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**GRAMMAR OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM:
The Use Of Authentic Texts In EFL Classrooms — Students' Perceptions**

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GRAMMAR OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM:
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Grammar Outside the Classroom: The Use of Authentic Texts in EFL Classrooms - Students' Perceptions

Antônio Felipe de Lima Filho

Abstract:

This research investigates students' perceptions regarding the use of authentic texts in EFL grammar classes. This study combines quantitative and qualitative research, conducted through the application of a questionnaire that investigated EFL students' perceptions of authenticity in grammar lessons. Additionally, this article is grounded in Tomlinson (2023), Gilmore (2007), and Ahmed (2017), who explored the implications of authenticity in language teaching. Results showed that most students agreed on learning with authentic materials, but were still concerned about the level of language and cultural references. Also, respondents view authentic texts as a natural tool to enhance their communicative skills. Furthermore, results show that authentic materials increase students' motivation in class.

Keywords: Authentic texts; Grammar teaching; EFL students; Students' perceptions.

Resumo: Esta pesquisa investiga as percepções dos alunos sobre o uso de textos autênticos nas aulas de gramática de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL). Este estudo combina pesquisa quantitativa e qualitativa, realizada por meio da aplicação de um questionário que investigou as percepções dos alunos de EFL sobre a autenticidade nas aulas de gramática. Além disso, este artigo baseia-se em Tomlinson (2023), Gilmore (2007) e Ahmed (2017), que exploraram as implicações da autenticidade no ensino de idiomas. Os resultados mostraram que a maioria dos alunos concordou com o aprendizado com materiais autênticos, mas ainda estava preocupada com o nível da língua e as referências culturais. Além disso, os entrevistados veem os textos autênticos como uma ferramenta natural para aprimorar suas habilidades comunicativas. Além disso, os resultados mostram que os materiais autênticos aumentam a motivação dos alunos em sala de aula.

Palavras-chave: Textos autênticos; Ensino de gramática; Alunos de inglês como língua estrangeira; Percepções dos alunos.

1. Introduction

Throughout recent decades, the teaching of grammar has been a widely debated field among applied linguists. Its significance, however, dates back centuries, shaping language use across different eras. From Pāṇini's pioneering grammatical studies in the 4th century BC to Lancelot's Port-Royal Grammar in the 17th century and Noam Chomsky's generative grammar in the 20th century, grammar has remained a central pillar of linguistic thought

(Alcantara, 1997; Câmara Jr., 2021). Along with grammar itself, multiple approaches to teaching it have evolved, culminating in the Communicative Approach in the late 1960s.

The Communicative Approach, also known as Communicative Language Teaching, gained widespread popularity in the 1970s as a response to the prevailing methods of the time, including the Grammar-Translation Method, Audiolingualism, and the Direct Method (Demirezen, 2011). They all had one thing in common: a lack of genuine communication. Thus, CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) emerged with the claim that “being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence” (Hymes, 1971 as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 121). In order to solve this insufficiency of developing communication-centered classes, CLT encouraged a method capable of exposing “students to natural language in a variety of situations” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 134-135), advocating “the use of language materials authentic to native speakers of the target language” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 134-125). That is, authentic texts.

According to Porter & Roberts (1981 as cited in Gilmore, 2007), authenticity can be defined as the language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience, conveying a real message. Authentic texts are multimodal, that is, they interplay between different representational modes, such as ‘printed, video, and audio materials students encounter in their daily lives’ (Mestari; Malabar, 2016).

Nevertheless, in recent decades, most research on the use of authentic texts in language teaching has primarily focused on reading skills, with limited attention given to their role in grammar instruction, and even less on how students feel about the matter. Thus, the main question that guides this work is: *What are the students' perceptions of the use of authentic texts in grammar instruction within EFL classrooms?* Understanding how learners engage with these materials in grammar instruction is essential for assessing their effectiveness and ensuring methodological adaptations that better align with students' needs.

The aim of this survey is, therefore, to analyze students' opinions and perceptions on the use of authentic texts in grammar classes in EFL classrooms. The specific objectives, in turn, are: a) to analyze how authentic materials influence students' motivation and communication, b) to examine the perceived difficulties, c) to evaluate students' beliefs about the effectiveness of authentic texts in promoting non-artificial, contextualized grammar learning, and d) to identify student preferences between authentic and non-authentic materials.

Thus, it is hypothesized that students view the use of authentic materials in grammar classes positively, believing they promote motivation, enhance the natural and contextualized learning of grammar, and support the development of communication skills. However, it is

also expected that some students perceive difficulties related to language complexity and cultural content, which may affect their preferences between authentic and non-authentic materials.

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as it relies on data from a questionnaire designed to gather statements about experiences with authentic materials from a language course at Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). Finally, the work is divided into five sections. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, Section 3 outlines the methodology, Section 4 includes the results and data analysis, and Section 5 concludes the article.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of authentic materials has been widely discussed in language teaching, raising a long debate in recent years. Defining authentic materials can be challenging, as one of the few points of consensus in the field is the lack of agreement among specialists (Gilmore, 2007; Ahmed, 2017).

Accordingly, Gilmore (2007, p. 4), in his research on the matter, provides eight possible definitions for authentic texts: a) Authenticity refers to language naturally used by native speakers to communicate with each other within their community; b) Authenticity involves language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience, delivering a genuine message; c) Authenticity is determined by the receiver, as it is not an inherent quality of a text but instead assigned by the reader or listener; d) Authenticity emerges from the interaction between students and teachers; e) Authenticity is linked to the types of tasks selected for learning; f) Authenticity is shaped by the social dynamics of the classroom; g) Authenticity applies to assessment practices; h) Authenticity is connected to culture and the ability to think or act like members of the target language group to gain recognition and validation.

The author highlights the multifaceted nature of authentic materials. He implies that authentic texts “can be situated in either the text itself, in the participants, in the social or cultural situation and purposes of the communicative act, or some combination of these” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 4), highlighting their complex definition that is likely to change depending on the perspective.

Gilmore concludes the chapter by citing Morrow’s definition of authenticity, which describes it as “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real

audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort" (Morrow, 1977, p. 13 cited in Gilmore, 2007). This definition, which highlights authentic elements created and performed by the social actors involved, captures the core idea of authenticity in a way that aligns very closely with the perspective adopted in this study.

Reinforcing this view, Tomlinson (2023, p. 5) describes authentic texts as "not written especially for language teaching." Examples include articles, magazines, TV shows, movies, and songs. The scholar argues that authenticity offers exposure to the language as it is naturally used, emphasizing how it helps learners develop a better understanding of real-world vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns.

Additionally, motivation is a crucial consideration. It plays a key role in many research studies on authenticity. Crookes and Schmidt (1991, p. 498–502, as cited in Peacock, 1997) define motivation as: a) interest and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; b) persistence and attention to the learning task; and c) varying levels of concentration and enjoyment. The reason why students' motivation is deeply connected to authenticity is simple: authentic materials have the potential to make learning more relevant and engaging by presenting language in real-life contexts. Thus, by choosing the correct authentic materials, classes become more engaging and may increase their motivation to learn.

Accordingly, Namaziandost et al. (2022, p. 2) state that "motivation leads the learners to become engaged in learning activities," which reinforces the idea that the strategic use of authentic materials can support learner engagement by stimulating interest and creating meaningful learning opportunities.

All things considered, the following sections will explore different perspectives on authenticity, with some arguing that authentic materials are helpful resources, while others suggest the opposite. Before addressing these perspectives, I also discuss the connection between authentic materials and grammar teaching..

2.1 Authenticity in grammar teaching

Although most authentic materials studies concentrate on reading and listening skills, more attention should also be paid to how authenticity may contribute to grammar instruction. This raises key questions: What exactly is grammar in the context of language learning? And more importantly, how can authentic materials play a meaningful role in teaching it?

Thornbury (2001, p. 1) defines grammar as "a description of the rules that govern how a language's sentences are formed." Such a definition exposes the core of what grammar truly is. Unfortunately, most teachers rely only on the isolated-sentence level of grammar, avoiding

recent approaches that emphasize contextualized and meaningful grammar teaching, i.e., authenticity.

According to Al-Musallam (2009, p. 114), the adoption of authentic materials in grammar instruction could potentially enhance students' knowledge of grammatical structures as they occur in their original contexts, avoiding isolated-sentence meaninglessness approaches. This perspective is also defended by Ahmed (2017, p. 196), who highlights "consciousness-raising" as one of the advantages that authenticity could bring to the classroom.

This idea of "consciousness-raising" can be understood as the process by which students begin to internalize grammar structures more naturally and frequently. Building on this, Little and Singleton (1991, p. 123–132) argue that authentic texts — such as newspapers, interviews, and real-world recordings — fix grammar within meaningful discourse, allowing learners to pick up rules inductively through lexical and situational clues. Their view suggests that grammar should emerge from exposure to words in context, rather than being taught as a set of abstract, prescriptive rules. Through this approach, learners not only recognize grammatical patterns but also develop the ability to use them communicatively, effectively bridging the gap between form and function. In this way, authenticity proves to be a valuable ally in the teaching of grammar.

2.2 The case for authentic texts

The debate over the use of authentic texts in language learning is an unresolved matter. Tomlinson (2023, p. 6) discusses whether texts should be authentic, identifying two main groups of researchers with opposing views on the subject: those against authenticity and those in favor of it. However, those advocating for authenticity in class represent the majority in this debate.

Supporters of authenticity argue that non-authentic texts overprotect learners and prevent them from having a real connection with the language. Kuo (1993, p. 176) states that students in language courses develop communication skills more effectively when exposed to authentic materials, compared to those who rely on non-authentic ones, claiming that such materials are "so artificially constructed that they cannot represent real-world language use". The author emphasizes the importance of exposing learners to language as it is genuinely used, enabling them to engage with real-life contexts, vocabulary, and structures that better prepare them for authentic communication beyond the classroom.

Similarly, Namaziandost et al. (2022, p. 10) defend that authentic teaching impacts students' feelings in class. The researchers argue that authentic materials are responsible for altering students' comprehension, anxiety, and, most notably, motivation, which is particularly boosted by the presence of authentic language materials. Gilmore (2007, p. 46) explains that the reason for this is "because of their intent to communicate a message rather than highlight target language". In other words, students are more likely to feel connected and motivated when working with materials that reflect genuine communication, rather than texts designed solely to teach grammar rules.

Lastly, the ideas of Namaziandost et al. (2022) and Kuo (1993) are also supported by many authors who advocate for bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world, as well as its multiple variations. These include Bacon and Finneman (1990), Little et al. (1994), Wong, Kwok & Choi (1995), Nuttall (1996), Mishan (2005), and Gilmore (2007). The consistent support found in the literature highlights the pedagogical value of authentic texts, which, by providing learners with relevant, real-world input, can enhance both linguistic development and classroom motivation.

2.3 The case against authentic texts

Conversely, some scholars remain uncertain about the adoption of authentic texts in the teaching of grammar, as well as in other areas of language instruction. Such authors base their attitude on the difficulty, claiming that learners might feel frustrated when such texts are adopted in class. Day (2003, *as cited in* Tomlinson, 2023) criticizes authentic materials for lacking evidence that they facilitate language acquisition, and argues that there is evidence suggesting learners find authentic texts more difficult.

For this reason, some researchers advocate for the use of non-authentic texts, drawing on the arguments against authenticity. They claim that such materials can serve as a guiding tool to focus learners' attention on specific language features, acting as a beacon that highlights the target feature and darkens the unnecessary ones (Tomlinson, 2023, p. 6).

Similarly, Martinez (2002) and Febrina (2017) bring another layer to the discussion: authentic materials are too culturally biased. Both authors defend that authentic materials are filled with traces of culture that are simply too difficult to understand outside the language environment. Based on the authors' perspectives, it can be said that the difficulty in bringing such materials to class is not only related to complex grammar structures or unknown vocabulary, but also to their deep connection to their language community. Other concerns are

also worth noting, such as the time-consuming nature of authentic texts and the potential frustration they may cause.

All things considered, both sides should be reflected on before addressing authenticity in grammar classes. On one hand, it advocates the pedagogical benefits of authentic texts, especially their ability to connect learners with real-world language use, enhance motivation, and promote contextualized grammar acquisition. On the other hand, critics raise valid concerns regarding the complexity, cultural specificity, and potential demotivation that authentic materials can cause, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. With these diverse opinions in mind, it is essential to reflect on how authentic materials are utilized and to consider the specific context and needs of the students. This discussion provides the basis for investigating how learners themselves perceive the use of authentic texts in grammar classes.

3. Methods

This study aims to analyze students' perceptions of the usage of authentic materials in grammar classes within EFL classrooms, mixing both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Data were collected through a Google Forms questionnaire comprising 21 questions, divided into three sections. The first section of the questionnaire gathered information about the participants' profiles, the second introduced the concept of "authentic materials" to ensure a clear understanding among respondents, and the third presented a series of Likert-scale statements to measure students' perceptions regarding the use of authenticity in grammar instruction. The latter will serve as the primary data for this article.

The survey involved 47 EFL students from an English course, whose profiles varied in age, English proficiency, education, and study experience. Most participants were between 18 and 30 years old, with a few younger or older. In terms of proficiency, 52.2% identified as basic users (A1–A2) and 47.8% as independent users (B1–B2), according to the CEFR. Regarding their English learning experience, 41.3% had been studying for 1 to 3 years, 28.3% for less than a year, 19.6% for over five years, and 10.9% for 3 to 5 years. As for their educational background, 45.7% were currently in higher education, 43.5% had completed some level of it, and 10.8% were in or had completed high school. The instrument is in Portuguese because it is the respondents' first language; the English translation of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix A. The students answered the questionnaire from June 26th to July 10th.

The following sections aim to analyze the data collected, as students' responses were converted into percentages and were visually transformed into graphs. The analysis examines the impact of authentic materials on students' motivation and communication in English, including the difficulties they encounter (such as vocabulary and cultural references), their perceptions of how these materials facilitate natural grammar learning, and their preferences for authentic texts over simpler, non-authentic ones.

4. Motivation and Communication

Figures 1 and 2 discuss motivation and communication about authenticity. Firstly, question number one addresses students' motivation when grammar lessons are taught with authentic materials. This question relates to how enthusiastic and interested they feel when such materials are presented in class. The chart below presents students' responses:

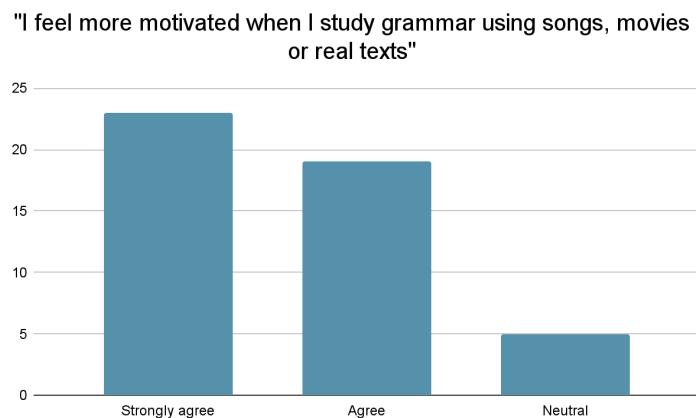


Figure 1 - Motivation

The results show that 89.3% of participants agreed that authentic materials are motivating, while 10.7% remained neutral. This supports Namaziandost et al. (2022), who highlight motivation as key to learner engagement. Student D also shared that authentic texts make them feel more "involved" in the language. Following this, the topic of communication naturally comes into focus.

Question number five focuses on the communicative outcomes of grammar instruction through authentic texts. It aims to highlight the potential of authentic materials to bridge the gap between form and communicative function. Students' responses are presented in the chart below:

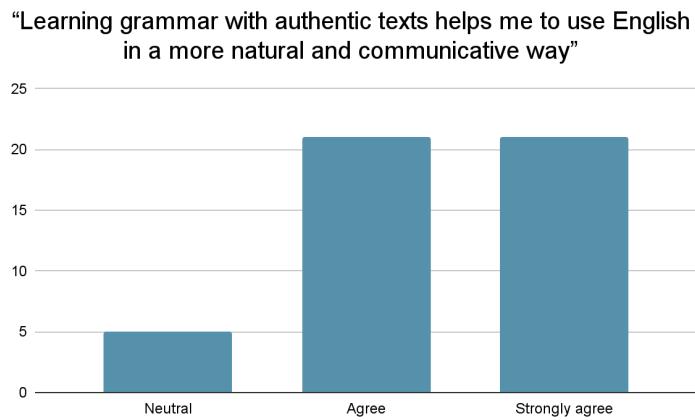


Figure 2 - Communication

The responses in Figure 5 were extremely positive: nearly all participants agreed with the statement, with 44.7% selecting “agree” and another 44.7% choosing “strongly agree.” Only a small portion (10.6%) remained neutral, and no participant disagreed with the statement. This suggests that most learners believe authentic materials do more than teach grammar rules: they help connect grammar to real-life communication.

Regarding the communicative side of grammar and authenticity, one student left a comment: Student A commented that she wants to “learn to communicate well, in a grammatically correct way, and also to be able to talk spontaneously and colloquially”. This response effectively balances accuracy with natural, real-world language use.

5. Language & Culture Barriers

Figures 3 and 4 discuss the difficulty that comes along with authentic materials. Firstly, Figure 3 concerns the level of difficulty associated with language structure in some authentic materials. This is related to how confused students might feel when exposed to complex language or unfamiliar content. The graphic below reveals students’ feelings related to the topic:

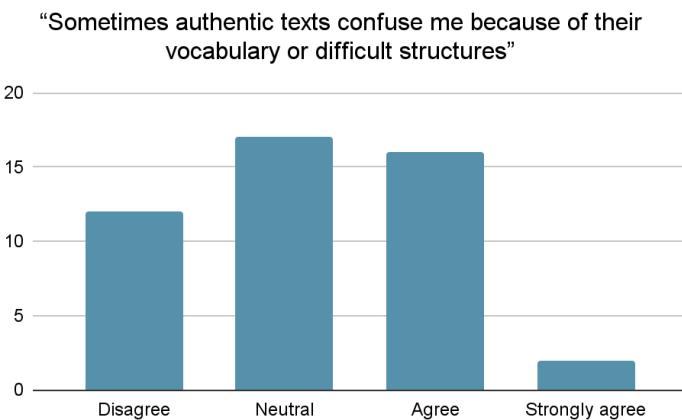


Figure 3 - Language-Related Difficulty

Regarding language-related difficulty, the responses were more divided. While 36.2% of participants remained neutral, 38.3% agreed or strongly agreed that authentic texts can be confusing due to complex vocabulary or structures. On the other hand, 25.5% disagreed with the statement. These results suggest that although some students experience challenges with authentic texts, many still show uncertainty, which may reflect their varying levels of language proficiency or familiarity with such materials.

Additionally, two students left comments related to the language difficulty of authentic texts. Student B reported that learning with such material causes them to feel confused, particularly when they need to use the foreign language in formal situations. Accordingly, Student D believes that authentic texts are more challenging to understand because of the appearance of some “difficult words”.

Additionally, Figure 4 focuses on the cultural challenges that students may face when engaging with authentic materials. It investigates whether cultural references present in real-world texts make comprehension more difficult. The chart below shows the students' responses on how cultural content may affect their understanding of authentic texts:

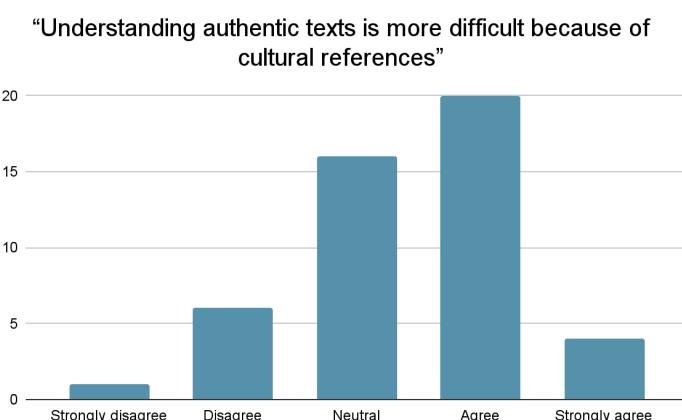


Figure 4 - Culture-Related Difficulty

Concerning cultural references, 51.1% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that understanding authentic texts is more difficult because of cultural content. Meanwhile, 34% remained neutral, and only 14.9% expressed disagreement. These results highlight that cultural specificity is a relevant concern for many learners when interacting with authentic materials. This supports the arguments of Martinez (2002) and Febrina (2017), who point out that authentic texts often contain cultural references that may be unfamiliar or confusing for learners outside the target-language environment.

In line with this, Student E commented about how non-authentic materials make them feel limited when exposed to real-life situations, particularly those involving culture. The student related that such a limitation occurs when trying to apply grammar to the real world, especially when they “come across an authentic text with nuances of culture and other layers present there”.

6. Artificiality and Naturality

Artificiality and naturality, as they relate to authenticity, are addressed in Figures 5 and 6. Firstly, Figure 5 examines students’ perceptions of whether authentic texts facilitate a more natural understanding of grammar, eliminating the need for memorizing isolated rules. The figure below shows how students responded to this statement:

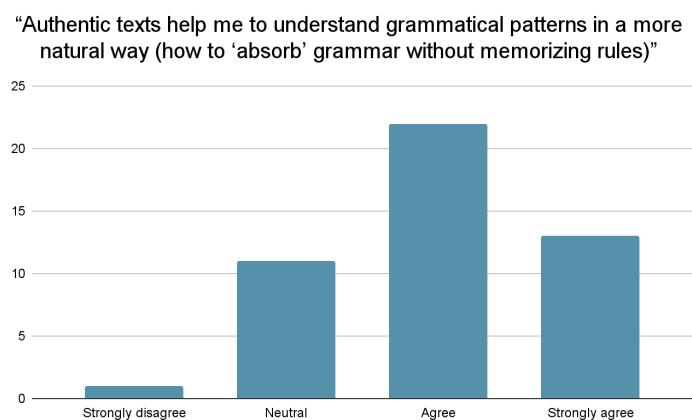


Figure 5 - Natural Grammar Learning

Concerning natural grammar learning, 74.5% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that authentic texts help them understand grammar more intuitively, without the need to memorize rules. Only one student (2.1%) strongly disagreed, while 23.4% remained neutral.

These results suggest that most students recognize the value of seeing grammar in context, as it allows them to internalize patterns more organically. Subsequently, Student F stated that “the lack of an authentic example undermines the genuine understanding of what has been taught”.

Following this, Figure 6 investigates how students perceive materials made just for teaching purposes, e.g, such as fabricated dialogues or textbook exercises, in contrast to real-life language. It considers whether such materials make learners feel like they are being exposed to an artificial or unnatural version of English. The graph below displays the students’ opinions on this matter:

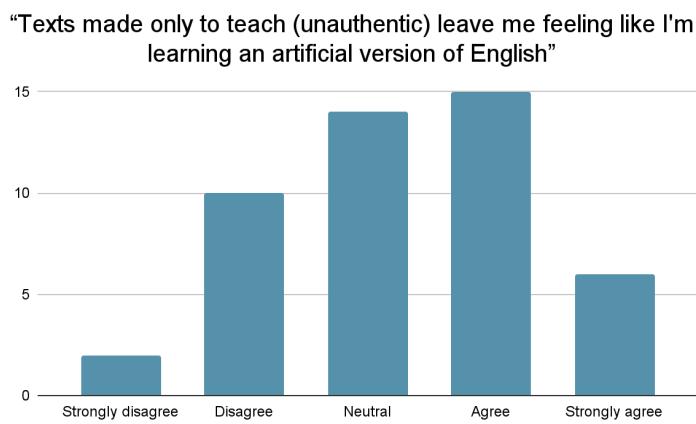


Figure 6 - Artificiality of unauthentic materials

The responses show that 44.6% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, suggesting that many students do perceive these materials as disconnected from authentic language use. Meanwhile, 29.8% remained neutral, and 25.6% disagreed to some extent. These mixed results may indicate that while a significant portion of learners value authenticity, others are either indifferent or see value in the simplicity that non-authentic materials can offer. The latter aligns with Tomlinson’s ideas, which suggest that non-authentic material serves as a guiding tool for students (2023, p. 6).

7. Authenticity in class

The final question in this section, and the most revealing one, asked students whether they would like teachers to use more authentic materials in grammar classes. Figure 7 addresses the students’ preferences and expectations based on their classroom experiences. The chart below shows the participants’ responses to this statement:

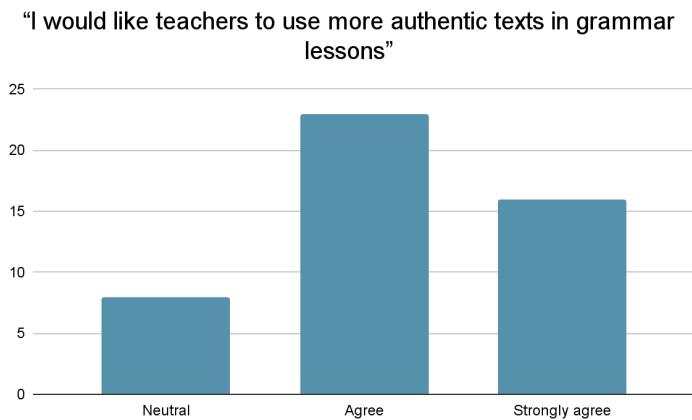


Figure 7 - Authenticity in class

This last question aimed to understand whether students want more authentic materials in their grammar classes, and the answers were straightforward. Almost all participants agreed with the idea: 48.9% selected “agree” and 34% “strongly agree.” Only 17% remained neutral, and no one disagreed with the statement. These numbers indicate that learners not only view authenticity as useful but also genuinely desire more of it in their learning routine. This reinforces what’s been discussed so far: students are open to seeing grammar not just as rules, but as something connected to how language works outside the classroom.

8. Conclusion

This article has discussed the students' perceptions of using authentic materials in grammar classes in EFL environments. To clarify the matter, a questionnaire was applied to some students to gather data on their feelings towards the topic. The results showed that, despite the difficulty, authentic texts are preferred over non-authentic texts for most students.

In agreement with the initial hypothesis, the main findings showed that students view authenticity as a valuable, motivational, and communicational tool that indeed should be used in grammar classes. However, its difficulty is still a problem for most students. Thus, teachers should apply these kinds of materials in grammar classes, adapting them to the level of students by removing or adding some explanations about unknown words or expressions students might encounter in the text, and not forgetting, however, the importance of non-authentic material to grammar teaching. As students F, G, and H stated, both materials should be implemented in class to gain a fuller understanding of any grammar topic. By doing that, educators can make classes more authentic without forgetting students' needs.

Finally, this research opens space for further studies in the area of authentic materials in grammar teaching, especially regarding their long-term impact on learners' motivation and understanding. Future investigations could deepen the analysis of how different proficiency levels respond to authentic input and explore strategies to better deal with cultural and linguistic difficulties. Also, perhaps through experiments in the classroom, it would be valuable to compare outcomes across varied learning environments. These efforts could contribute to new perceptions and innovations in promoting grammar outside the classroom.

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaire - Teaching Grammar in English Classes with Authentic Texts

Hello, this questionnaire is part of a research project investigating students' perceptions of the use of authentic texts in the teaching of grammar in English classes. Your answers are anonymous and will be used for academic purposes only. Please answer honestly.

1. What is your English level? () Basic () Independent () Proficient
2. How long have you been studying English? () Less than 1 year () From 1 to 3 years () From 3 to 5 years () More than 5 years
3. How old are you? () Less than 18 years () Between 18 and 24 years () Between 25 and 30 years () Above 30 years
4. What is your educational level? () High school completed or in progress () Higher education in progress () Higher education completed () Master's degree or above
5. How often do you have contact with English outside the classroom (watching series, listening to music, using social networks, etc.)? () Never () Rarely () Sometimes () Frequently () Everyday
6. Before looking at the examples above, did you already know what "authentic texts" are in English? () Yes () No
7. Do you notice a difference when your teacher uses inauthentic materials instead of authentic ones? () Never () Rarely () Sometimes () Frequently () Always
8. Which of the two types of text have you seen more of in your English classes? () The one in example A (made for teaching) () The one in example B (used in real life) () Both
9. What other types of materials have you seen in your English classes? (mark the ones you remember) () News () Songs () Fictional texts () Fictional dialogues (textbook) () Excerpts from series/movies () Texts produced by the teacher () Podcasts or real interviews () Social media posts () YouTube videos (vlogs, tutorials, real interviews)
10. Which do you prefer to see in the classroom? () Authentic materials (those used in real life) () Non-authentic materials (those created to teach)
11. I feel more motivated when I study grammar using songs, movies or real texts. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
12. Learning grammar with authentic texts awakens my creativity. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree

13. Sometimes authentic texts confuse me because of their vocabulary or difficult structures. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
14. Authentic texts frustrate me because they are very difficult to understand. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
15. Understanding authentic texts is more difficult because of cultural references. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
16. Authentic texts help me to understand grammatical patterns in a more natural way (how to ‘absorb’ grammar without memorizing rules). () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
17. Learning grammar with authentic texts helps me to use English in a more natural and communicative way. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
18. I’d rather see real examples of grammar in use than sentences made up to teach a rule. () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
19. Texts made only to teach (unauthentic) leave me feeling like I’m learning an artificial version of English () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree
20. I would like teachers to use more authentic texts in grammar lessons () Strongly disagree () Disagree () Neutral () Agree () Strongly agree