Ideating A Conceptual Framework of Authentic Materials

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Abstract

This exploratory study is a short communication, and it aims at ideating a conceptual framework of authentic materials (AMs) in terms of executing them in a strategic manner to maximize optimal learning of English in ESL classrooms. As a part of findings, using document analysis as a method of data collection and analytic induction as a method of data analysis, the study has come up with a conceptual framework of authentic materials that illustrates the sequential strategies of using any authentic materials in proper correlation among *skills*, *levels of learners*, and *activities*.

Introduction

Today, having good communication skills has become a flat out need for the students not only for real-life communication but equally for the success in competitive world and for language proficiency tests like IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, etc. But if we look at the ground reality of ESL classrooms especially in rural India, the learning outcome of English learners is far from satisfactory. Here comes the need of introducing authentic materials in ESL classrooms. Authentic material is any material that brings real-life communication for the students in English language classrooms. Learning a language through Authentic Materials (AMs) is always more enjoyable as it enhances communication skills of the students by immersing them in real life communication. But any headway is possible only when ESL teachers are efficient enough in using authentic materials appropriately. If an ESL teacher does not have adequate know-how about using authentic materials, s/he would not be able to produce desirable learning outcome. Ironically, it has been

found in Indian ESL classrooms that neither the teachers nor the curriculum encourage the use of authentic materials. As a result, the students remain deprived of learning English optimally despite years of studying in schools. Given the stated problem, this study has proposed a conceptual framework of using authentic materials in a strategic manner.

Conceptual Framework of Authentic Materials (CFAM)

Since, an exploratory study is often oriented towards generating formal hypotheses in the form of conceptual framework; this study ideates an empirical approach in the form of *Conceptual Framework of Authentic Materials* (CFAM) to expedite English language learning in ESL classrooms of rural India. The proposed CFAM is based on integrated iconic approach of Jha (2011) that enlists six strategies namely: *skills, levels, authentic materials, activities, help,* and *evaluation* to reach the stage of mastering. The aim of CFAM is to make learners autonomous in their learning by using different ELT activities.

Before we delve into the mechanics of CFAM, it is imperative to discuss what an authentic material is. Authentic material is any material that brings real-life communication for the students in English language classrooms. AMs are normally used in eight different forms under four broad categories as follows: (*see figure-1*) below, namely audio-video, audio, web-based, and print. Except print authentic materials, most of the sub-types are multimedia-enabled. As for print authentic materials, they normally come either in archival form or in peripheral form. The archival materials are normally books on situational dialogues of daily use along with books on communicative words, phrases and collocations. On the other hand, peripheral authentic materials are the materials which are not supposed to be archived rather used for some time only. Here is a classification of all the major types and sub-types of AMs.
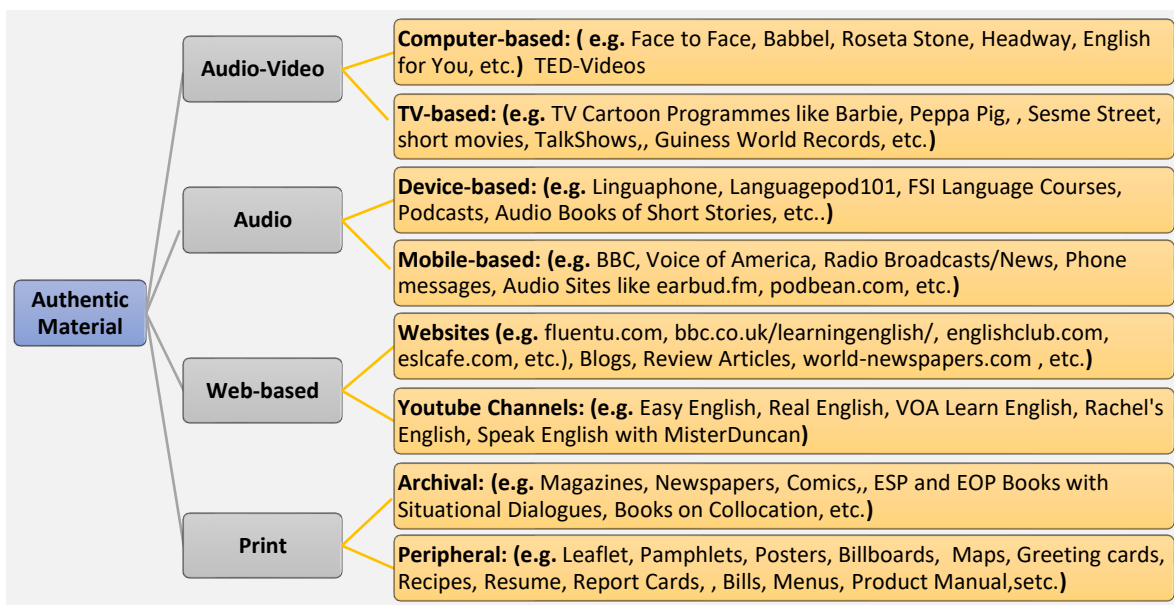

Figure 1: Types of Authentic Materials

The study further proposes five-layered strategic conceptual framework of using authentic materials (see figure-2) under five nomenclatures namely (i) skills, (ii) levels of learners, (iii) authentic materials, (iv) activities, and (v) evaluation as follows:

STRATEGIES	COMPONENTS
1. Skills	(1) Listening (L) (2) Speaking (S) (3) Reading (R) (4) Writing (W)
2. Levels of Learners	(1) Pre-production Level **(PPL)** (2) Early production Level **(EPL)** (3) Speech emergence Level **(SEL)** (4) Intermediate fluency Level **(IFL)** (5) Advanced Fluency Level **(AFL)**
3. Authentic Materials	(1) Video Authentic Materials **(VAM)** (2) Audio Authentic Materials **(AAM)** (3) Printed Authentic Materials **(PAM)** (4) Integrated Authentic Materials **(IAM)**
4. Activities	**Independent Activities:** (For PPL and EPL) (1) Watching Situational or ESP Dialogues of Native Speakers (2) Watching Videos of Short Stories (3) Collocational and Contextual Vocabulary Drills, (4) Inductive Grammar learning, (5) Peripheral learning using exhibitions, fairs, placards, posters, etc. (6) Fluency Drill Summarization and Paraphrasing (7) Rhetoric & Idioms to master stylistic nuances **Performance-oriented Group Activities:** (For SEL, IFL, & AFL) (1) Role play: Teacher & Student, or Student & Student (2) Opinion / Information / Reasoning Gap (3) Jigsaw Task (4) Debates/Group Discussion (5) Public Speaking and Presentation (6) Purposive Writing, Review writing, Report Writing (7) Narrating with Illustration (8) Think-Pair share (9) Projects and Portfolios
5. Evaluation	(1) Unconscious Evaluation (2) Self Evaluation (3) Conscious Evaluation

Figure-2:(Strategies and Components of CFAM)

The conceptual framework of authentic materials {see figure-2) hypothesizes a desirable sequential processing of six major strategies and their respective components to learn and master English language optimally. The usage of unidirectional downward arrow merely implies the occurrence of strategies one after another but not vice versa; whereas components under interdependent activities can occur both directions as indicated by bidirectional arrow. Similarly help database do not follow any particular direction as they can be accessed based on the needs irrespective of the sequence. Let us see each of the strategies in turn.

Skills

The first strategy in IIA framework is to decide "which **skill** should be learnt first". The hypothetical sequence of four language skills for integrated learning is *Listening→Speaking→Reading→Writing*. Naturally, the first two audio-lingual skills, i.e. listening and speaking are taught first followed by the graphic skills, i.e. reading and writing. But a learner may opt for learning a particular skill based on his/her needs. For instance, a non-English speaking person who is going to visit London for tour or business would like to learn and master his/her speaking skill first. Thus, skill is decided first in CFAM.

Levels of Learners

In accordance with the selected skill, IIA's next strategy is to measure and decide levels of learners. Based on varied degree of linguistic proficiency, traditionally, L2 learners have been labeled with levels like *beginner*, *pre-elementary*, *elementary*, *upper-elementary*, *pre-intermediate*, *intermediate*, *upper-intermediate*, and *advanced* respectively. Measuring the levels and progression of learners, an ELT website link http://www.esl-languages.com/en/study-abroad/adults/levels-and-progression/index.htm adds up two more levels: (1) *very advanced* in which learners understand and use almost everything including idiomatic expressions and (2) *proficiency level* in which learners master the foreign language with precision sometimes superior to that of some native speakers. To ensure the levels of learners, there are several online and offline comprehensive level-tests related to different aspects of English grammar. For instance, one can visit the following website links and adopt any or all of the level-tests; or devise similar tests accordingly.
http://www.esl-lounge.com/student/level-test.php
http://www.dllr.maryland.gov/gedmd/cs/eslcslevel.pdf
http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/levels-test-wc-start.htm?

As a part of IIA, levels of learners have nothing to do with the age of learners; rather they refer to the quantum of learners' knowledge and the length of time learners spend at a particular level. The base of measuring and assigning the levels of learners in IIA is that of Krashen & Terrell (1983). Krashen and Terrell

hypothesize five stages through which a learner must pass serially. The five stages have been termed here as five levels.

Level- 1: Pre-Production (PP)

Pre-production level that spans from 0-6 months is also known as a silent period in which learners with their minimal comprehension do not actually produce language rather listen attentively and keep parroting. At this level, learners learn up to 500 words in their receptive vocabulary and communicate with 'yes/no' cues. Normally, TPR method and peripheral learning activities and listening comprehension activities are used for PP level learners.

Level-2: Early Production (EP)

This level spans from six months to one year and the learners learn active vocabulary of about 1000 words. At this level, the learners are in the process of item learning, i.e. learning language at word and phrase level. Teachers are supposed to involve learners in interactive activities by asking questions that require one word answer and response.

Level-3: Speech Emergence (SE)

This level spans from one to three years in which learners acquire a vocabulary of about 3,000 words and communicate with simple phrases and sentences that may or may not be grammatically correct. Teachers are supposed to (i) ask questions that require short answers, (ii) involve learners in explaining phenomena in terms of 'why' and 'how', and (iii) give activities like listening story, reading short essays, understanding-answering questions about charts and graphs, matching and defining words, pair work, and sharing life experience, etc.

Level-4: Intermediate Fluency (IF)

This level spans from three to five years in which learners acquire a vocabulary of about 6000 active words. They start using more complex sentences in speaking and writing with few grammatical errors. As a part of activities, the learners are expected to synthesize what they have learned and analyze more complex concepts.

Level-5: Advanced Fluency (AF)

To reach AF level, learners normally take six to ten years in which their limit of vocabulary exceeds 6000 communicative words and they acquire outstanding academic language proficiency. The learners at AF level are said to have mastered the second language at all linguistic levels, e.g. (phonology,

morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse). Learners are groomed with higher activities like, public speaking, delivering rational talk, storytelling, compiling and presenting views of distinguished speakers and writers, practical teaching, literary composition, etc. to have native-like or superior-to-native proficiency.

Based on the above categorization of the levels of learners, IIA framework necessitates the selection of learners based on their quantum of knowledge with the help of necessary tests. Level of learners is a vital decision in IIA as any further strategy in terms of applying methods and activities varies as per the levels of learners. Subsequent to the resolution of level of learners, IIA moves on to employ appropriate methods designed for specific levels of learners.

Authentic Materials

After deciding the levels of learners, the next strategy of CFAM is to offer four broad types of authentic materials to learn and master the pre-selected skill. CFAM believes in exposing learners to video authentic materials (VAM) first because according to Caplan (2019), humans respond to and process visual data better than any other type of data. In fact, the human brain processes visual content 60,000 times faster than text. That means that a picture is actually worth 60,000 words! Even more, 90 percent of information transmitted to the brain is visual. Secondly, CFAM recommends audio authentic materials (AAM) as listening to an audio lesson is advantageous firstly because it enables our brains to be more attentive and receptive especially when learning is mobile-enabled.

Secondly, it not only improves our listening skills but also improves our pronunciations. Thirdly, CFAM recommends printed authentic materials (PAM) to make learners learn vocabulary, spelling, grammar, figures of speech, and comprehension.

Finally, CFAM recommends integrated authentic materials (IAM) to make learners learn and master English language from holistic perspectives. Thus, IAM suggests using different modes of authentic materials in an integrated manner in line with the pre-selected *skill* and the *level* of the learners. For instance, a learner at PP or EP level should be exposed first to VAM. Similarly, a language teacher is expected to expose learners of SE level to AAM and a learner of IF level to PAM, and a learner of AF level to IAM. respectively. Such a sequence of progression is governed by the notion of moving from simpler to complex phenomenon.

Activities

Subsequent to employing authentic materials, the next strategy of CFAM is to decide appropriate independent and interdependent activities in pertinence

with the pre-selected skill, the levels of learners, and the type of authentic materials. It is noteworthy that there are nine activities listed under both independent and interdependent activities, but independent activities are unidirectional and meant for PP, EP, and SE level learners; whereas interdependent activities are bidirectional in sense that they can be done IF and AF level learners preferably. It is important to mention here that all the activities, listed in the CFAM, have been rationally arranged to arouse and keep up interest of learners at a natural pace of learning which eventually leads to and aims at bringing out the desired competency in English language.

(1) Exposure to Situational Dialogues

Situational dialogue refers to the exchange of communication occurring in different situations, contexts, and settings of life. This activity finds its place in the theoretical premise of Hymes' communicative competence proposed in 1972. Çakır (2009) suggests a large number of conversations exemplifying real life situations, and communicative activities on all four language skills to be used abundantly in language teaching curriculum. From the dialogue teaching perspective, it can be stated these fours skills are integrated when the principles to be mentioned below are followed. What is intended in dialogue should be not only rules but also communication since knowing just the rules do not always lead to satisfactory communication.

While talking of situational dialogues, it is apt to mention that human life has more than 100 types of situational contexts in which real life communication takes place. Here is a list 0f 12 broad contexts subsuming 60 real-life situations. Now, it is the the job of ESL teachers to prepare and procure appropriate exchange of communication from different online and offline sources and make them available to the students in print, audio, and video forms.

Table-1: Prominent Situational Contexts for Authentic Materials

TRAVEL AND TOUR	FOOD AND DRINK
Asking the Way	At Lunch/Dinner/Tea Time
Taking a Bus/Taxi	Learning Recipes
At a Railway / Metro Station	During a Party Ceremony
Booking Airline Ticket	In a Restaurant
Holidaying	Offering Cigarettes and Drinks
LIFESTYLE	GREETINGS
At a Hotel/Bank/Barber's Shop	Introduction Gambits
Making an Appointment	Festival Greetings
Finding a Job	Conference Greetings
Shopping	Marriage Greetings
At a Theatre	Birthday Greetings
COMMUNICATION	HEALTH and SPORTS
Telephoning	Discussing Physical Exercises
Complimenting People on Clothes	At a Doctor's Clinic

Complaining Apologising Planning for the Weekend	At a Chemist Shop In Cricket Stadium Health Tips
NATURAL CATASTROPHE Describing Bad Weather Describing Flood Describing Epidemic Describing Landslide Describing Famine	**EDUCATION** Applying for a Course Going Abroad for Higher Education Asking Admission Procedures Asking for Scholarships Asking for Tuition Waiver
ENTERTAINMENT Describing a Movie Discussing Recreational Hobbies Discussing Dramas Discussing Indoor Activities Discussing Outdoor Activities	**HOUSEHOLD CHORES** Daily Chores: Cooking, Dusting, etc. Weekly Chores: Cleaning Kitchen, Laundering Monthly Chores: Clean Garage, Curtains, etc. Seasonal Chores: Cleaning AC, upholstery, etc Yearly Chores: Pruning Trees, Painting, etc.
HELP Asking for Lifts In a Car Asking for exchanging seats in plane/train Asking for lending money Asking for salary increment Asking for reducing price of any product	**MENTAL WELL-BEING** Doing Meditation Doing Yoga Discussing Peace, Harmony, and Happiness Socialization Community Services

(2) Watching Videos of Short Stories

The purpose of watching video of short stories is to make the learners aware not only of linguistic use but more importantly sociolinguistic use of the language to enhance four language skills. To be more precise, integrating literature and cultural nuances in the form of short stories proves very useful in an ESL classroom due to its rich potential to provide an authentic model of language use. However, the selection of short stories should be done in reference to the course objective, the learners' profile, and the story content in order to make the best of it**.** Short story creates a meaningful context to teach different language focuses and to improve the students' interpretative strategies (Pardede**,** 2011**)**. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, reenactment, and discussion are some effective learning activities Asking students to read story aloud can develop their speaking as well as listening skills. Moreover, it also leads to improving pronunciation.

Conclusion

Since ESL teachers as part of customary practices often squander valuable time of class in unproductive grammar activities resulting into learning grammar rules rather than learning real communication, this study has proposed a conceptual framework of authentic materials with the belief that the framework will help ESL students in terms of honing their all the vital skills and sub-skills of the English language. In conjunction with AMs, the schools need to be equipped with good language lab to understand phonological, morphological, and syntactic programming of English language so that the students could rehearse them to improve authenticity of their English.

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