Libyan teachers' Attitudes and Believes Regarding the Use of EFL Authentic Materials within Reading Lessons at Universities Levels in Libya

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Abstract

There are many references among literature supporting the idea of using authentic material in language teaching. Authentic material provides the learners with many significant advantages and promotes learners with high motivation and interest in language learning. This paper attempted to recognize Libyan EFL teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding the use of authentic reading materials at university level in Libya. After employing attitude and believes questionnaire toward the use of authentic materials to EFL teachers from the University of Gareuness in Libya the results indicated that EFL Libyan teachers had a positive attitudes towards the use of authentic material. In addition, the study indicated that a perfect reading class should use a combination of both authentic texts and textbooks. Therefore, language programs should consider introducing authentic materials into the curriculum as a tool to improve the current learning environment.

Key words: *Teachers' Attitudes and Believes, Authentic Materials, Reading Lessons*

1.0 Introduction

English is the world's most widely used language. Kitao (2006) estimates that the total numbers of native English speakers are more than 350,000,000 and more than 400,000 speakers of English as second language or foreign language. It appears that the growing importance of English as an international language and as a global lingua franca is observable in virtually all countries of the world from its increasing status in educational curricula to its role as the language of international. English has been widely used in many areas such as politics, economics, tourism, electronics, telecommunication, culture and science and technology. English is not only a means of but also a key to accessing the latest achievements of science and technology. Therefore, it is necessary for many Libyans to have a good command of English to satisfy the growing needs in a developing country like Libya. It is clear that English language has become more dominant around the world. In some countries it is native language and in other countries it is learned as a second language or foreign language in the schools, such as in the Arab world as a second language. There are many researchers have been conducted and discussed the various problems of Arab learners of English, but there has been very little attention paid to the various ways of solving these problems Ghaleb Raba'bah (2003) added "Another important area of difficulty that Arab learners of English have is communication. Arab learners find it difficult to communicate freely in the target language. This may be due to the methods of language teaching and the learning environment, which may be said to be unsuitable for learning a foreign language (p.122).

The relentless push toward communicative approaches to language teaching since the mid 1970s has brought along with it a need to develop students' skills for the real world (Adams,

1995; Widdowson, 1979, Widdowson 1990). Teachers, therefore, must "simulate" real-world situations in the classroom (Stern, 1981). One way of doing so is to incorporate, in reading instruction, the use of authentic materials. These are "ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes" (Carter & Nunan, 2001, p.68). Examples of such materials include newspapers, magazines, TV programs, radio talks, menus, brochures, comics, novels, short stories, weather forecasts, and recipes (Hedge, 2000). Researchers (e.g. Breen, 1985; Duquette, Dunnett, & Papalia, 1987; Herron & Seay 1991; Lee, 1995; Morton, 1999; Nostrand, 1989; Rogers & Medley, 1988; Weyers, 1999) have repeatedly concluded that authentic materials in the foreign language classroom are effective resources that can positively contribute to students' progress.

Foreign language pedagogy is increasingly focusing on the functional use of language while instructors look for materials that more closely reflect the language students will encounter outside of the classroom. Grammar practice, drills, exercises, and reading and listening texts found in common textbooks are necessary, but students need to be exposed to and have access to the same language native speakers typically use. In this respect, Harmer (2001) believes that, despite many textbooks' use of non-authentic materials to practice specific language points, only authentic materials will 'genuinely' improve listening and reading skills.

1.1 The State of English in Libya, a Brief History

After the revolution in 1969, all Libyan students were guaranteed the right to education. The education system in Libya from the primary to the university level is similar in all Libyan provinces. The school program consisted of six years of primary school, three years of preparatory school (junior high), and three years of secondary school. A five-year primary teaching program could be selected upon completion of primary school. But it could be recall it that, one of the worst problems faced by the Libyan higher education sector after 1986 was the political decision to stop teaching English and French languages at all the educational sectors (Hashim, (1997). As a result of this, the English language phased out of school and university for 10 years. Recently in 1992, all Libyan students are exposed to English as a foreign language at school and university levels. English has been taught as a compulsory subject at private and public schools. Libyan students have faced difficulties in learning English as a foreign language.

At present, the structure of the Libyan education system is classified into four levels. The system works from primary and elementary education through to secondary education and finally to higher and university education (Ministry of Education, 2007). That is to say, 6years primary, 3 years elementary, 3 years secondary and 4 to 6 years at university level, depending on fields and specialization. But it can be noted that, there are many problems facing Libyan students in learning English language. In addition to that, the teacher is the only source of knowledge and the learner has no opportunity to participate except if she/he is asked to answer a question.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Widdowson (1983) "Authenticity is a term which creates confusion because of a basic ambiguity" (p.30). Therefore, the term authentic material has been defined in different ways throughout the literature. What is common to these definitions is 'exposure to real language and its use in its own community'. Adams, (1995) refers to authentic materials as "any material which has not been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching" (p.4). Guariento & Morley, (2001) define authentic material as "an authentic text…created to

fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced" (p.347). Bacon and Finnemann (1990) define authentic materials as texts "produced by and for native speakers of the target language" (p.469). Rogers and Medley (1988) used the term "authentic" to refer to "language samples ... that reflect a naturalness of form and an appropriateness of cultural and situational context that would be found in the language as used by the native speakers" (p. 468). Other definitions of authentic material have emphasized the primacy of communicativeness. For example, Lee (1995) states that "a text is usually regarded as textually authentic if it is not written for teaching purposes, but for a real life communicative purpose, where the writer has a certain massage to pass on to the reader" (P. 324).

On the other hand, others believe that there are more elements to the definition of the term authentic than textual authenticity (Breen, 1985; Chaves, 1998; Jacobson, Degener, & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Rings, 1986; Ur, 1996). Widdowson (1990), for example, distinguishes between authentic text and authentic discourse, saying that "the language presented to SL learners may be genuine record of native speaker behavior, genuine, that is to say, as textual data, but to the extent that it does not engage native speaker response it cannot be realized as authentic discourse" (p.45). Similarly, Breen (1985) suggests that authenticity does not relate only to the language selected to be taught (*authentic texts*) but to the tasks on which the learners are engaged and the social setting created in the classroom. He explains that "authenticity to the target language needs to be seen as only one of a number of demands for authenticity which confront the teacher. the learners' own contributions, the activity of language learning, and the actual classroom situation are also constituent elements" (p.61). Thus, Breen distinguishes four types of authenticity which must be in continual interrelation with one another during any language lesson.

- *Authenticity of the texts which we may use as input data for our learners.*
- *Authenticity of the learners' own interpretations of such texts.*
- *Authenticity of tasks conductive to language learning.*
- *Authenticity of the actual social situation of the language classroom (p.61)*

Moreover, Rings (1986) concludes that "For a particular type of text, the speaker must be' authentic' the situation must be authentic, and only then will the language content and structure be authentic for that text type" (p. 205). Taylor (1994), similarly, states, "authenticity is not a characteristic of a text in itself: it is a feature of a text in a particular context. Therefore, a text can only be truly authentic in the context for which it was originally written." To conclude, authentic material can be said to be the kind of language which is used by native speakers, communicating orally or in writing, and which is not simplified for FL/SL learning purposes.

2.1 Linguistic Advantages of using authentic texts

Empirical studies have confirmed the positive results obtained by learners who have opportunities to interact with and utilize authentic texts. Several studies, such as Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000), found that aural language development was improved when the practice incorporates authentic materials. Moreover, Otte (2006) examined the impact of aural authentic texts on listening comprehension abilities of four adult ESL students at an American university. He found that students' listening comprehension abilities and motivation increased after exposure to authentic materials. Similarly, Herron and Seay (1991), in a study conducted on intermediate-level students, found that students who listened to authentic radio tapes as a substitute for regular classroom activities demonstrated significantly greater listening comprehension than those students for whom the authentic radio program was not a part of the

semester's curriculum. Their research asserts that listening-comprehension skill improves with increased exposure to authentic speech.

Moreover, Berardo (2006) indicates that several studies have found out that authentic materials can increase reading development by introducing students to new vocabulary and expressions. For example, Young (1999) investigated reading comprehension of 127 second year Spanish language students at a state university. He found a tendency for better recall scores on authentic, as opposed to simplified, versions of the same texts. Similarly, Leow (1993) examined learners' intake of selected linguistic items from authentic and simplified texts and found that, although the simplified versions were significantly more comprehensible, they did not facilitate greater levels of intake. Moreover, Crossley, McCarthy, Louwerse, and McNamara (2007) investigated differences in linguistic structures between sampled simplified and authentic reading texts using computational tools. They found that simplified texts demonstrate more syntactic complexity than authentic texts do. In this respect, Carney and Franciuli (1992) believe that the use of authentic texts focusing on reading has obvious advantage when teaching more mature students.

In addition, many professionals in the field of language pedagogy have emphasized the importance of using authentic materials to improve the communicative competence of learners (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Wilcox et al., 1999). Empirical evidence was provided by Gilmore (forthcoming, as cited in Gilmore, 2007). Gilmore compared the impact of authentic versus textbook materials on developing learners' communicative competence in a one-year quasi-experimental study at a Japanese university. He found that the experimental group, receiving the authentic input, made statistically significant improvements over the control group on six out of eight tests designed to measure different types of competence. He concluded, "This result was attributed to the fact that the authentic input allowed learners to focus on a wider range of features than is normally possible and that this noticing had beneficial effects on learners' development of communicative competence" (p.111).

In this respect, Weyers (1999) examined the impact of exposure to authentic video on the language acquisition process of university students of Spanish. Analysis of the results showed a significant improvement in listening comprehension skills and some component parts of the communicative competence of those students who were exposed to authentic video.

According to Ur (1996), students usually have trouble understanding texts outside of the classroom because classroom reading materials do not reflect the language of the real world. She states, "We want our learners to be able to cope with the same kinds of reading that are encountered by native speakers of the target language" (p.150). Similarly, Brantmeier (2008) asserts that authentic reading materials should remain a critical component of language programs. Moreover, Hadley (2001) concludes that the, "use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials used alone" (p.97). Therefore, it sounds sensible to base students' reading practice on a variety of authentic texts.

Furthermore, Morton (1999) maintains that the strategies students develop in comprehending authentic texts can help them develop writing proficiency in the target language. He explains, "Students need to learn the register that is appropriate for their own essays. for this, there is no substitute for authentic academic texts which can develop students' ability to master basic rhetorical devices" (p. 182). In this respect, Carter and Nunan (2001)

assert that the use of authentic materials raises learners' awareness of not only grammatical and lexical but also stylistic features.

Moreover, scholars in favor of authentic materials suggest that exposure to authentic materials should start in the earliest stages of language learning (Bacon, 1989; Miller, 2005), asserting that an early exposure to such texts will help students develop useful strategies for more complex tasks later on. Herron and Seay (1991) believe that using authentic materials allows students to experience early in their study the rewards of learning a language.

Authentic materials can still be useful in another way; empirical studies have confirmed that less proficient students can benefit from such materials. In an examination of high school students studying German as a FL, Bernhardt and Berkemeyer (1988) concluded that all levels of students were able to manage using authentic texts. Similarly, Allen et al. (1988) examined 1,500 high school students' abilities to read authentic materials after one to five years of foreign language instruction at three different levels of language difficulty. The researchers found that all subjects were able to deal with all of the authentic texts they were asked to read, even at the beginning level; "regardless of level all subjects were at the very least able to capture some meaning from all of the texts" (p. 168).

Maxim (2002) carried out another study on beginners to investigate the effect of reading extended authentic texts in true beginning college level language students who enrolled in their first semester of German. The results of the study indicated that students in the treatment group were able to read a full-length authentic text in the fourth week of instruction, and this did not affect their language development negatively since they performed as well as the control group on three department tests. Maxim (2002) concluded, "The students' limited linguistic competence did not short-circuit their ability to read authentic texts in class with the support of their classmates and instructor" (p.29). The findings of the above-mentioned studies have indicated that authentic materials can be useful in many ways. Such materials introduce students to how language is used in the real world and improve their overall language proficiency as well as reading and listening comprehension, communicative competence, and lexical and stylistic knowledge.

2.2 Non-Linguistic Advantages of using authentic texts

Incorporating authentic materials in teaching a FL offers more than linguistic advantages. In this respect, scholars argue for the motivating power of authentic materials (Gilmore, 2007; Sherman, 2003), which is a key factor affecting successful language learning (Keiko Komiya, 1992; Krashen, 1981; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Gilmore (2007), "Claims that authentic materials are a motivating force for learners are widespread through the literature" (p. 106).

For example, McNeil (1994) and Kilickaya (2004) indicate 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 the real language – the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it. Rivers (1987) maintains that students who work with authentic materials have an interest in the language that is based on what they know it can do for them. Findings of empirical studies (Kim, 2000; Otte, 2006; Peacock, 1997; Thanajaro, 2000) have confirmed that students' motivation and self-satisfaction increased after exposure to authentic aural texts.

Kim (2000) argues that authentic materials make a major contribution to overcoming certain cultural barriers to language learning. Sherman (2003) argues, "One reason why

[authentic material] is so important for language learning is that it is a window into culture" (p.12). McGinnis and Ke (1992), in their project about using authentic cultural materials to teach reading in Chinese, conclude that "Through a carefully organized and richly divergent variety of authentic materials, students can acquire … the greater ability to develop cultural understanding by themselves" (p. 238). In this respect, Garcia (1991) claims that the use of authentic reading texts improves the students' cultural understanding. In conclusion, it is clear from the above review that incorporating authentic materials into the FL/SL classroom has a positive effect on the students' linguistic achievements and the affective aspects of the learning process.

2.3 Teachers' Attitudes towards the use of authentic materials
Teachers' attitudes toward the use of authentic materials in their classes are an issue that has not received the attention it deserves. It seems that only few studies have reported some ideas regarding teachers' beliefs about the communicative approach, in general. Kienbaum et al. (1986) in their study of the effectiveness of a communicative approach using authentic materials reported that "the program's teachers found that selection and planning for using the authentic materials required considerable extra preparation time, and that they needed to minimize their role of authority to encourage the students' direct contact with the culture" (p.1). This claim was not based on research data collection methods; Kienbaum, Russell and Welty, (1986). did not investigate whether the teachers were willing to use such materials in their classes. In this respect, Karavas-Doukas (1996) investigated EFL teachers' attitudes toward the communicative approach in Greek public secondary schools. A Likert-type attitude scale was developed, and fourteen teachers completed the questionnaire and were observed. The results of the study indicated that the teachers seemed to hold favorable attitudes toward the communicative approach. However, the teachers tended to follow an eclectic approach, including features from both traditional and communicative approaches, in their classes. Karavas-Doukas did not mention anything regarding the teachers' attitudes toward the use of authentic materials as a practice of the communicative approach.

3.0 Statement of the problem
Nowadays the main goal of teaching English as a foreign language in Libya is to enable students to communicate with English speakers and to offer them a window to the world. But in reality the students' English proficiency remains rather low. This weakness may be attributed to various factors, including the English curriculum, the excessive use of Arabic in instruction, the small number of hours of instruction per week, limited use of the media, over-dependence on the board and the textbook, and the use of traditional teaching methods (e.g. grammar and vocabulary translation) which do not enhance communication. The English curriculum in Libya can, therefore, be said to suffer from serious deficiencies. Authenticity in the foreign language classroom could be a possible solution. However, the use of authentic materials has not yet received enough attention in Libya EFL classes. In fact, the in-class exposure to authentic input is very rare despite the fact that previous studies (Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, & Demel, 1988; Miller, 2005; Otte, 2006; Thanajaro, 2000) have provided evidence to support the effectiveness of such materials in the learning process. Somehow, Previous research has proved that teachers' attitudes have a significant influence on students' motivation and, more generally, on their learning achievement (Dornyei, 2003). Both of Brown and Rodgers (2002) state that teaching is heavily influenced by the beliefs of its participant (teachers). Thus, there is a need for evidence of the teachers' attitudes regarding the effect of authentic materials on language learning and teaching in Libya. Authenticity in the foreign language classroom could be a possible solution. Nonetheless, the gap here is that, the use of authentic materials has not yet received the much required attention in Libyan EFL classes.

4.0 Research Methodology

A quantitative method was used, whereby questionnaire was distributed to the target sample in order to find out the amount of attitudes and believes that Libyan EFL teachers hold regarding the use of authentic materials within their English lessons. Furthermore, the questionnaire made up of selected-response items and open-response items. Both types of items may collect information on (1) personal profile (including years of experience, nationality, academic degree). (2) Opinions about the currently used EFL reading textbooks; and (3) attitudes toward using authentic input in class.

5.0 Result and Discussion

According to several researchers (Keiko Komiya, 1992; Krashen, 1981; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Smith, 1971), students' achievement in learning an EFL is heavily influenced by teachers' attitudes; thus, understanding teachers' perspectives regarding the use of authentic materials in reading instruction is essential for a successful application of this practice in Libyan university. However, materials introduce students to how language is used in the real world and improve students' overall language proficiency as well as reading and listening comprehension, communicative competence, cultural awareness, lexical and stylistic knowledge, and motivation (Bacon, 1989; Berardo, 2006; Garcia, 1991; Herron & Seay, 1991; Otte, 2006; Peacock, 1997). The extra advantages such materials provide clearly justify the teachers' positive attitude.

Moreover, almost all of the teachers indicated that the ideal reading class uses a combination of both authentic texts and textbooks, which provides further support for Hadley's (2001) claim that such a combination is more appropriate. Most of the teacher participants also stated that a reading class that exclusively used textbooks was the most ineffective, which supports previous research findings that textbooks can build a wall between the students and the real language and fail to reflect the students' needs and interests (Brown & Eskenzai, 2004; Brusch, 1991; Swan, 1991).

The teachers in the current study also indicated the types of authentic texts they preferred for use in their reading classes. Short stories were the most preferred, whereas poems were the least preferred, providing further support for Ghosn's (2002) claim that authentic short stories effectively motivate students and promote the development of skills necessary for L2 academic literacy. The teachers also preferred, in order, magazines, Internet materials, newspapers, books, novels, and brochures. They also suggested using documentaries, statistics that provide facts, emails, personal diaries and journals, technical articles, instruction manuals, announcements, advertisements, food recipes, medical prescriptions, and letters.

The current study also examined the teachers' attitudes in regard to the right stage to introduce authentic materials to EFL learners. The results revealed that the majority of instructors believed that exposure to authentic texts should start at the intermediate levels of language learning. However, several previous studies have found that even beginning language learners can benefit from the use of authentic materials in language instruction (Allen et al, 1988; Bernhardt & Berkemeyer, 1988; Maxim, 2002). However, Rivas (1999) and Mishan (2005) argue that students' interests and needs are the most essential factors in the choice of authentic texts, and Brown and Eskenzai (2004) claim that the primary criteria for selecting appropriate authentic texts should be the reader's current vocabulary knowledge and desired vocabulary knowledge throughout the curriculum in addition to grammar difficulty. Rivers (1987), for example, claims that "although length, linguistic complexity, and interest for the

student all play significant roles in the selection of materials, the single most important criterion for selection is content" (p. 50).

6.0 Conclusion

The concept of authentic material in classroom provides students with opportunities to get exposed to and practice a language that naturally occurs outside the classroom. However, the impact of authentic materials on language performance at various levels has shown improvement in language performance as a result of exposure to authentic language in the classroom. Therefore, authentic material provides the learners with many significant advantages and promotes learners with high motivation and interest in language learning and Students' achievement in learning EFL is always influenced by teachers' attitudes.

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