

Attitudes of ELT Teachers Working in Turkey towards the Role and Use of Authentic Materials

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Abstract

Sanderson (as cited in Tamo, 2009) defines authentic materials as “materials that we can use in the classroom and that have not been changed in any way for ESL students” (p. 74). This definition makes it clear that authentic materials bring learners into direct contact with real English usage. McGarry indicates that activities based on authentic texts play a key role in enhancing positive attitudes towards learning, in promoting the development of a wide range of skills, and in enabling students to work independently of the teacher. Since authentic materials are considered effective in language teaching by many scholars, this paper aims to reveal the general ideas of English language educators (teachers, instructors, tutors), working in different schools in Turkey regarding the notion of “authenticity” and “authentic material”. It further intends to find out their attitudes towards the authentic texts. The data was collected by a questionnaire adapted from the study of Yeung T. (2011). In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants which constitute the qualitative stage of the study. The results indicated that participants give importance to the role of authentic materials in language teaching. Besides, they have positive attitudes towards the use of authentic materials in their classrooms.

Keywords: authentic materials, authenticity, authentic texts, learner, teaching vocabulary

1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a radical change in relation to language teaching methods. With the advent of technology and human psychology, humanistic approaches have gained importance and become more popular than traditional methods in ELT field. With this radical change, foreign language education has largely shifted its focus from the limited receptive oriented use of language to the functional use of language. Meanwhile, language educators look for materials that more closely mirror the language elements learners can come across outside of the classroom. Textbooks enhanced with grammar explanations, drills, listening, speaking and writing practice are, without doubt, fundamental elements in ELT. However, most of the course books contain a list of expressions or grammatical points that most native English speakers would never say on daily basis. For this reason, it is of great importance to expose learners to the language native speakers use or encounter in their everyday lives. This exposure can be expanded with the help of real-life authentic materials such as journals, leaflet, newspaper, tickets, TV programs, radio podcast etc. published and broadcasted in the target language. Polio (2014) states that when learners are only exposed to textbook language, they miss learning how language is used in real life.

Furthermore, the concept of authenticity has gained importance equally as it is closely linked with recent language teaching methods such as communicative language teaching, Desuggestopedia etc. Widdowson (1996) indicates that the idea of authenticity come into existence naturally from a communicative orientation to language teaching. Similarly, the opinion that the language teaching/ learning materials should be authentic is commonly highlighted by other scholars (Nunan, 1988:99; Harmer 2001:205; Mishan, 2005) thanks to the communicative approach to teaching language. Communicative Language Teaching can be explained as “the teaching of communication via language instead of the teaching of language via communication” (Allwright, 1979). With this explanation, it can be said that if the communication is the purpose, it requires the input and context to be ‘real’, in other words ‘authentic’. As a result, for a successful and effective learning/teaching experience, situations which are faced in real life and learners’ exposure to these genuine situations should be exploited. The use of authentic materials is also instrumental in teaching vocabulary. As Polio (2014) states teaching vocabulary by using authentic materials is, by a long shot, the easiest language feature to focus on. Yet, it is still controversial whether language teachers in Turkey make use of authentic materials while teaching English. Hence, this study primarily focuses on revealing the overall ideas of English language educators on authentic materials as well as finding out whether they exploit authentic materials in their classes.

2. Literature Review

There can be found a wide range of definitions related to “authenticity” and “authentic material” in the literature. Breen (as cited in Baral, 2009) made the definition of authenticity by stating “what is authentic is relative to our purposes in the classroom and to the points of view of different participants in that classroom” (p. 3). Peacock (1996), on the other hand, makes a definition of authentic materials as: “...materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community” (p. 146). Harmer (as cited in Tamo, 2009) specifies authentic texts as “materials that are prepared for native speakers; so language students are not taken into consideration while authentic texts are being prepared. As can be seen from the definitions, most of them share a common point. However, there are still some differences about the definition which is probably due to authors’ concentration on a different aspect.

Berardo (2006) states that “the sources of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom are infinite, but the most commons are newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs, and literature. One of the most useful is the internet” (p. 62). It can be argued that it will be more proper to use a broader term “technology” instead of “internet”. Social networks are getting more and more into our daily lives. Whether we like it or not, we are exposed to the social network in almost every aspect of our lives. Social network platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram can also provide authentic language to learners. When a learner follows a reporter on Twitter, for example, he/she gets the chance of reading his posts written in English. They will peripherally learn the vocabularies that they encounter while using social networks. This way, exposure to the social network will be transformed into exposure to the authentic language. Such methods can also be classified as authentic materials or authenticity.

As Tamo (2009) states, “authentic material is significant since it increases students’ motivation for learning, makes the learner be exposed to the “real” language” (p. 75). Apart from motivating the learner, authentic materials have numerous advantages for both learners and educators. Tamo (2009) highlights some of these advantages in his article:

- Students are exposed to real discourse, as in videos of interviews with famous people where students listen for gist.
- Authentic materials keep students informed about what is happening in the world, so they have an intrinsic educational value. As teachers, we are educators working within the school system, so education and general development are part of our responsibilities.
- Books, articles, newspapers, and so on contain a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials.
- Authentic materials support a more creative approach to teaching.
- Authentic materials can encourage reading for pleasure because they are likely to contain topics of interest to learners, especially if students are given the chance to have a say about the topics or kinds of authentic materials to be used in class.

Indeed, these are only some basic advantages of authentic materials and they are enough to understand how important they are in language teaching settings. If we go back to our school years we can realize that, as English language learners, we were exposed to authentic materials. Material writers and designers place great importance on the issue of authenticity. This issue is also important for language teachers who are in charge of making use of these materials in classroom settings. Teachers find, design, sometimes need to change and implement the learning materials rather than directly use them. For this reason, selection of authentic materials is an essential factor to consider.

As Berardo (2006) highlights, thanks to authentic materials, learners get the chance of interaction with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used in the real world by its native speakers outside. Nuttall (as cited in Berardo) highlights three main criteria when choosing texts to be used in the classroom; suitability of content, exploitability, and readability. However, Berardo (2006) adds another criterion which he calls presentation. Suitability of content requires relevance to students’ needs, being interesting and closeness to real life. At this point, Lee (1995) argues that materials should be learner-centered and promote learners’ interest. Exploitability, on the other hand, means the text should be exploited for teaching goals and it should serve the purpose. A material in the target language does not necessarily mean that it is suitable to be used in the classroom settings. Authentic materials can be above or below the level of the target audience. So, at this point, another criterion, readability comes into play. As the name suggests, readability refers to the structural and lexical difficulty of the material chosen. Finally, authenticity is also important when presenting it to students. A more eye-catching text will get more attention from students and motivate them.

There are several studies that focus on the use of authentic materials in language classrooms in Turkish Context. Boran (1999) aims at finding out EFL instructors' attitudes to authentic materials and using television programs as authentic video activities so that the similarities and discrepancies between the students' attitudes and the instructors' attitudes emerge. The students' attitudes and the instructors' attitudes to the video activities, in which television programs were used, have been found to be positive.

Torun (2008) investigated the role of contextualized language instruction through authentic animated stories in teaching EFL to young learners. The participants of the study were 31 sixth grade students aged between 11-12. Five authentic animated stories were used. All in all, the results of the study revealed that students kept their initial positive attitudes towards learning English with contextualized language instruction through authentic animated stories. The study also demonstrated that students' anxiety level related to learning English declined by the use of contextualized language instruction through authentic animated stories.

Ozgen (2008) conducted a similar research to find out the positive effects of captioned authentic video on the listening comprehension of intermediate level university students. This study lasted over 8 weeks. During this time, the same chosen episodes of a sitcom were shown to two groups of students, and they were given the same pre and post-tests, and questionnaires. The students in the control group watched the episodes without captions while experimental group watched the episodes with captions. The results illustrated that the group with captioning scored significantly better on the listening comprehension test and their perceptions of authentic materials were all positive.

Aktan (2010) tried to illustrate the use of authentic French songs in language classrooms. He intended to show the possible benefits of the songs as a lesson and self-improvement material in his descriptive study. However, there is no empirical study conducted. He confirmed the use of authentic songs by extensively referring to related literature.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted with thirty language teachers who have been working in different institutions located in 5 different cities of Turkey. A questionnaire was sent to twenty participants via e-mail and they were asked to fill it and send it back in the same way. 10 of the participants filled the questionnaire by hand. Five of the participants were interviewed with 5 semi-structured questions and their answers in the interviews were transcribed. They were also asked to add more opinions regarding the subject of the study if they had.

Participants work at different educational institutions, so they teach to students belonging to different age groups. Most of the participants (12 of them) teach English in high schools. 4 of them teach at primary schools while 5 of them teach English at secondary schools. 6 of participants teach English at universities. Finally, 3 of the participants teach English at private language schools (Table 1.) Two of the participants are foreigners teaching English in a state university in Turkey. Data collection process lasted for two weeks.

Table 1: Distribution of the participants in terms of the institutions they teach at.

Primary school (1th-4th grade)	Secondary school (5th-8th grade)	High school (9th-12th grade)	University	Language school
4	5	12	6	3

As for the experience of the participants, 8 of the participants have teaching experience of between 0-4 years. 15 participants have 5-10 years teaching experience. Lastly, 7 participants have experience of 11-20 years. When it comes to the educational background of the participants, 20 of the have bachelor's degree while 10 participants have completed their master's degree. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the data collection process. A questionnaire adapted from Yeung (2011) was exploited for collecting quantitative data. Additionally, an interview with 5 of the participants was done which compromise the qualitative part of the study (See Appendix 1 – 2).

The questionnaire consists of two parts. Part A includes background information of the participants. Part B consists of 17, five-item Likert type scale questions divided into 4 subsections. Participants were questioned about the role of authentic materials in language teaching, the effects of using authentic texts, the text selection process and finally their overall feeling about using authentic materials. Participants were asked to circle the appropriate number which begins with 1 being strongly disagree and ends with 5 strongly agree. Descriptive statistics were used in order to analyze the data collected via questionnaire.

In addition to the questionnaire, 5 participants selected randomly were interviewed. They were asked what they

understand from the term authenticity and authentic materials, to what extent they make use of authentic materials while teaching English. They were also asked about what kind of authentic materials they utilize and if it is important to use authentic materials in language teaching. Finally, they were asked to add more ideas if they would like to. Participants' answers to semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researchers were examined and generally interpreted.

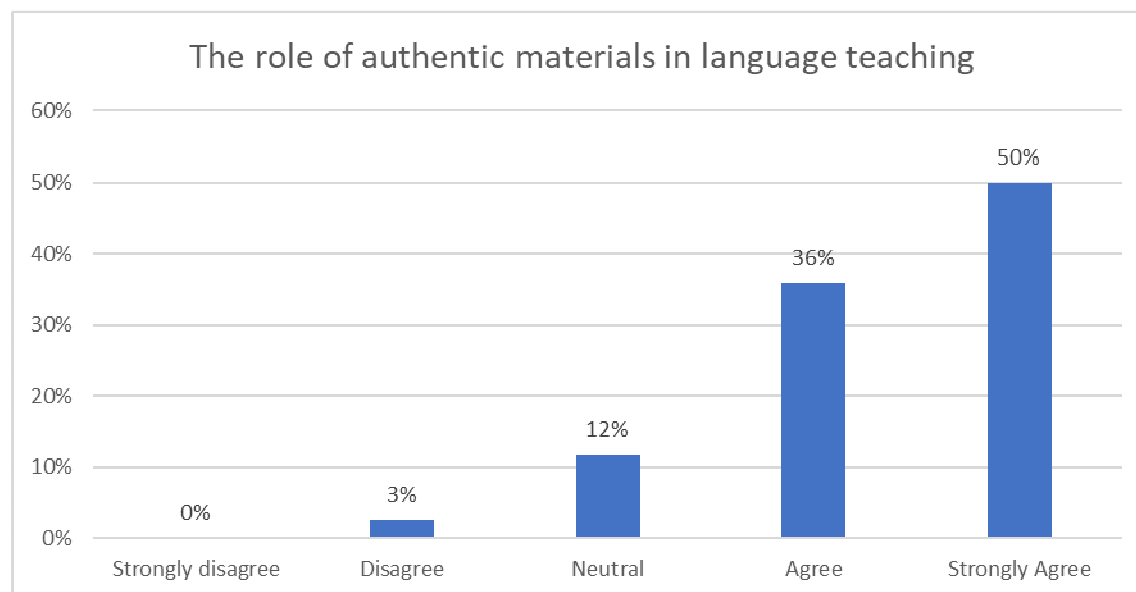
4. Results and Discussion

The results gained from the questionnaires and interviews are analyzed and discussed in this section. First, the questionnaire results are presented. Later, the answers given to the interview questions are interpreted.

4.1. Questionnaire

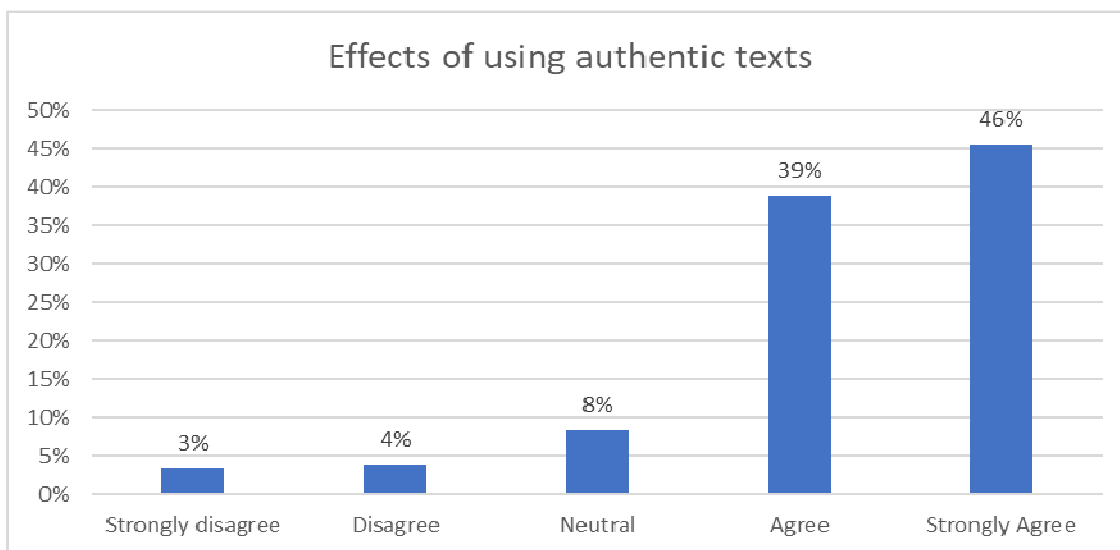
As earlier stated, the questionnaire consists of 17 items in total and these items are classified into 4 categories. The first category which is called the role of authentic materials in language teaching consists of 4 items. The first item of this category aims to find out if participants agree with the idea that authentic materials are more beneficial to student's learning English compared with local English textbooks. 60 % of the participants strongly agree with this statement. 30 % of them chose agree option while only 10 % of the participants feels neutral. This result demonstrates that a great majority of the teachers are aware that authentic materials are more useful than local English textbooks. Another item in this category aims to find out whether participants think English language cannot be learned well if there is no exposure to authentic materials. 47 % of the participants strongly agreed with this item while only 10 % of them stated that they disagree. All in all, participants' answers to 4 items listed in this category showed that 86% of them truly think that authentic materials have a major role in English language teaching settings. When all the items in this category analyzed, it can clearly be seen that participants value the role of authentic materials in ELT (Figure 1.)

Figure 1. The role of authentic materials in language teaching



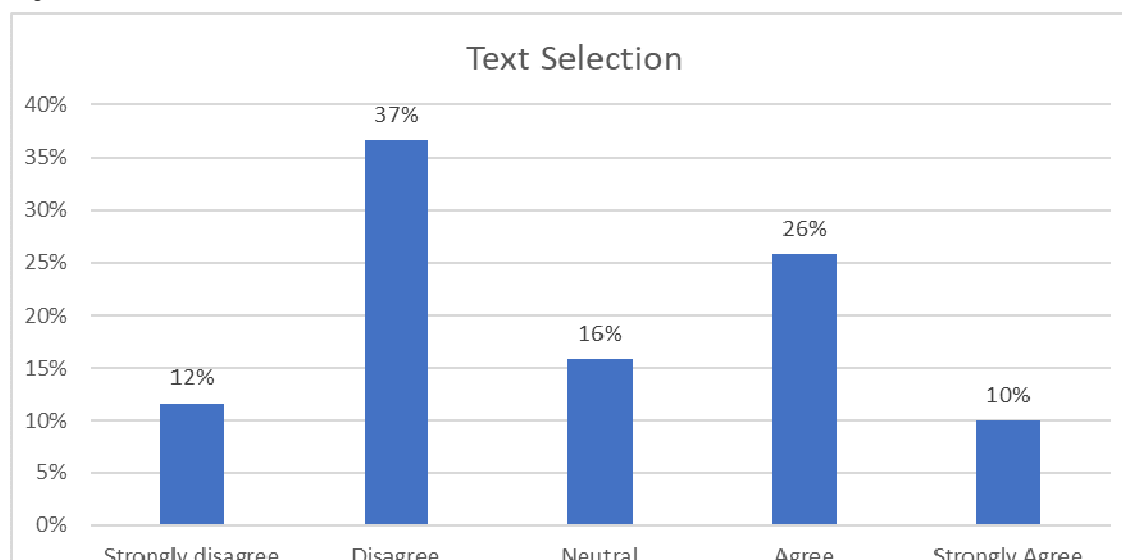
The second category titled as effects of using authentic text has 6 items. All of the participants (with 67 % strongly agree and 33 % agree) think that authentic texts widen students' knowledge, understanding, and experiences of different cultures in which English is used. While 77 % of the participants have a positive tendency towards the idea that students feel more motivated when authentic texts are used, only 14 % of them have a negative attitude on this item. As a result, the great majority of the participants have positive feelings about the effects of using authentic text. The overall result of the second category is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Effects of using authentic text.



The following category is about text selection. 47 % of the participants disagree with the idea that when they select texts, the length of the texts is their main consideration. 40 % participants take the length of text into account when they are selecting texts. 53% of the participants think that finding authentic texts suitable for the school curriculum is difficult while 40 % of them disagree with this idea. This finding may indicate that 53 % participants are more capable of exploring different sources for finding authentic texts. The mean percentage of this category demonstrated that majority of the participants do not think that text selection is a time-consuming process. Additionally, they consider that it is not difficult to find authentic texts which are suitable for school curriculum and students' interests. As a result, it can be stated that participants have positive attitudes toward text selection process. Participants' general attitudes towards the text selection category are shown in figure 3 below.

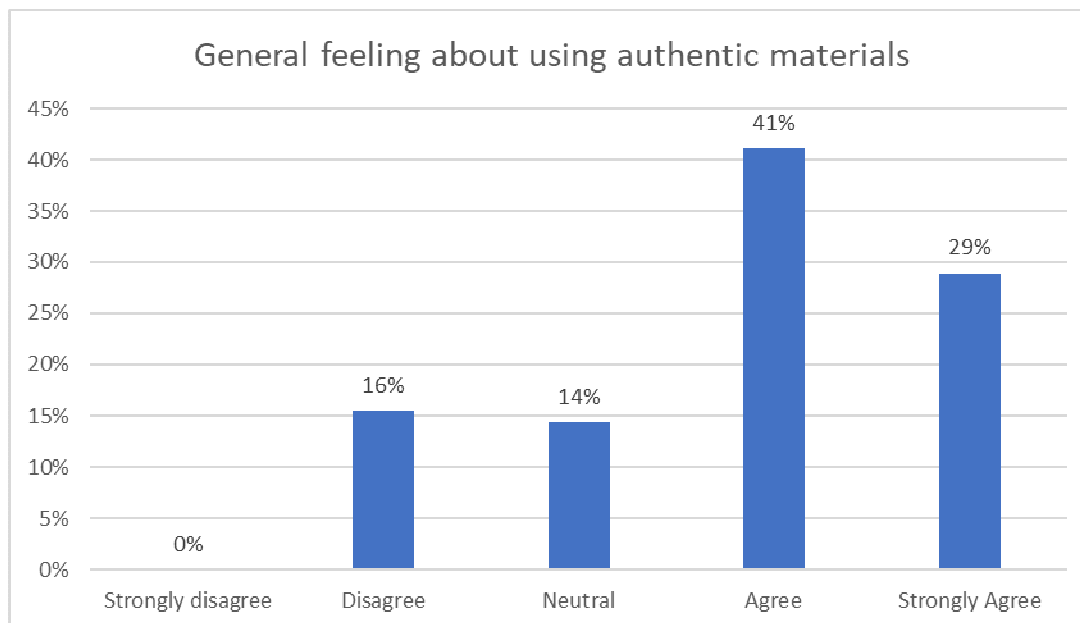
Figure 3: Text Selection



Final category intended to explore participants' general feeling about using authentic materials. 27 % of the participants, being the highest percentage marked for neutral option in this study, feel neutral about the idea that it takes a lot of effort and creativity to exploit authentic texts. 90 % of the participants (with 43 % agree and 47 % strongly agree) indicate that they feel more competent as teachers when they use authentic materials in their classes. All in all, the majority of the participants have a positive feeling towards using authentic materials

in their classes (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. General feeling about using authentic materials



4.2 Semi-structured Interview

The first question of the interview was “what do you understand from the term Authenticity and Authentic material?” There are really interesting answers to this question. Participants emphasize words such as “reality, real objects, originality, genuine, natural context, uniqueness” while they define the terms authenticity and authentic materials. One of them who teaches English in a state university defines it as:

“Authentic material is audio-visual or printed material about life situations that are familiar to the students”.

Another indicates that:

“..... I understand real life materials like a newspaper for a reading class or a T.V show for a listening class from the term authentic material. One of the colleagues teaching English at a primary school emphasizes that “authenticity is the link between education and real life.”

In summary, it is observed that all of the participants, more or less, know about authenticity and authentic materials.

The second question was “to what extent do you make use of authentic materials in your English class?” All of the of the participants state that they use authentic materials while teaching English. One the participants stated that:

“...I use authentic materials every time I have to perform a vocabulary lesson so let’s say I make great use of it.”

Another one indicated that:

“I often make use of authentic materials as all of my students are 5th and 6th grades.....teaching younger students is more difficult than teaching adults. For this reason, we need to make use of authentic materials to create a natural language environment.”

Answers to the second question go parallel with the question finding which demonstrates that participants are aware of the role of authentic materials in language teaching.

When it comes to the third question which is “what kind of authentic materials do you use?,” one of the participants teaching in a state university stated that he makes use of real magazine articles like Turkish Airlines magazine-skyline and local newspapers issued in English. 4 of the participants told that they make use of videos in native language while teaching vocabulary and use YouTube to a great extend as a provider of authentic videos. One of the participants said the course book that she uses has a real-life focus; so, she greatly makes use of course book as an authentic material.

The fourth and last question was “Is it important to use authentic materials while teaching English? Why or why

not?" Most of the participants feel the same thing as to its importance while a few of them claimed that it really depends on the purpose of teaching. The most striking answer was that:

"It is important to use it while teaching because my students may never get an opportunity to travel abroad or speak to a native English speaker, by using authentic material; I give them the opportunity to interact in English and to find out more about other cultures. English is a living language. It evolves and the way online communication changes it also needs to be taught through authentic materials."

Another salient answer was that:

"In an ideal class with ideal students, an ideal teacher is supposed to use authentic material. Because a language is often learned to use in real life but if the aim is not daily communication, then it is not that important." this answer may lead us to another research about how ideal is classroom settings to use authentic materials."

When they are asked if there are any related ideas they would like to add, only two of the participants expressed their opinions. Both of them are teaching in a public elementary school. One of them suggested that:

"All language teachers should use authentic materials in order to create a natural language environment. By doing so, they can get their students to learn target language more naturally."

The other stated that:

"Authentic materials are very important, especially for teachers teaching children and younger students. Creating a natural language environment is really important to teach target language"

5. Conclusion

This paper revealed teacher's ideas on the role of authentic materials and their general feeling about authentic materials. All of the participants, this way or that way, are familiar with the terms authenticity and authentic materials. Majority of the participants have positive attitudes towards using authentic materials in their classes. Still, more than half of the participants, that's 54 % of them think that it is difficult to find authentic materials that are compatible with the school curriculum. Another negative point is that little amount of the participants (20 %) think that it takes a lot of energy and time to make use of authentic materials. The solution for this problem may be solved if teachers are provided an easier access to online authentic materials by the school management. One significant conclusion of the study is that as the years of experience increase, the positive feeling towards the use of authentic materials decreases. Another important point is that as the number of lessons participants attend per week increase, the use of authentic materials decreases. This may be because they do not have enough time to look for authentic materials as they are too busy with going to classes all day. The solution to this problem is simple. Teachers should be required to teach fewer hours per week. When the educational background of the participants analyzed, no relation has been found between their attitude towards to authentic materials and their level of educational background. Answers given the interviews showed how important videos, YouTube etc. are and, in a broader sense, how important technology is as a provider of authentic materials. For this reason, teachers should be encouraged to make use of online sources to reach authentic materials. Finally, interviews also revealed that all of the participants favor authentic materials as important and indispensable while a few of them are still reluctant to use them because they think that it is time-consuming and difficult to find.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire

The questionnaire aims to gather your beliefs, attitudes, and experience regarding the use of authentic materials in English language classes. In this questionnaire, authentic materials are defined as texts that are produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience, for example, newspaper articles, radio programs, holiday brochures and so on. This questionnaire consists of two parts. The questions in Part A aim to collect some general information about you. Part B asks about your beliefs and attitudes towards the use of authentic materials.

Please be well assured that all the information collected will be used for research purposes only. All the responses you give will be treated confidentially and anonymously. Your input is very important for researchers to understand the practice and value of using authentic materials in English classes. Thank in advance.

Part A: Background Information

Please tick the appropriate options in the following questions:

1. I am currently teaching at :
(.....) primary school (1th-4th grade) (.....) Secondary school (5th-8th grade)
(.....) High school (9th-12th grade) (.....) University (.....) Language school

[can both options]

2. How many years have you been teaching English?
(...)0 – 4 years (....)5 – 10 years (....)11 – 20 years (....) 21 years or above

3. How many lessons do you teach per week on average?
(....) 9– 15 (....)16-25 (....) 26 – 30 (....)31 or above

4. Have you received any English language teacher training?
 (...) Bachelor of Education (....) Master's degree (....) P. hd (.....) Others, please specify _____

5. When you were a student, how often did your English teachers use authentic materials?
 (...) always (....) often (....) sometimes (....) seldom (....) never

Part B: Beliefs and Attitudes

The following statements are about your beliefs and attitudes towards the use of authentic materials in language teaching. Please circle the appropriate number with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree.

The role of authentic materials in language teaching

1. Compared with local English textbooks, authentic materials are more beneficial to Students' English learning.	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
3. Students cannot learn English well without exposure to authentic texts.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Students should not be denied the opportunity to interact with authentic materials.	1	2	3	4	5

Effects of using authentic texts

5. Students show greater learning motivation when you use authentic texts.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Authentic materials help to build students' confidence in using English.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Authentic texts are beneficial to students' development of receptive skills.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Authentic texts are beneficial to students' development of productive skills.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Authentic texts broaden students' knowledge, understanding, experience of various cultures in which English is used.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Using authentic material is a good way to introduce students to the idea of "English-as-a-global-language".	1	2	3	4	5

Text selection

11. When selecting texts, length of the texts is your prime consideration.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Selecting authentic texts which are suitable for students' English level is time-consuming.	1	2	3	4	5
13. It is difficult to find texts that match the content of the school curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
14. It is difficult to find texts that are relevant to students' lives and interests.	1	2	3	4	5

General feeling about using authentic materials

15. It does not a lot of effort and creativity to exploit authentic texts.	1	2	3	4	5
16. When using authentic texts, teachers should endeavour to take advantage of the linguistic and cultural opportunities presented by the texts.	1	2	3	4	5
17. When I manage to use authentic materials in my English classes, I feel that I am a more competent English teacher.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 2
Interview Questions

Dear Colleague,

We are making a search and we need your valuable comments and ideas related to “Authenticity” and “Authentic materials”

Your personal information will not be shared with others and the information you provide will just be used for scientific purposes. We will be grateful if you answer the questions below intimately

Thanks in advance.

Name: (optional).....**Age:**.....

Surname(optional):.....**Gender:**.....

Name of the Institution you are working:.....

Age of the Students you are teaching:.....

- 1) What do you understand from the term “Authenticity” and “Authentic Material”?
- 2) To what extend do you make use of authentic materials while teaching English?
- 3) What kind of authentic materials do you use?
- 4) Is it important to use authentic materials while teaching? Why or why not?
- 5) Any related ideas you would like to add :