

## Developing Oral Communicative Competence for Secondary School Level Students with Context-based Authentic Materials

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### Abstract

One of the biggest challenges faced by several Indian teachers in government schools is their reliance on prescribed textbooks as resources for developing students' Oral Communicative Competence while largely neglecting a plethora of authentic materials that they may easily be used to build learners' Oral communicative competence. Perhaps, A major cause for this is the fact that teachers often find themselves confined to the situations where prescribed textbooks are imposed upon them giving little scope of the course of action beyond the classroom. This paper discusses some techniques of adapting authentic materials for ESL teachers in government schools that they can use for developing the oral communicative competence of students at secondary school level. All the ideas expressed are a result of classroom transactions reported here.

**Keywords:** authentic material, oral communicative competence, supplementary language teaching materials, Context-based Language Learning, outside world.

### Introduction

Language development is directed towards the growth of textbooks. Now, after a long gap of 20 years, the problem persists with textbooks used in government schools focusing more on structured questions instead of providing a variety of contextualised tasks and activities to assist the learning process. For instance, the prescribed textbook used in schools in Andhra Pradesh is evidence for the syllabus and spread of tasks found in it, i.e., textbooks always focus on the outcome of it but not on the language learning of learners.

As a result, students are hardly engaged with the lessons in the textbook; they are bored with the same repetitive 'remembering' techniques which are the first level of cognitive challenge from the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, 2001. Those techniques promise neither excitement nor interest to suit their palette. In addition to this, Krashen mentioned that the affective filter is high in such learning environments which further acts as a barrier in developing oral communicative competence of learners.

ESL students from low socio-economic status dwell in challenging contexts and for them the classroom is a primary source of comprehensible input. So, to develop proficiency in oral communicative competence, they need to encounter new words, phrases, and sentences in a variety of contextualised settings and perform activities that have clear communicative content. As language teachers, thus, we have felt a perceived need to provide our students with numerous exposures to learn oral communicative competence in meaningful ways for which authentic materials are available in our surroundings.

### **Definition of Authentic Materials**

Authentic materials, as a construct, developed as part of the Context Based Language Teaching (CBLT) Approach, which was a cognizant move away from structuralism. The CBLT approach is the need of the hour to use real life materials as valuable target language inputs without structuring them or tuning them for textbook use - the idea was to get students have a feel of authentic use of the target language, i.e., English, and therefore get motivated to use it. Gilmore (2007) compares what he calls “the contrived materials of traditional textbooks” with “authentic materials, particularly audio-visual ones, which offer a much richer source of input for learners and have the potential to be exploited in different ways and on different levels to develop learners’ oral communicative competence” (p, 103). That is, by implementing different kinds of authentic materials, students are introduced to the language used by real speakers rather than scripted, simplified and/or fixed material. This in turn better prepares them for the language they are likely to hear and use outside the L2 instructional environment.

There are two types of materials, i.e., Authentic Materials (Pamphlets, Paper clippings, photographs, video clips, etc.) and Created Materials (textbooks). Among these two types of materials, the usage of context-based authentic materials relate the students to the real world. Authentic exposure to language takes place when it is used in a natural way while students are reading articles from magazines, newspapers, journals, listening to audio-video recordings on the web, watching television shows, movies or hearing the news bulletin in English and reading chunks of words or sentences in pamphlets, advertisements, brochures, posters, notices, and the like. It would offer students a valuable source of real language input. In addition, students are exposed to language forms they already know, combined with some new elements or features, just beyond their existing level, acquisition of these new elements or features of the target language, which serves as comprehensible input.

### **Context-based Authentic Materials to Develop Students’ Oral Communicative Competence**

Speaking is at the core of ESL teaching, yet it is a neglected area of language skill development pointed out in the introduction. As most of the lessons in our textbooks do not integrate speaking, it is imperative upon teachers to incorporate oral activities as much as

possible and to align them with the context. Students need extensive exposure to authentic language and oral practice to aid their language acquisition.

In this section of the paper, we will present some examples of classroom activities with our students to show the use of authentic materials to develop students' Oral Communicative Competence.

### Activity 1

The lesson *Attitude Is Altitude* is about Nick Vujicic. Who is a torso? While transacting the lesson we tried to make the students to understand the exact meaning of disability and how some physically disabled (Divyangs) persons such as Shekhar Naik, Nick Vujicic succeeded in life even though they are Divyangs. At first, we showed them a newspaper clipping of the former blind cricket team captain, Shekhar Naik and how he overcame his disability.



**Source:** Hindustan Times, July 26, 2016, New Delhi, Aniruth Dharr.

### Instructions Given

- ✚ Formed the students into 5 groups.
- ✚ Instructed the students to think about Shekhar Naik.
- ✚ Allowed the students to discuss among their group members about physically disabled persons of their locality.

### Questions Posed

1. Whom do you see in the picture?
2. Can a name some physical disabilities?
3. How do you treat divyangs?
4. Is your school a special school?

5. How do the mainstream schools help the differently abled children?

### Observations

Students were excited very much after introducing Mr. Shekhar Naik. They were highly enthusiastic to know how the blind people play cricket and about Naik's achievements. All the students began to think and exchange their ideas among their friends. They actively participated in JAM (Just A Minute) activity which helped them to develop their oral communicative competence. JAM session was conducted on the topic how will you help the divyangs, if you come across them. All the students participated well; the session helped the students to develop their oral communicative competence very much.

### Activity 2

Before going to teach the lesson *I Will Do It*, we showed the students picture of Abdul Kalam, Mysore Palace, and a logo of Infosys etc. as a part of the authentic materials, to introduce Mysore and Narayana Murthy, the founder of Infosys.



Source: Google Images

### Instructions Given

- ✚ Asked the class to form into 5 groups.
- ✚ Maintained 5 students in each group.
- ✚ Instructed the class to think about the tourist places that they had visited.
- ✚ Informed the class to understand logos.
- ✚ Instructed the class to share their knowledge about Abdul Kalam.

### Questions Posed

1. What do you see in the picture?
2. What is your favourite soap?
3. What do you know about Abdul Kalam?
4. Do you know the logo of your school?
5. What is your goal? How do you achieve it?

### Observations

We observed the following things while the lesson was going on---

1. Students began to think about the greatness of Mysore.
2. They shared their knowledge on city of Mysore with one another.
3. The students came to know about different logos.
4. All the students listened to the other group members and expressed their opinions.
5. The students presented the information about Narayana Murthy orally excellently because of the context-based authentic materials used in the classroom.

Later, a small talk was conducted on the topic “the person who influenced most” at the end of the class. All the students participated in the activity very happy, and they talked well on the given topic. The session helped them in a better way to develop their oral communicative competence.

### Activity 3

While teaching, we used the family picture of Mr. Amitab Bachchan who is also known as ‘Big B’, to introduce the play *The Dear Departed* by William Stanley Houghton, the British dramatist.



Source: Google Images

### Instructions Given

- ✚ Informed the class to form into 5 groups.
- ✚ Next, Instructed the class to discuss about the names of relations
- ✚ Advised the class to think about their family members and relations

### Questions Posed

1. Do you identify the people in the picture?
2. Can you say the names of the persons in the picture?
3. What is the relationship between the little girl and Amitab Bachchan?
4. Do you like your grandparents? Why?
5. How do you treat your grandparents?

### Observations

At the time of discussion, we observed the following things among different groups:

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Dr. Suneetha Yedla and A. Lakshmi Narayana

Developing Oral Communicative Competence for Secondary School Level Students with Context-based Authentic Materials

1. Students understand the relations in a family with authentic material shown.
2. And started to know the different names of the relationship.
3. The students discussed about their grandparents.
4. The students shared their ideas about their grandparents.
5. The students expressed their love towards their grandparents.

A group discussion was organized on the topic “**Health of the Parents vs the Wealth of the Parents**”, which is related to the lesson ‘*The Dear Departed*’. All the learners are very interested to take part in the group discussion. All of them felt very happy in this session, because it helped them to develop their oral communicative competence in a better way.

### **Teacher Observations**

When we used these activities through the three stages presented as three activities, we observed that students’ participation was remarkably high. Most of them enthusiastically participated in the discussions and made a concerted effort to solve the tasks. Getting copies of *Realia* raised their spirits; they got an instant desire to try out the tasks on their own. We observed that it helped in oral communicative competence. The use of authentic material created a natural environment of communication. Through these sessions the students selectively took in portions of comprehensible input and chose some of the appropriate linguistic forms to express themselves (e.g., use of pictures, rappers, logos, and newspaper clippings). The context-based activities made it possible for the students to internalize what they read and use it to extend their discussions and thereby experienced a change in oral communicative competence.

### **Student Reflections**

As a consequence, by the end of the activity many of our students understood effectively the benefits of working with authentic materials first hand. This is aptly reported by one student:

“Before using the authentic materials, I was not good at oral communicative competence.”

Another student added, “This is very much interesting to work with colourful, attractive material.”

It is important to note that the context-based authentic materials construct supplements for textbooks to develop oral communicative competence.

### **Conclusion**

Developing students’ oral communicative competence is one of the end-goals of the teaching learning process and teachers need to create an environment which helps to develop oral communicative competence. Context-based Authentic supplementary materials are a



major prerequisite for creating such an environment in the classroom. Most teachers find themselves pushed by the system to focus on the product instead of the process, whereas only a process-oriented classroom would promote in students the desire to explore the world beyond the textbook. Based on our own experience, we can say that authentic materials have great potential if used effectively by us as and when necessary. Authentic materials should be designed in such a way as to incorporate a series of activities that would allow students to practice and reinforce the meaning and forms of the target language. Teachers can maintain productive classroom discussions, use effective questioning skills, and frame interactive activities that would promote oral communicative competence using a range of context-based authentic materials around us such as newspapers, pamphlets, advertisements, pictures, etc. The authentic materials help to bring and the subject matter closer to life and students make important connections between the classroom and the world outside.

Finally, with reference to the context a quote from Crawford (1995) is very appropriate here. “Authentic materials can scaffold the work of both teachers and learners and even serve as agents of change, provided they act as guides and negotiating points, rather than straightjackets” (p. 31). Thus context-based authentic materials related to textbook content develop oral communicative competence at Secondary school level effectively.

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Dr. Suneetha Yedla and A. Lakshmi Narayana

Developing Oral Communicative Competence for Secondary School Level Students with Context-based Authentic Materials 189

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Dr. Suneetha Yedla and A. Lakshmi Narayana  
Developing Oral Communicative Competence for Secondary School Level Students with  
Context-based Authentic Materials 190