

Using Authentic Materials to Develop Students' Oral Competence: Moving Away from 'Product' to 'Process'

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Abstract

One of the key challenges faced by several Indian teachers in government schools is their reliance on prescribed textbooks as resources for developing students' language proficiency while largely neglecting a plethora of authentic materials that they may easily use to build learners' communicative competence. A major cause for this perhaps is the fact that teachers often find themselves hamstrung in situations where prescribed textbooks are imposed upon them giving them little scope to venture beyond them. This paper discusses some techniques of adapting authentic materials for ESL teachers in low-cost government schools that they can use for developing the communicative competence of students with 'Beginner to Pre-intermediate' level of proficiency. All the ideas expressed are a result of classroom transactions reported here. They are presented to enable ESL teachers to involve their students in the 'process' of language learning without overtly focusing on its 'product'.

Keywords: authentic material, communicative competence, input, supplementary language teaching materials

Introduction

When I first stepped into the ESL classroom of a state school in West Bengal in the year 2000, the only resource I found teachers relying on was the prescribed textbook. The book (a mix of prose and poetry) followed a specific set format - lessons followed by end-of-the-text comprehension questions, a few grammar activities (often unaligned with the content