocabularies are easy to learn, and they are often repeated. They might already know the plot, and it will make vocabulary understanding and guessing even easier (Case, 2019).

The Role of Attitudes in Teaching and Learning Process

The classroom outcomes and the experiences of the experimental community instructor indicated that the cultural content implicit in the materials had a positive effect on the inspiration, interest, and focus of the students as there was a persistent natural urge to ask from students about the characters, locations, and events described in all materials with regard to their teachers and peers. Tomlinson (1998) thinks that authentic materials are objects to expose and assist students to gain authentic use of language by offering ways for learners to use the language while maintaining the interest and focus of the learners. The experimental community instructor acknowledged based on interactions during the course that authentic materials had a significant impact on enriching the vocabulary range of the learners, and in increasing their cultural knowledge and level of attention.

Types of Authentic Materials in Teaching and Learning

Authentic materials can be described as a story book, a newspaper, a film, a short video, a poem, an image and any other content. Those materials should be classified by the teachers so it can be easier for them to choose the appropriate teaching material. Authentic materials were into four main types (Genhard 1996; Maxim 2002; Alkhuli 2006; Polio 2014; Barzani 2021; Hussein et al., 2021):

- Authentic Visual Materials: are defined as a material that students can obtain information by the sense of seeing by (Polio, 2014). Pictures, post cards, wordless picture books, signs with symbols, art works, and drawings are the samples of visual materials.

- Authentic Audio Materials: Alkhuli (2006) defines audio materials as the materials that students can listen to receive the main information. Radio programming, taped interviews, albums, advertisements, songs, announcements, and sundries are some

samples of audio materials. Maxim (2002) suggests that it is vital for their learning development to give students authentic audio material as it teaches them on how to become familiar to the vocabulary, fluency, intonation, and pronunciation of native English speakers.

- Authentic Printed Materials: Magazines, newspapers, newspapers, movie reviews, story books, brochures, and song lyrics are examples of printed materials according to Genhard (2006). He believes that "bringing authentic printed materials to the classroom can make students realize that a high number of stuffs have been produced in the real life which use English as the language."

- Authentic realia: realia are concepts that relate to actual objects and tangible things which are contributing to the formation of real-life circumstances in the halls of teaching (Herre and Jordan as cited in Kheider, 2012).

Selecting Authentic Materials for Teaching and Learning Process

Teachers may follow eight categories to choose a good and appropriate authentic material for learning process. These categories are applicable to the criteria of the school textbook and pupils, subjects focused on the needs of students, cultural appropriateness, practical concern, cognitive requirements, linguistic requirements, material consistency, and exploitability.

For the choice of authentic materials, Mahsefat and Sabet (2012) propose three criteria:

- Suitability of content: FL teachers, able to use authentic language teaching materials, should ask about the standard of study that is appropriate for the introduction of those materials. This is because authentic materials that are beyond the level and competence of learners can de-motivate and discourage them.

- Exploitability: Exploitability implies the degree of which authentic materials can be used to stimulate and strengthen the ability of learners and enable teachers to manipulate them in order to accomplish the goals of teaching.

- Readability: Readability refers to the level of difficulty that EFL students can face as far as the language of authentic materials is concerned, i.e., structure and vocabulary. Teachers should not be deterred by the number of new words and grammatical constructs in their attempts to strengthen and grow the skill of students.

The Relevant Empirical Studies

Akbari and Razavi (2015) in a study found that teachers have positive attitudes

about authentic materials. The participants consider such materials as an important input for developing the language skills of students and introducing them to the actual language. The findings showed that 95% of them use authentic materials in reading classes, and 76% of them use authentic materials in listening classes. There is a big difference between the results because of the lack of computer labs in non-governmental schools. The teachers prefer authentic materials in reading classes more than listening classes. Also, they conducted five questionnaires, almost every participant thinks that authentic materials could be used at the intermediate level, 78% think that they can be used at the advanced level whereas 53% believe that they can be used for beginners.

Similarly, Nadhim (2017) found out that authentic materials supply the communicative properties of language with a strong chance utterly. This study arrives at the fact that university EFL learners reinforced and improved their communicative features of language over 8 weeks of interacting with authentic materials with which different communicative features of language are included. The researcher realized that depending on such materials was remarkably taken into consideration in general education and, in particular, in studying and teaching communicative facets of language; for a long time, students enjoyed using various authentic materials, and they were happy to practice language and communicate with each other via various international social media platforms.

Methodology

Research design

The present study implemented a quantitative research design. The idea of using such research design was due to its relevance and appropriacy to best address and achieve the objectives of the study.

Participants and Setting

The present study comprised of 150 participants (68 males & 82 females); they were from different universities including public and private ones. The study was conducted in the academic year of 2020-2021, in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Data Collection Instruments

For the data collection a 20 items five Likert-scale questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was devised by the researchers. It consisted of two parts: part one related to demographic information of the participants and part two related to the opinions and attitudes of students towards the use of authentic materials in classes.

Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, SPSS was used. First, data were entered into a Microsoft Excel sheet then they were analyzed using the software. The questionnaire that was used to collect data for this thesis were carefully constructed. The research questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to ask participants attitudes and perceptions about the impact and the importance of authentic materials in the study of a second language. The scale ran from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, with (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree). As a result, the participants were asked to check the appropriate column if they believed that authentic materials had an impact.

Results and Discussions

Results

This chapter describes the results of the research about investigating Kurdish EFL students' attitudes towards the use of authentic materials in learning English.

What Are the Kurdish EFL Students' Attitudes and Preferences Towards the Use of Authentic Materials in Classes?

Most students have positive attitude and preferences towards the use of authentic materials in classes. According to the item No. 1 "I am satisfied with the usage of authentic materials" 44.2% of the participants strongly agreed with using authentic materials, 32.8% agreed, and 4.9% strongly disagreed. Survey of 150 university students of KRG-Iraq found that 48% indicated strongly agree, 29.8% agreed that they prefer authentic materials rather than the textbook materials, and 9.5% of the participants indicated disagree. Only 4% stated strongly disagree. Concerning to the item 3 "authentic materials are more fun than traditional teaching materials." 36.6% chose strongly agree, 41.5% agreed that authentic materials are better than other teaching materials. 9.3% participants selected neutral, 6% showed disagree, and 6.6 percent strongly disagreed. As to the item No. 4 "I like and prefer my teachers to use authentic materials more than other teaching materials", 54.6% of the participants selected strongly agree, 39.9% stated agree, 7.9% indicated neutral, 7% showed disagree, and 4.6% participants chose strongly disagree. Nevertheless, for the last item 36.7% strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed that authentic materials motivate students to study, but 18.1% indicated neutral, 9.3%, and 2.6% disagreed.

Table 1: Students' attitudes towards authentic materials

Items	S. Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	S. Agree %
1. I am satisfied with the use of Authentic Materials.	4.9	6.8	11.3	32.8	44.2
2. I prefer Authentic Materials rather than the textbook materials.	4	9.5	8.8	29.7	48
3. Authentic Materials are more fun than traditional teaching materials.	6.6	6	9.3	41.5	36.6
4. I like and prefer my teachers to use Authentic Materials more than other teaching materials.	4.6	7	7.9	39.9	54.6
5. Authentic Materials motivate me to study even outside the class.	2.6	9.3	18.1	33.3	36.7

Do Kurdish EFL Students Find Authentic Materials Useful in Language Learning and Improvement?

The students' responses to whether Kurdish EFL students find authentic materials useful in language learning and improvement or not; 59.8% of the participants strongly agreed, and 24.9% agreed that using authentic materials is essential in learning English. Finally, 5.9% disagreed and 2.6% strongly disagreed on the item No. 6 "The use of authentic materials is important in learning English". Concerning item No. 7 "Authentic materials help me improve my English"; the survey results found that authentic materials helped them to improve their English. 40.6% of the participants strongly agreed. However, 5% pointed out that they disagreed, while 3.9% strongly disagreed with the findings. As a result of item No. 8 "Authentic Materials enrich me with functional aspects of language", 45.7 % of participants expressed a firm agreement with the statement. In addition, 34.1 % of those polled agreed, while 11 % were neutral.

The students' responses to item No.9 "Authentic materials fulfill my needs in language learning"; 37.9% strongly agreed, 36.4% agreed, and 11.8% indicated neutral. However, 9.9% disagreed and only 4% strongly disagreed. 27.5% of the participants strongly agreed that authentic materials improved their cultural understanding. 61.5% agreed, only 2% showed neutral, 6.1% indicated disagree, and 2.9% chose strongly disagree to the item No. 10 "Authentic materials improve my cultural understanding". According item No. 11 "Authentic materials introduce me to how language is used in the real world"; 59.3% participants rated strongly agree, 32.7% agreed, 5% selected neutral, and only 3% stated negatively. 49.5% students strongly disagreed with item No. 12

"Authentic materials are beneficial to the development of productive skills." and 37.4% indicated agree that authentic materials are beneficial to the development of productive skills. 7.1% showed neutral and 4.7% disagreed, whereas only 1.3% selected strongly disagree.

Concerning item No. 13 "Authentic materials are beneficial to the development of receptive skills" the majority agreed. 26.9% strongly agreed and 54.5% agreed. 8.8% stated neutral, 5.8% chose disagree, and 4% strongly disagreed. Item No. 14 "The use of authentic materials improves my language proficiency more than textbooks do"; 21.8% of the participants strongly agreed, 67.4% pointed out that they agree with authentic materials improved their language proficiency more than textbooks do. 6% were neutral, and 3.1% disagreed, while only 1.7% of participants strongly disagreed. As seen in Table 2 below 40.3% strongly agree that authentic materials improved their language skills more than textbooks do, 39% agreed, 13.5% responded neutral, 3.2% chose disagree, and 4% strongly disagreed to the item No. 15 "The use of authentic materials improves my language skills more than textbooks do.". Concerning item No. 16 "The use of authentic materials helps develop my writing skills more than textbooks do." 20.2% of the participants strongly agreed, and 38.9% agreed that authentic materials helped them to develop their writing skills more than textbooks. 17% were neutral, 16.3% disagreed, and 7.3% strongly disagreed. Most of the students 56.1% pointed out that authentic materials helped them to develop listening skills more than textbooks, and 35.6% agreed. 5% of the participants showed neutral, and only 3.3% disagreed on item No. 17 "The use of authentic materials helps develop my listening skills more than textbooks do". However, item No.18 "The use of authentic materials increases my familiarity with the use of grammar rules in their original context"; students responds were 36.5% strongly agree, 39.1% agree, 9.1% neutral, 8.3% disagree, and 7% strongly disagree.

Nevertheless, item No. 19 "The use of authentic materials increases my knowledge of vocabulary items which I need in real situations"; 66% of the students strongly agreed that authentic materials are useful for increasing knowledge of vocabulary items which they need in real situations, 27.6% participants selected agree, 4.4% disagreed with using it, and while only 2% strongly disagreed. The majority of the students for the last item No. 20 "Authentic materials contain difficult and complex language structures which create problems for me" indicated negatively. 11% of the participants strongly agreed, 13.2% agreed, 10.1% neutral, 30.1% disagreed, and 35% strongly disagreed that authentic materials contain difficult and complex language structures which create problems for them.

Table 2: Students' perceptions on the significance of authentic materials

Items	S. Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	S. Agree %
6. The use of authentic materials is important in learning English.	2.6	5.9	6.8	24.9	59.8
7. Authentic Materials help me to improve my English.	3.9	5	4.1	46.4	40.6
8. Authentic Materials enrich me with functional aspects of language.	5.3	3.9	11	34.1	45.7
9. Authentic Materials fulfill my needs in language learning.	4	9.9	11.8	36.4	37.9
10. Authentic Materials improve my cultural understanding.	2.9	6.1	2	61.5	27.5
11. Authentic Materials introduce me to how language is used in the real world.	0	3	5	32.7	59.3
12. Authentic Materials are beneficial to the development of productive skills.	1.3	4.7	7.1	37.4	49.5
13. Authentic Materials are beneficial to the development of receptive skills.	4	5.8	8.8	54.5	26.9
14. The use of Authentic Materials improves my language proficiency more than textbooks do.	1.7	3.1	6	67.4	21.8
15. The use of Authentic Materials improves my language skills more than textbooks do.	4	3.2	13.5	39	40.3
16. The use of Authentic Materials helps develop my writing skills more than textbooks do.	7.6	16.3	17	38.9	20.2
17. The use of Authentic Materials helps develop my listening skills more than textbooks do.	0	3.3	5	35.6	56.1
18. The use of Authentic Materials increases my familiarity with the use of	7	8.3	9.1	39.1	36.5

grammar rules in their original context.				
19. The use of Authentic Materials increases my knowledge of vocabulary items which I need in real situations.	2	4.4	0	27.6	66
20. Authentic Materials contain difficult and complex language structures which create problems for me.	35.6	30.1	10.1	13.2	11

Conclusion

The inclusion of authentic materials is one of the momentous methods of teaching in the classroom. It is to encourage students to become more motivated and involved in learning a second language. Thus, the present study began with the aim of answering the two research questions (What are the Kurdish EFL students' attitudes and preferences towards the use of authentic materials in classes?). As a result of the findings, it was concluded that the participants had positive perceptions toward the use of authentic materials in classes. Also, most of the students preferred using authentic materials rather than textbooks, and they defiantly agreed that authentic materials are motivating. Concerning to the second research question (Do Kurdish EFL students find authentic materials useful in language learning and improvement?) the majority of the participants strongly agreed with the utilization of authentic materials in language learning and improvement. Respondents agreed that authentic materials help them improving their English and their vocabulary knowledge. As a result of what has been said so far, authentic materials are considered as one of the significant factors in the development of receptive and productive skills. Additionally, authentic materials have many advantages for the learners, and it makes learning easier and more motivating.

Pedagogical Suggestions

The students' perspectives on the use of authentic materials are shown in this paper. Nowadays, English has become an integrated component of individual's life. Deferent materials are designed to give learners enough access and to help them improve their language learning abilities. To further elaborate, the functional aspects of language are given more priority in the process of second language teaching and learning. This is due to the significance of the communication competence of the learners. Therefore, students strongly agreed with authentic materials. Teachers can use authentic materials to improve their students' English language and make their lessons more interesting. The

benefit of using authentic materials is that they are freely available, and learners can easily practice English on their own in their free time.

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