

The Positive Effect of Realia in EFL Classes

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Abstract: There are many ways generated by the linguists to teach the language items in EFL classroom; however, bringing 'realia' into the classroom is one of the most effective ways to create an enjoyable class atmosphere and acquire the target language efficiently. Especially, low-level students may suffer from obtaining what teacher presents because they have no chance to synthesize what they learn in the class with real life situations. Using real objects and materials gives students opportunity to experience real life in the class atmosphere and this may facilitate and accelerate their learning process. Accordingly, using visuals stimulates students to maintain studying on the language because practicing the topic with visuals assists students to get involved in more powerful learning. This study illustrates an investigation based on a 20-question exam paper whether getting support from realia augments the students' success in the examination or not. Two elementary-level EFL classes took part in this project. Looking at the results, the students who were taught with realia showed more success compared to the others who were not taught with visuals during teaching.

Keywords: EFL Classroom, Experience, Real Life, Real Objects, Realia, Visuals

1. Introduction

“One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.”

Frank Smith

Teachers are locomotive and inspirer in the classroom so that the students could soar at the peak of enlightenment. They should try to explore new ways how to teach the target language to the students much more effectively and permanently. Language teachers should have an ample range of teaching materials not to bore and lose students' attention from the course. That is, they should offer students a variety of tastes to pursue learning.

Harmer (2001) asserts that the language teachers should stimulate and expose students to the language and they should give them opportunity to practice it in the classroom. He mentions about three elements called 'ESA' that helps students acquire the parts of the language efficiently. The elements are respectively 'Engage' –students' interests are tried to be drawn to learning and provided to get involved into the activities through some objects or pictures-, 'Study' –the aim is to have students focus on the construction of the language, and 'Activate' – students generate new products what they have already studied. In order to catch the students' attention, activate them in the classroom or augment their fruitfulness, visuals can be regarded as a trigger.

2. Literature Review

“Realia is a term for real things-concrete objects-that are used in language classroom to build background knowledge and vocabulary” (“Realia Strategies”, n.d.). In order to provide learners experiences during learning, it is aimed to include sensory abilities into learning through realia because students can smell, hear, see, touch and taste the real objects to boost perception of new topics (“Realia Strategies”, n.d.).

Comenius who was one of the experts of education pointed to ‘use the objects or the pictures to illustrate concepts’ (Ornstein & Levine, 2006, p. 108, cited in Chang, 2006). Krashen & Terrell (1995) point out that teacher should help students build confidence to get involved in the class activities and get positive attitudes towards a foreign language. Using realia is one of the most appealing alternatives that enable the learning process more comprehensible, enjoyable or long-running.

In order to make the learning more memorable and amusing, students should experience the tools which are arranged for ‘real life situations’. These should be real materials from a specific culture (Berwald, 1987). For instance, while teaching the items about a flight ticket such as gate number, boarding time, seat number, etc., it is better to provide the students a real ticket to improve their understanding. They see the components of the ticket and touch a real object and this assists them get the required knowledge comprehensibly. Thus, learning can be more meaningful, cognizable and enjoyable. In order to promote an interactive learning and teaching atmosphere in EFL/ESL classroom, realia takes a significant role (Smith, 1997).

Visual materials such as flashcards, note cards, photographs, illustrations, train or cinema timetables, newspapers, recipes etc. are used to facilitate the learning development. Pictures are regarded as a teaching tool in order to awaken the students’ imagination or capture their interest (Harmer, 2001). Not only using realia such as adverts, maps, magazines, bills, menus or notices in foreign language teaching reduces anxiety, but also it promotes to increase even low-achiever students’ perception and ‘a feeling of accomplishment’. These handicrafts which belong to the culture of target language convey the customs and traditions and constitute teaching supports which ease the act of experience (Berwald, 1987).

The fundamental benefits of using authentic materials are listed below (Philips & Shettlesworth 1978; Clarke 1989; Peacock 1997; Richards, 2001 cited in Kilickaya, 2004):

1. They contribute to amplify learners’ motivation positively.
2. Authentic objects that belong to the target language culture supply real cultural information.
3. Students are exposed to language with these materials.
4. They are likely to meet students’ learning needs.
5. They bring an imaginative approach to teaching.

Based on the above references, realia can be used as a tool to stimulate the learners to activate them in the classroom. They are also used to make the topics more attractive to appeal the learners to get involved in the class activities. Furthermore, if the learners are supplied required materials, they do not just perceive the topic; they also obtain that foreign language cultural information.

Kilickaya (2004) states that knowing a language is much more than just knowing grammatical rules, vocabulary items and pronunciation of these components. Students should try to take in the culture of the target language to be able to absorb the real meaning for successful language learning process. Teachers should provide a relaxing atmosphere for the students so as to give them opportunity to discuss their own culture together with the foreign language culture in meaningful and communicative tasks and activities. Determinants that affect language learning are intricate, and the motivation is one of the remarkable factors that contributes to language learning in achievement to be studied. “EFL teachers can use realia as one of the best ways to motivate students arousing in them curiosity and concern about english speaking countries and their way of living” (Boyer & Linder, 2000). Based on the various studies, motivation fosters students’ performance in classroom (Bernard, 2010). Referring to Bernard’s study (2010), it’s obviously seen that “those students who are most motivated about learning the language are willing to put in more time to learn it well”. On the other hand, the students who are not motivated cannot continue learning the language or show a significant success and high performance in class activities.

This study sought to find out the following questions:

1. Does realia take a role to facilitate foreign language learning?
2. Does realia augment students’ motivation and performance in class activities?
3. Does realia help students to increase exam results?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Preliminarily, students had proficiency exam to measure their language level before academic year. Five groups’ proficiency exam results from the first year of ELT Department were analyzed. It was seen that Group A and Group B’s results were equivalent. Researcher selected 21 students from group A and 21 students from group B randomly.

3.2 Design of the Study

This study is conducted to seek if ‘Realia’ used in EFL classes to introduce a new item of English Language augments students’ success in their exams or not. First, both EFL classes were presented the same topics that were not taught before by the same lecturer. 20 multiple-choice exam papers were composed and distributed to 42 first year students in English Language Teaching Department at a private university in Erbil, Iraq. The researcher used quantitative and qualitative method to analyze the data.

3.3 Data collection

For the control group, the lecturer used power point presentation and class board to teach the subjects. For the experimental group, in addition to PowerPoint presentation, and class board, some real objects were used in order to ease the learning process. Ultimately, after each presentation students were

demanded to do three class activities. One of the activities was individual, second one was given for pairs, and the last activity was done by the groups. After these activities, students were asked to answer an exam sheet that was designed by the researcher in order to measure students' perception about the topic. Quantitative information about the groups is indicated below:

Table 1: Quantitative information about the experimental and control groups

Groups	Number
Experimental	21
Control	21
Total	42

3.4 Findings

The exam results for each group are demonstrated in the tables below.

Table 2: Experimental Group's correct answers in the exam

Questions	Frequency	Percentage
Q1	14	% 70
Q2	12	% 60
Q3	15	% 75
Q4	10	% 50
Q5	13	% 65
Q6	17	% 85
Q7	13	% 65
Q8	15	% 75
Q9	14	% 70
Q10	11	% 55
Q11	16	% 80
Q12	18	% 90
Q13	16	% 80
Q14	15	% 75
Q15	11	% 65
Q16	13	% 65
Q17	17	% 85
Q18	14	% 70
Q19	19	% 95
Q20	16	% 70
Average	15	% 75

Table 3: Control Group's correct answers in the exam

Questions	Frequency	Percentage
Q1	11	% 55
Q2	10	% 50
Q3	12	% 60
Q4	9	% 45
Q5	10	% 50
Q6	13	% 65
Q7	7	% 35

Q8	11	% 55
Q9	11	% 55
Q10	7	% 35
Q11	12	% 60
Q12	16	% 80
Q13	12	% 60
Q14	10	% 50
Q15	9	% 45
Q16	13	% 65
Q17	15	% 75
Q18	11	% 55
Q19	14	% 70
Q20	12	% 60
Average	11	% 55

It is obviously figured out from the tables that there is a significant distinctness between two groups notwithstanding their language level is same. As the table illustrates above, the students who were taught with realia made more success in the examination. Experimental group students got 75% success whereas control group had 55% achievement. Pickett (1988) who conducted a similar study reached at the following results:

Visuals can capitalize on seeing. For most people, the sense of sight – more so than hearing, smell, touch, or taste – is the most highly developed of the senses. Visuals can convey some kinds of messages better than words can. Ideas or information difficult or impossible to express in words may be communicated more easily through visuals. Visuals can simply or considerably reduce textual explanation. Accompanying visuals often clarify words. Visuals can add interest and focus attention (p. 538).

In addition, it was observed that the learners in experimental group were more active than the others in control group. They participated in activities more than control group and they were also more motivated, relaxed and volunteer to provide the answers. It can be asserted that using real objects in EFL classes enhance the students learning process. They help students comprehend the new presented topic of the foreign language effectively.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this globalization era, traditional teaching aids such as course books, activity books, etc., have no longer great effect on learners. They cannot satisfy the students' needs and excite them because of lacking variety of teaching. As the day goes on, educators attempt to discover various teaching approaches so as to find out the ways to engage the students to their courses. In consequence of these endeavors, some of them came to a mutual agreement that utilizing from real objects as teaching aids facilitate the acquisition of a foreign language and give the learners opportunity to experience real life situations in classroom atmosphere. This supplies students real cultural information of the target language and give chance to synthesize their culture and other cultures.

Besides, using real materials help students feel more comfortable to be fruitful in class tasks and activities. Students can be more motivated, and creative and teachers can activate schemata in learners' mind through realia because it addresses to different types of learners such as kinesthetic, visual, and auditory. Consequently, educators should investigate new recipes to boost their students' language acquiring success and realia is one of the efficient ways to perform this.

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