USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: Developing speaking competence is one of the major challenges in English language education, particularly for learners who have limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. Although students may possess sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, many remain reluctant to participate in speaking activities because of fear of making mistakes, limited confidence, pronunciation difficulties, and problems understanding naturally occurring speech. This paper discusses the potential role of authentic materials in supporting the development of students' speaking skills. Authentic materials, including films, interviews, songs, news reports, podcasts, and other real-world resources, expose learners to naturally occurring language and provide meaningful contexts for communication. The discussion is informed by classroom experiences at my university in Uzbekistan, where authentic materials have been incorporated into discussions, debates, presentations, and other communicative activities

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Introduction. Nowadays, improving English speaking skills is essential for learners who need to communicate effectively not only in academic settings but also in everyday life. Students are expected to participate in classroom discussions, examinations, presentations, and debates while also being able to communicate naturally outside the classroom. Communicative competence therefore requires

more than knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; learners also need the ability to use language appropriately and confidently in real communicative situations (Hymes, as cited in Kusumaningsih, 2013).

However, many students struggle to express their ideas even when they possess sufficient linguistic knowledge. Fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, low confidence, and problems understanding naturally occurring speech can prevent learners from participating actively in speaking activities. In some cases, students may know what they want to say but hesitate because they are concerned about making grammatical or pronunciation errors in front of their classmates. Consequently, a gap may emerge between students' passive knowledge of English and their ability to use it spontaneously.

One possible way to address these challenges is to use authentic materials. Authentic materials are resources created for real communication rather than specifically for language teaching. They may include films, interviews, songs, news reports, podcasts, advertisements, websites, and other forms of naturally occurring language. Such materials expose learners to vocabulary, pronunciation, accents, speech patterns, and cultural contexts that may differ from the controlled language commonly presented in textbooks. Gilmore (2007) argues that authenticity in language learning can be connected with motivation, real-world language exposure, and opportunities for meaningful communication.

Authentic Materials and Speaking Development. Authentic materials can give learners opportunities to encounter English in contexts that resemble communication outside the classroom. Rather than learning vocabulary or grammatical structures in isolation, students can observe how language is used to express opinions, tell stories, provide information, persuade others, or respond to different situations.

This is particularly important for speaking development because speaking requires learners to transform their linguistic knowledge into active communication.

A short interview, for example, can introduce students to naturally occurring expressions and pronunciation patterns. After listening, students can summarize the speaker's ideas, discuss the topic with a partner, or express whether they agree or disagree.

Authentic materials can be a bridge between receptive and productive language skills. Students first watch or listen to meaningful language and then use the information as a basis for speaking. This process may be particularly useful for learners who find it difficult to generate ideas independently. Instead of asking students to speak about an unfamiliar topic without preparation, teachers can provide authentic input that gives them both a topic and linguistic context.

Authentic materials may also increase students' motivation by making classroom activities more relevant to their interests and experiences. When students recognize that the English they encounter in class is similar to language used in films, interviews, songs, online content, or news reports, they may perceive English as a means of communication rather than simply an academic subject. In this respect, authentic materials can help connect classroom learning with learners' experiences outside the classroom.

Classroom Experiences at My University. This approach is particularly relevant to my university, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, where students have different levels of English proficiency and participation in speaking activities varies considerably. In my classroom experience, only limited number of students have enough confidence to actively participate in debates and discussions, while most of them hesitate because they are afraid of making mistakes in front of teachers and groupmates or find it difficult to understand more advanced speakers.

One noticeable situation occurs when students are asked to discuss complex topics without sufficient preparation. Lower-level students may have ideas but struggle to organize and express them in English. In those cases, 90 % of students rely on artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT or Gemini to just read or memorize

the written form of answers. However, when the same topic is first introduced through an authentic video, interview, short film, song, or news report, students have a clearer context from which to develop their ideas. After watching or listening, they can identify the main idea, discuss the material in groups, and then are given freedom to express their own opinions.

Authentic materials have also been used in my university to introduce students to global issues and encourage them to consider different perspectives. Instead of requiring students to immediately produce complex opinions using advanced vocabulary, teachers can begin with a short and engaging material and gradually move towards discussion or debate. This process provides students with linguistic input and preparation before they are expected to speak independently.

For example, students may first watch a short video related to a global or social issue. They can then identify the main points, learn several useful expressions, discuss the topic with a partner, and finally participate in a group discussion. Such a sequence gives students an opportunity to process the information before producing their own language.

Benefits and Challenges of Authentic Materials. The main potential advantages of authentic materials include exposure to real language, cultural information, increased learner engagement, connection with learners' needs, and opportunities for more creative teaching approaches (Gilmore, 2007). They can also introduce learners to different accents, speech rates, vocabulary choices, and communicative styles that may not be represented in traditional written materials.

Besides these advantages, authentic materials may also present a number of challenges. Firstly, materials for fluent speakers may contain unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar structures, cultural and idiomatic expressions, and fast speech. For lower-level learners, who are many at my university, excessive difficulty can result in frustration rather than motivation.

Language teachers therefore need to select materials according to students' proficiency levels, interests, learning objectives, and also background knowledge. Appropriate scaffolding can include essential vocabulary, selecting shorter extracts, providing guiding questions, using subtitles when appropriate, allowing repeated viewing or listening, and organizing pair or group discussion before the start of whole-class speaking.

Also, for the effective use of authentic materials such as visual ones the schools have to provide enough facilities. Regular Internet access, projectors, interactive and electronic boards, speakers, and other digital tools can facilitate the use of audiovisual materials. However, limited resources should not prevent teachers from using authentic materials. Short downloadable videos, printed transcripts, photographs, newspapers, and other authentic resources can also be integrated into communicative activities.

Classroom organization is equally important. In large classes, it may be difficult for every student to speak individually. Pair work, small-group discussions, role-plays, and short presentations can increase opportunities for language production while reducing the pressure of speaking in front of the entire class.

Conclusion. Having considered the classroom experiences and common challenges faced by students at my university, it can be suggested that the integration of authentic materials is a practical and meaningful approach to supporting the development of English speaking skills. Authentic videos, interviews, songs, films, news reports, and other real-world resources can provide students with exposure to naturally occurring English while creating meaningful contexts in which they can practise using the language.

The value of authentic materials, however, extends beyond the development of individual linguistic aspects such as fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. They can also contribute to students' confidence, motivation, classroom engagement, and willingness to communicate. Students who initially hesitate to

speak may gradually become more active when they are provided with accessible language input, supportive activities, and meaningful opportunities to express their ideas.

The potential benefits can be observed in several interconnected areas:

1. **Classroom participation and learning**

Authentic materials can encourage students to take a more active role in classroom communication. Rather than remaining passive recipients of information, learners can discuss, question, debate, or respond to real-world content. Activities such as pair discussions, group debates, role-plays, presentations as well as interactive activities can provide students opportunities to practise English more effectively.

2. **Communication beyond the classroom**

Exposure to naturally occurring English can help students become more familiar with the language they may encounter in everyday communication. Developing the ability to understand different accents, speech patterns, vocabulary choices and communicative situations can support students in using English with peers and other speakers like foreign peers, groupmates, teachers or internation visotrs during their wotking life

3. **Confidence and willingness to communicate**

Speaking development is not limited to linguistic knowledge. Students also need confidence and a willingness to take communicative risks. When learners are given opportunities to speak in supportive and engaging contexts, they may gradually become less afraid of making mistakes. This can encourage them to participate more actively and develop greater confidence in expressing their ideas.

4. **Developmental experiences for teachers**

Authentic materials provide teachers with opportunities to employ different approaches to speaking instruction, including debates, role-plays, group discussions, presentations, problem-solving activities, and other interactive tasks. Such variation

can accommodate different learning preferences and provide students with multiple ways to practise communication.

Overall, authentic materials should not be viewed as a single solution to all challenges in speaking instruction. Their effectiveness depends on appropriate material selection, students' proficiency levels, teacher support, classroom conditions, and the design of communicative tasks. Nevertheless, the classroom experiences discussed in this paper suggest that authentic materials can create a valuable connection between language input, classroom interaction, and real-life communication.

In short, the purpose of speaking instruction is not simply to enable students to produce grammatically correct sentences, but to help them use English with greater confidence and purpose.

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