

**A COMPARISON OF TEACHING MATERIALS (SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS VS AUTHENTIC MATERIALS) FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENGLISH TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL SUPERVISORS IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article is an original contribution to knowledge in that it explores English teachers' and educational supervisors' attitudes to using school textbooks and authentic materials in Saudi boys' schools. Specifically, it aims to determine the preferred teaching materials (either textbooks or authentic materials which are not usually recommended in the current textbooks (or which are additional to the contents of the current textbooks) from the participants' points of view. A mixed-research approach -- quantitative and qualitative -- was used to investigate the favoured teaching materials, while the contrastive research approach allowed both types to be evaluated. The results showed that the participants had positive attitudes to using authentic materials and that most teachers preferred them to school textbooks. The study contributes to the debate over how best to teach English as a Foreign Language, and concludes with the recommendation that school textbooks should include authentic materials in order to improve learners' communicative competence.*

**KEYWORDS:** *textbooks, authentic materials, communicative competence, Saudi boys' school, Makkah.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There are different teaching materials that enable teachers to present and organise their lessons; authentic and non-authentic materials. These include authentic materials such as newspaper and magazine articles, brochures, menus and leaflets which are not designed for pedagogical purposes. Such materials present natural language because they are produced for native speakers. In contrast are artificial materials such as textbooks, hand-outs and worksheets which are designed for pedagogical purposes. The majority of teachers in Saudi Arabia use textbooks that have accompanying components such as the students' book, workbook and test in a CD/CD-ROM format as primary resources for learning in the classroom. This article contributes to the current debate over how best to teach EFL by drawing on research that for the first time quantifies the responses both of groups of Saudi school teachers and educational supervisors to the question of whether using authentic materials in classrooms in Saudi Arabia is preferable to the national course books, and the extent of their satisfaction with both

approaches. This study contributes to the debate over whether teaching EFL by grammar (aiming for accuracy of expression) or using authentic material (aiming for communicative competence) is preferable. The greater skills of communication with English speakers are developed through the use of authentic materials in conjunction with other methods.

### **School textbooks vs authentic materials**

There are numerous teaching materials used for teaching English as a foreign or second language. However, the majority of such materials emphasise teaching linguistic structure (grammar and vocabulary). Textbooks are one of those materials that are based on teaching grammar and vocabulary as the main part of learning English. Nowadays, with a revolution in technology electronic textbooks have emerged. Teachers and students can gain access to the Internet and download them easily. But still such textbooks, whether in hard copy or digital format, have the same characteristics (teaching grammar and vocabulary in isolated sentences and also providing reading texts). Hence, those textbooks focus on accuracy rather than fluency. In recent years, there has been an ongoing argument about using textbooks and authentic materials in EFL classrooms. Another issue has arisen: “Do textbooks reflect the real use of English and enable learners to use English in a comprehensible way?”

Textbooks are deemed by some to be the main resource for providing learners with the necessary communication skills. Hutchinson and Torres (1994: 315) point out that “No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook”. School textbooks are considered the essential resource for teachers and students in the ESL/EFL classroom (Wen-Cheng, Chien-Hung and Chung-Chieh, 2011). Ahmad and Shah (2014: 13) state that “Textbooks are at the heart of the language learning and teaching process and they are the gateway not only to the linguistic elements of a specific language but also to its cultural norms”. In the same way, Mohammad and Kumari (2007) mention that course books play a vital role in the education process.

On the other hand, other scholars such as Gilmore (2007) and Guo (2012) argue that the prime teaching content of textbooks does not fulfil the learners’ needs for communication skills. They think using authentic materials is more effective than textbooks. Gilmore (2007) mentions that textbooks do not present real language but authentic texts do, because they reflect the natural language as it is spoken. Similarly, Guo (2012) points out that using textbooks inside the classroom creates a gap between what learners learn in the classroom and real life English because textbooks present artificial materials. Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) mention that textbooks do not provide the learners with real life language because they are designed for teaching rather than learning. In the same way, Tomlinson (2008: 3) argues that:

many ELT materials (especially global coursebooks) currently make a significant contribution to the failure of many learners of English as a second, foreign or other language to even acquire basic competence in English and to the failure of most of them to develop the ability to use it successfully. They do so by focusing on the teaching of linguistic items.

Gilmore (2007) defines authentic texts as using a real language that is produced by a native speaker for a native speaker. Similarly, Ianiro (2007: 1) states that “Authentic materials are not created specifically to be used in the classroom, but they make excellent learning tools for students precisely because they are authentic”. Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) state that using authentic materials in EFL classrooms helps the learners to learn English and use the language in a comprehensible way. Ianiro (2007) mentions that authentic materials assist learners in making the match between the classroom and real life. Authentic materials improve students’ communicative competence (Gilmore, 2007).

### **The relationship between communicative competence and using authentic materials**

The communicative competence concept was introduced by Hymes (1972), and it refers to both the knowledge of a language and the ability to use it comprehensibly. Hymes’ concept adds to Chomsky’s concept of “linguistic competence” (1964). Chomsky thought that knowledge of grammar enables speakers to use a language. However, Hymes argues that linguistic competence should be seen as just part of a larger communicative competence. Along the same lines, Alptekin (2002) mentions that communicative competence includes four other competences; firstly, grammatical competence that puts the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. Secondly, sociolinguistic competence that emphasises the use of a language socially. Thirdly, discourse competence that refers to the use of a language within a communicative context. Fourthly, strategic competence that emphasises the ability to manage the communicative situations, for example, when things go wrong and the conversation needs to be repaired. Richards (2006: 2) points out that “Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence”. Similarly, Savignon (2002) states that the core concept of the CLT approach is communicative competence. In other words, using the CLT approach in the EFL classrooms develops the learners’ communicative competence.

Implementing the CLT approach requires focusing on using authentic materials because such materials reflect the real language that is used in societies such as the UK and the USA. Xerri (2012: 43) states that “The emphasis on using authentic texts in the language classroom is usually associated with the communicative approach”. Similarly, McKay (2012) mentions that applying the CLT approach stimulates teachers to use authentic materials in the classrooms. Day (2004: 103) notes that “One of the major features of CLT is the strong preference for authentic materials. Thus, interest in and preference for authentic materials grew and spread with the widespread acceptance of CLT”. In this context, the notion of using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms is to reflect the natural use of the target language by emphasising the CLT approach. Hence, English teachers need to use such materials in order to apply the CLT approach.

### **Textbooks in Saudi schools**

The situation in Saudi schools reflects the uncertain value and success of the grammatical approach which lacks reference to cultural contexts. Textbooks have been changed to include multicultural topics as well as grammar lessons, but those so far published –even the latest, *Traveller*-- do not go so far as to recommend the use of

authentic materials. School textbooks in Saudi Arabia were replaced by the Ministry of Education four times between the 1960s and 2013. Al-Seghayer (2005) mentions that the first textbook series was *Living English for the Arab World*, and it was used between the 1960s and the 1980s. It was replaced by another series entitled *Saudi Arabian School English*. In the mid-1990s, this series was also changed for another one entitled *English for Saudi Arabia*. The last series was *Traveller*. Faruk (2015) points out that this new series is unlike the previous ones. By the same token, in another study conducted by Allehyani, Burnapp and Wilson (2017), the authors noted that the *Traveller* course book shifts from the local culture to multi-cultural topics for several reasons:

- Promoting Saudi learners' communicative competence.
- Supporting learners to use English within an interactive context.
- Keeping students up to date with the globalisation of culture.
- Enabling learners to explore other cultures and share their experience with other people around the world.

Al-Seghayer (2014) points out that the Saudi textbooks focus primarily on grammar, vocabulary and reading lessons, hence the learners cannot use English as a communication tool. Similarly, Ahmed (2016: 67) says that "A textbook is not an absolute solution to the learners' needs". The current textbooks still focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary with amendments to the way of presenting the content. In their study of the place of English/American culture in Saudi textbooks, Allehyani, Burnapp and Wilson point out that the *Traveller* series

is characterised by useful new features such as covering English receptive and productive skills, involving multi-cultural topics and implementing the CLT approaches (discussion, role playing and problem solving tasks). And also it takes the learners through a variety of classroom activities that help them to reflect their personal responses. As a result, the *Traveller* course book transports learners from memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules to practice in the classroom by implementing communicative tasks (2017: 8).

Despite these developments in the *Traveller* textbooks over and above previous textbooks, the series still lacks important contents such as interactive situations that reflect the social life in societies which use English as a first language (ibid).

### **Statement of problem**

The main goal of teaching English is to help learners use it as a medium of communication. Hence, the Saudi Ministry of Education makes ongoing efforts to develop textbooks. However, these textbooks still do not fulfil the learners' needs for communication skills. The reason for this may be the lack of authentic texts that reflect the communicative situations in societies that use English as a first language such as the UK or the USA. Another reason is that the teachers, students and parents do not make a sufficiently strong demand for authentic texts when learning in English.

## **Purpose of the study**

Despite the school textbooks' positive contribution in the EFL classroom, their lack of natural language that reflects the uses of English in real life is a drawback. By contrast, using authentic materials enables English teachers to show how English is spoken and written in societies such as the UK and the USA and helps teachers bridge this gap. Hence the key purpose of this article is to elicit and explore teachers' and academic supervisors' attitudes about using authentic materials in the classroom and to determine their preferences for materials (whether textbooks or authentic materials) for teaching English.

This article is based on two questions:

1. What are the educational supervisors' and teachers' attitudes to teaching authentic materials?
2. Which teaching materials (textbooks or authentic materials) do teachers prefer to use in their classrooms?

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed in order to collect data; firstly, a semi-structured interview face to face was held with seven academic supervisors in the city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia. They were chosen due to their long experience in the field. Secondly, a structured questionnaire was distributed to eighty-five teachers in secondary schools.

## **RESULTS**

### **Interviews**

The educational supervisors who were interviewed confirmed the significance of the role of authentic materials in the EFL classrooms. Based on the findings, the participants had positive attitudes about using authentic materials. Interviewee 2 mentions that

our world is full of authentic materials. With the technology revolution, we can find them easily. What we need is that the Ministry of Education should adapt them and maximize their role besides the textbooks because our textbooks still need some authentic materials to improve the learners' communicative competence. Just think about the benefits of using authentic materials, how many chunks, expressions related to real situations our students will learn.

Interviewee 5 states that:

In my opinion, authentic materials connect our students with real life situations. In addition, authentic materials help the learners how to say certain things in an appropriate way.

Regarding the kinds of authentic materials that educators can use inside the classroom or encourage students to use, five supervisors favoured printed materials to viewing materials such as videos. They argued that viewing materials is difficult to adjust to fit the cultural context of Saudi, and noted that printed materials are easy to adjust without losing their content. However, two of them favoured both viewing and printed materials.

Here some quotations from the interviews:

Interviewee 1:

I think students should not be encouraged to watch movies; it is better to use printed materials to avoid the inappropriate contents that are shown on TV or movies.

Interviewee 3:

I think students should be encouraged to watch movies to improve their language, and to get the benefits the movies should be with English subtitles. The learners will be accustomed to the natural sounds of language and also have knowledge of how a dialogue with a native speaker should sound. Besides movies, also reading stories are important, the learners learn vocabulary in context; also by reading students learn grammatical English naturally. In addition, reading stories helps the learners to understand another culture.

Interviewee 6:

Young people love watching movies; no one can deny their importance because they improve students' comprehension of the spoken language and their pronunciation. On the other hand, the language level is too high to understand what is going on. For that reason, I would encourage them to read traditional stories, articles and poems. But I would not recommend them to watch movies because of their contents. Also from another angle, when you encourage them to watch movies, you may involve yourself in trouble with conservative families.

## **Questionnaires**

The first category: English school textbooks in Saudi Arabia



**Table 1: Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations of teachers' responses related to English school textbooks in Saudi Arabia.**

No.	Arrange	Statement	Degree Approval										Mean	St. dv.
			Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree			
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	5	English school textbook is based on entertainment.	1	1.2	10	11.8	4	4.7	34	40.0	36	42.3	1.89	1.02
2	1	English school textbook enables Saudi students to be successful communicators with English/American native speakers.	2	2.4	29	34.1	4	4.7	18	21.2	32	37.6	2.42	1.36
3	3	English school textbook raises the learners' cultural awareness towards English/ American culture.	3	3.5	18	21.2	3	3.5	22	25.9	39	45.8	2.10	1.29
4	4	English school textbook is accompanied with enough materials (such as CDs, flashcards...) that support the learners to learn English language and use it successfully.	4	4.7	15	17.6	1	1.2	13	15.3	52	61.2	1.89	1.33
5	2	English school textbook includes enough activities to support learners to develop their communicative competence.	4	4.7	25	29.4	-	-	20	23.5	36	42.3	2.30	1.40
<b>Total</b>												<b>2.12</b>	<b>0.96</b>	

The first category is concerned with teachers' opinions of the national school course books in Saudi Arabia. The results in Table 1 demonstrate that the teachers who were surveyed were not pleased with the course books. The bulk of educators (70) thought that English school course books are not based on entertainment, while only 11 of the participants supported the statement. The mean average is 1.89. The participants were asked if the school textbooks help students to be successful communicators with English/American native speakers. 50 teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the second statement. However, one-third of teacher participants (31) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. The mean average is 2.42. Table 1 also shows that 61 educators thought that the existing textbooks do not increase students' cultural

awareness about English/American culture. The mean average is 2.10. But, less than one-third of teachers (21) strongly agreed or agreed with the third statement. The respondents also questioned whether there are enough materials accompanying the textbooks to learn English and use it efficiently or not; more than two-thirds of teachers (65) disagreed or strongly disagreed while 19 teacher participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. The mean average is 1.89. The results from the last statement show that 29 educators assumed textbooks contain sufficient activities to develop students' communicative competence. By contrast, two-thirds of teachers (56) thought textbooks do not contain enough activities to expand students' communicative competence. The mean average is 2.30.

The second category: using authentic materials (newspapers, magazines...) inside the classroom.

**Table 2: Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations of teachers' responses related to using authentic materials (newspapers, magazines...) inside the classroom.**

No.	Arrange	Statement	Degree Approval										Mean	St. dv.
			Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree			
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	5	Using adapted (suitable for Saudi culture) authentic materials is better than using school textbooks.	40	47.0	17	20.0	-	-	5	5.9	23	27.1	3.54	1.72
2	2	Authentic materials increase learners' knowledge of the vocabulary and daily expressions that they need in real life situations.	52	61.2	30	35.2	-	-	1	1.2	2	2.4	4.52	0.65
3	4	Authentic materials motivate the learners to learn English.	31	36.4	33	38.8	6	7.1	13	15.3	2	2.4	3.92	1.13
4	1	Authentic materials help learners to build a better awareness about English/American culture.	46	54.1	31	36.4	3	3.5	5	5.9	-	-	4.66	0.82
5	6	Authentic materials improve learners' language proficiency more than school textbooks.	20	23.5	33	38.8	6	7.1	14	16.5	12	14.1	3.42	1.38



6	3	Listening and viewing materials such as radio, TV programs reinforce learners' oral skills.	41	48.2	39	45.8	2	2.4	3	3.5	-	-	4.39	0.71
<b>Total</b>													<b>4.08</b>	<b>0.94</b>

The second category focused on teachers' perceptions about using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms. Whether the participants prefer using authentic materials rather than textbooks, the results in the first statement show that 57 teacher participants (67%) had more positive views about using authentic materials than about the textbooks. But, 28 did not support the statement. The mean average is 3.54. The results in Table 2 also illustrate that the majority of the participants (82) thought using authentic materials increases learners' knowledge of the vocabulary and daily expressions that they need in real life situations. Only three teachers did not support the statement. The mean average is 4.52. The results of the third statement show that two-thirds of teacher participants (64) supposed authentic materials motivate the learners to learn English. However, 15 teachers did not agree with the statement. The mean average of the responses is 3.92.

Do authentic materials assist learners to build a stronger awareness of English/American culture? 77 teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the fourth statement. Only five teachers disagreed. The mean average is 4.66. Regarding whether authentic materials improve learners' proficiency in English more than textbooks or not, over half of the participants (53) thought that such materials develop the learners' target language better than textbooks. However, 26 teacher respondents did not support the statement. The mean average of the responses is 3.42. The results from the last statement demonstrate that 80 teachers thought listening materials and viewing programs reinforce students' oral skills. Only three teachers disagreed with the statement. The mean average is 4.39.

## DISCUSSIONS

1. What are the Saudi educational supervisors' and teachers' attitudes to teaching authentic materials?

### Educational supervisors

The results above show that using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms was welcomed by the educational supervisors who were interviewed. However, there was no general consensus related to the type of authentic materials to be used. Two educational supervisors thought using printed materials such as newspapers and magazines articles, and viewing ones such as videos and TV shows, are helpful. On the other hand, five supervisor participants preferred using printed rather than viewing materials because of the difficulty of modifying viewing materials.

### Teachers

According to the results in Tables 1 and 2, in general the majority of the participants had positive attitudes to using authentic materials in the classroom compared with using textbooks. The mean average of the first category "English school textbooks in Saudi Arabia" was 2.12. Some educators showed some degree of satisfaction with the current

national textbooks. On the other hand, the mean average of the second category, “Using authentic materials (newspapers, magazines...) inside the classroom”, was 4.08. A great number of teacher participants welcomed using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms. Similar results were found in the studies by Al-Musallam (2009), Belaid (2015), Akbari and Razavi (2016) and Alshaikhi and Madini (2016).

## 2. What teaching materials (textbooks or authentic materials) do teachers prefer to use in their classrooms?

Based on the teachers’ responses, it is clear that the bulk of them were aware of the importance of using authentic materials in the EFL classroom. Hence, they preferred to use authentic materials rather than textbooks in their classes. The results in Table 2 of answers to the first statement illustrate that 67% of teachers prefer authentic materials to school textbooks but 33% did not prefer authentic materials. The participants who had positive views about using authentic materials mentioned several reasons for their positive responses. Firstly, 96.4% of teachers believed that authentic materials boost learners’ knowledge of the vocabulary and daily expressions that they need in real life context. Also, authentic materials encourage learners to learn English as thought by 75.2% of teacher respondents. In addition, 90.5% of teachers argued that using authentic materials increased learners’ awareness about English/American culture. Furthermore, more than half of the participants (62.3%) thought that such materials develop students’ English proficiency better than school textbooks. Finally, 94% of teachers believed listening materials and viewing programs reinforce students’ oral skills.

In spite of the textbooks’ positive contribution in grammar and vocabulary usage, they limit opportunities for learners to apply their knowledge in real life interactive situations, due to their focus on semantic rather than pragmatic meaning. Griffiths (2006) points out that semantic approaches emphasise isolated sentences out of communicative context but pragmatic approaches emphasise utterances within a communicative context, and the utterances go beyond the literal meaning of the sentences.

The learners probably get high scores in their exams without real practice that will reflect the language as it is used by native speakers, but when they come across natural conversations with speakers they encounter difficulties in generating conversation in English. Hence, implementing authentic materials in the EFL classrooms is a significant innovation in learning English. Such materials support the learners in using English in an effective way. Al-Seghayer (2014) states that one of the limitations that affects the teaching of English language in Saudi Arabia is dependence on textbooks as the main source of learning. The English Language Development Project does not pay attention to authentic materials in school textbooks (Alshumaimeri and Alzyadi, 2015). But, using authentic materials develops learners’ communicative competence because those materials use English as a package; one that includes both linguistic and non-linguistic structures. In addition, using authentic materials reflects how English is used in real life in societies such as the UK and the USA. Another advantage pointed out by Rahman (2014), is that authentic materials fill the gaps created by the existing textbooks.

As an alternative approach to teaching English, teachers can balance between the existing textbooks and authentic materials. It would be useful for novice or training

teachers to use textbooks, for as long as they go through the textbooks, they can build more self-confidence about such authentic materials. Then they can use authentic materials alongside the school textbooks.

### **Rationale for Research**

Research to date conducted in Saudi Arabia on methods of teaching has focused on evaluating textbooks and teaching materials and approaches. By contrast this article comes from the need to examine in greater depth the use of authentic materials about which there are only a few general studies. Furthermore, it examines the attitudes of school teachers in a boys' school, whereas previous research has been conducted at universities in Saudi Arabia, and the dominant voice was that of lecturers. The research has been designed as a comparison between the use of textbooks and authentic materials in secondary boys' schools, because a focus on authentic materials alone would not have provided balanced results. Conducting a contrastive study related to Saudi context enabled us to explore the gap between school textbooks and authentic materials. Moreover the data collection included academic supervisors as well as teachers, because their long experience in the field provides a broader set of responses leading to a wider understanding of this issue.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH**

The main aim of this study was to discover teachers' and academic supervisors' attitudes to the use of authentic materials, and to investigate whether teachers preferred using national textbooks or authentic materials. The results show the participants' awareness of the value of implementing authentic materials in EFL classrooms and so they contribute positively to the development of teaching and learning the English language. Firstly, we hope that the results might encourage the Ministry of Education to internationalise their teaching materials and approaches to enhance learners' awareness of the globalisation of culture. Also the outcomes of this study-- that is, the points of view of both teachers and academic supervisors-- might equip the Ministry with a better understanding about the value of using authentic materials and for this to be taken into account when designing textbooks and teaching materials in the future. In addition, the results might encourage the Ministry to provide teachers with training courses about using authentic materials in order to raise awareness about their. Furthermore, the results of this article might inspire teachers, and in particular novice and trainee teachers, to better conceptualise authentic materials and practice inside the classroom. Finally, this study might encourage researchers to conduct more extensive studies in the area of teaching authentic materials in the EFL classrooms.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the current results of this article, there are some recommendations that need to be taken into account to develop learners' communicative competence and enable them to use English in comprehensible way. They are as follows:

- Authentic materials should be well-matched to the national textbooks.
- Authentic materials should be suitable to students' level and culture.

- Authentic materials should reflect social interaction situations in societies where English is used as a first language.
- A varied range of authentic materials might be used in the EFL classrooms rather than relying on school textbooks.

## CONCLUSION

This article examined the educational supervisors' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions of using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms within the Saudi context. Also, it explored the question of what materials teachers prefer in the EFL classrooms: textbooks or authentic materials. The results reflected the participants' positive views about using authentic materials in the EFL classrooms. They also illustrated that English teachers favoured authentic materials over and above the national school course books. In other words, authentic materials are more appealing than textbooks to the majority of English teachers who were surveyed. The study concludes with the recommendation that school textbooks should include authentic materials acceptable to the learners' local culture in order to improve their communicative competence.

## FUTURE STUDIES

The authors of this article make = suggestions for conducting further studies in the future in order to explore new avenues related to teaching materials. They are as follows:

- To provide insights of the stakeholders' preferences authentic materials (printed or viewing) that should be presented in the classrooms.
- To determine what aspects of English/American culture should be reflected in authentic materials.

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