

# Attitudes of the Iranian EAP Students Majoring in Computer and Information Technology Regarding Authentic Materials

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**Abstract**—Authentic materials have many times been recommended to be introduced into the syllabus in order to simulate a real-world condition and also to teach the skills that students may encounter outside the safe environment of the classrooms (Graves, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2000; Paltridge, 2001; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Kelly & Kelly & Offner & Vorland, 2002; Khaniya, 2006). In this respect, from among all foreign language learning environments, ESP is not an exception. The present article tends to provide a report on Iranian EAP learners' (majoring in computer and Information Technology at university level) perceptions about some of the authentic materials recommended in the literature such as the articles as part of the literature, newspaper, scientific news, or advertisements. The findings of the survey suggest that from among ten different authentic materials, professional websites followed by scientific news were highly favoured; whereas, advertisements and product labels were the least preferred.

**Index Terms**—authenticity, adult motivation, EAP (English for Academic Purposes)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Initial interest in authentic materials dates back to 1890s. Back then it was Henry Sweet, one of the first advocates, who favored the use of authentic materials and discussed the benefits of authentic materials over contrived ones. He was in the belief that natural texts “do justice to every feature of the language” while artificial materials comprise “repetition of certain grammatical constructions, certain elements of the vocabulary, certain combinations of words to the almost total exclusion of others which are equally, or perhaps even more essential” (Cited in Gilmore, 2007).

However, as Gilmore (2007) mentions including authenticity criterion reappeared as a result of the discussions of Chomsky and Hymes during 1960s and 1970s. They proposed that communicative competence does not only comprise the knowledge of the language and emphasized the need for contextualized communication.

Guariento and Morley (2001) also relate the use of authentic materials to the onset of communicative movements in which there was an attempt to simulate real world in the classroom. They believe that having had lots of implications in ELT, authenticity has been with English language teaching for almost forty years. Several language teachers (Shrum and Glisan, 2000; Richards, 2001; Kilickaya, 2004, etc) believe that authenticity has proved its beneficial effect in language teaching and there is no argument regarding this. However, Khaniya (2006) believes that.

In the course of the decade, the use of authentic materials has become increasingly popular in learning situations ranging from traditional intensive ESL to language training for professionals. (p.17).

For the case of EAP students in Iran, there is a consensus among EAP practitioners that these courses have not reached their objectives in the sense that students cannot use their knowledge in the outside world as a real language user after graduation (Tayebipour, 2005; Hassaskhah, 2005; Zohrabi, 2005; Soleimani, 2005; Hayati, 2008; Fathi, 2008; Amirian & Tavakoli, 2009, etc.). These scholars offer different reasons for this unsatisfactory outcome of ESP courses in Iran ranging from the problems associating with materials included in text books, instructors, teaching methodology, approach to ESP, exam-centeredness of courses, to ignoring future needs of learners. Correspondingly, other scholars (Eslami, 2005; Khonsari, 2005; Sayfouri, 2005; Shokouhi, 2005; Riazi, 2005) recommend the inclusion of authentic materials as a source of real language use to solve some of these problems. Thus, the present study seeks to find out about the students' perceptions about different kinds of materials that may fit in an EAP setting through a survey. Since students' participation in defining their needs and choosing what to study has been emphasized as a cornerstone of every ESP course (Dudley-Evans and St John's, 1998), this study tends to provide some information regarding EAP learners' attitudes about authentic materials particularly those majoring in Computer and Information Technology.

### A. Authenticity and Authentic Materials

Authenticity and authentic materials have long been discussed by different scholars (Wilkins, 1976; Morrow, 1977; Rogers & Medley, 1988; Nunan, 1989; Harmer, 1991) and each has viewed it from his own standpoint. Wilkins (1976) believes that “authentic materials are those originally directed at a native-speaking audience” (p.79). Morrow (1977)

defines authentic text as the language produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and which is expected to express a real message.

Rogers & Medley (1988) move further and look at the terms authenticity and authentic as used for describing oral and written language samples that are the reflection of language forms used naturally and appropriately based on the cultural and situational context. Nunan (1989), Jordan (1997), and Harmer (1991) concentrate on the issue of purpose and state that authentic is any material which has not been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching. Lee (1995) also sees authenticity in texts which are not produced for teaching purposes but for a real communicative purpose. By this he means that the writer of a text intends to convey a message to the reader. Furthermore, MacDonald et al. (2006) contend that if there is a correspondence between the texts used in the classroom and types of texts used outside the classroom then it is possible to call such texts authentic. Unlike others, Mishan (2005) prefers to set some criteria for authenticity rather than defining the term. According to her "Authenticity is a factor of the:

- Provenance and authorship of the text.
- Original communicative and socio-cultural purpose of the text.
- Original context (e. g. its source, socio-cultural context) of the text.
- Learning activity engendered by the text.
- Learners' perceptions of and attitudes to, the text and the activity pertaining to it" (p. 18).

#### *B. Advantages of Authentic Materials*

A variety of advantages have been attributed to authentic materials according to different authors in language teaching literature. One of the advantages that has many times been emphasized is the presentation of real language and real-world situation and the integration of culture (Murdoch, 1999; Shrum and Glisan 2000; Kelly et al., 2002; Martinez, 2002; Haley and Austin, 2004; Velazquez, 2007). Another advantage is mentioned by Little et al. (1988), Murdoch, (1999), Guariento & Morley (2001), and Oguz and Bahar (2008) as being more motivating, more interesting, and working as rich sources of language input. Guariento & Morley (2001) value using authentic materials since they believe that extracting real information from a real text in a new/different language can be extremely motivating, therefore increasing students' motivation for learning by exposing them to 'real' language. Moreover, it is believed that authentic materials can encourage independent language use (Gilmore, 2004), enhance comprehension and create a meaningful context (Shrum and Glisan, 2000), increase vocabulary storage (Macaro, 2003), develop learners' communicative competence (Rice, 1991 and Shanahan 1997 cited in Sonmez, 2007), produce awareness of language and its related skills (Paltridge, 2001), introduce students to a full range of transactional and interpersonal speech (Burns and Seidlhofer, 2002), and teach students that comprehension does not necessarily mean understanding every word but it means learning strategies that are important for oral or written communication (Swaffar, 1981 cited in Maher Salah, 2008). Finally, Martinez (2002) is in the belief that besides exposure to real discourse and a wide variety of text types and language styles, authentic materials can keep learners informed about the current world situation and encourage reading for pleasure.

#### *C. Sources of Authentic Materials*

Authentic materials can include audio, visual and printed materials. Multimedia materials involving audio, video and graphical presentations can also be included. Any of these types of materials which are used for communicating specific messages in real life will fall under this category. The messages may be addressed to native speakers or to those who use this language as a second language in their country for communication.

There is an abundance of authentic materials which are used in daily life of native speakers and which are recommended by scholars of English language teaching field such as best-selling essays/stories, TV news-magazines, and talk shows (Hwang, 2005), literary texts (Sonmez, 2007), short stories, poetry, plays, realia in everyday life such as advertisements, brochures, and newspapers Crossley et al. (2007), real newspaper articles and reports, advertisements, cooking recipes, horoscopes, and editorials (Awasthi, 2006 and Kilickaya, 2004), literacy excerpts, audio recordings, and videotapes (Shrum and Glisan, 2000), movie schedules, classified ads, and food packaging (Horwitz, 2008), best of all internet which unlike other sources is updated continuously and has the unique features such as authenticity, immediacy, and large scope (Berardo, 2006 and Bell 2005). Amongst these authentic materials the ones which seem to be better fit an ESP setting are the professional websites and advertisements (Vaičiūnienė and Užpalienė, 2010), catalogues, articles, newspaper, instructions, news, magazines, and product labels.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### *A. Instrument*

The data was collected through an opinionnaire which asked about the students' attitude towards ten authentic materials namely, catalogues, articles, newspaper, instruction for hardware, instruction for software, scientific news, professional websites, magazines, product labels, and also advertisements. It consisted of ten items each relating to an authentic material in the form of likert-scale which required the students to choose their own perception about these materials from among options which were perfect, average, good, and weak.

### B. Subjects and the Context

The respondents to the survey included 75 students majoring in computer and Information Technology. However the number of the collected oppionnaires reduced to 68 because of the missing data. The subjects' age ranged from 18 to 23. They were taking their English for Academic courses at Mashhad Azad University, Iran. For their EAP course students are instructed using EAP course book for the students of engineering which mainly consists of three sections: pre-reading, reading for comprehension, and homework (Amirian and Tavakoli, 2009). Every unit begins with a pre-reading section which has different aims such as the pronunciation practice (Fathi, 2008), the introduction of technical terms in the text (word study), and the introduction of vocabulary by using them in the context of a sentence using definitions and exemplification. For technical terms teachers either use the definitions in the book or use their own definitions or synonyms. All this is done to provide the learners with some pre-understanding of the terms and vocabulary before the main text is practiced. A grammatical point is normally introduced deductively (Amirian and Tavakoli, 2009).

### III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Having collected the data, frequency analysis was performed using SPSS version 15. As is illustrated in table 1 the professional websites [ $\bar{X} = 3.35, SD = 0.787, 52.9\%$ ] followed by scientific news [ $\bar{X} = 3.01, SD = 1.029, 41.2\%$ ] are the most preferred choices among students. That is, 52.9% and 41.2% of the students respectively rated professional websites and scientific news as perfect to be taught as instructional materials. However, product labels [ $\bar{X} = 2.24, SD = 0.90, 7.4\%$ ] and advertisements [ $\bar{X} = 2.38, SD = 0.99, 13.2\%$ ] were the least desired items; that is, 23.5% of the students considered these materials as weak for instruction in EAP courses.

TABLE 1

	Weak	average	good	perfect	Mean	SD
Catalogues	9 (13.2)	25 (36.8)	21 (30.9)	13 (19.1)	2.56	0.952
Articles	7 (10.3)	14 (20.6)	23 (33.8)	24 (35.3)	2.94	0.991
Newspaper	11 (16.2)	22 (32.4)	19 (27.9)	16 (23.5)	2.59	1.026
Instruction for hardware	3 (4.4)	23 (33.8)	23 (33.8)	19 (27.9)	2.85	0.885
Instruction for software	5 (7.4)	19 (27.9)	23 (33.8)	21 (30.9)	2.88	0.939
Scientific news	8 (11.8)	11 (16.2)	21 (30.9)	28 (41.2)	3.01	1.029
Professional websites	1 (1.5)	10 (14.7)	21 (30.9)	36 (52.9)	3.35	0.787
Magazines	9 (13.2)	16 (23.5)	23 (33.8)	20 (29.4)	2.79	1.016
Product labels	16 (23.5)	25 (36.8)	22 (32.4)	5 (7.4)	2.24	0.900
Advertisements	16 (23.5)	19 (27.9)	24 (35.3)	9 (13.2)	2.38	0.993

### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

By integrating the principles of needs analysis which emphasis a more learner-centred approach to learning when it comes to an ESP setting, it is possible to include students' perceptions and attitudes in providing ESP teachers with ideas that lead them for the selection and inclusion of different instructional materials. However, the results from an oppinionnaire may differ from field to field so ESP/EAP teachers are advised to involve their students in materials selection. Nonetheless, the results of the present survey indicate that there is a high preference for professional websites and scientific news among the students majoring in Computer and Information Technology. Moreover, it is found out that students show their desire to work with articles related to their field, and also instruction booklets for hardware and software.

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