



Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Using Authentic Materials in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Authentic materials support language learning by connecting classroom experiences with everyday communication. This article examines secondary-level teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the use of authentic materials in EFL classes to facilitate students' English learning. It employed an interpretive phenomenological research design under the interpretative research paradigm. Semi-structured interviews with purposively selected 10 community school English teachers from Birendranagar Municipality, Surkhet, and classroom observations were used to collect data. Semi-structured interview guidelines and observation protocols were used to facilitate 10 interviews and 30 classroom observations (three classes of each teacher). The interviews were transcribed, and observation sheets were compiled for coding and thematic analysis. The teachers argued that authentic materials help teachers encourage and motivate students to use English appropriately and to build an interactive classroom environment for learning the target language. Findings suggest that when used appropriately, authentic materials can significantly enrich the language learning experience and better prepare learners for real-world communication, foster student engagement, enhance critical thinking, and develop essential language skills. Teachers need to select authentic materials creatively and critically, and other educational stakeholders must recognize the importance of using authentic materials in learning a second or foreign language and implement measures to manage such materials and support teachers' appropriate use for students' learning.

Keywords: Authentic materials, engaged learning, community schools, language exposure

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Introduction

Authentic materials refer to resources created for real-life communication rather than for teaching purposes (Mamba, 2024). These include audio, video, songs, podcasts, menus, radio broadcasts, websites, television programs, advertisements, and real-world conversations. Authentic materials (AMs) are not primarily prepared or authored, or created for teaching and learning, or solely to be used in the classroom. Nowadays, English Language Teaching has advanced from traditional grammar-based instruction to more communicative and learner-centred approaches. One key element of this shift is the increasing emphasis on using AMs, texts, and media created for native speakers and real-world contexts rather than for pedagogical purposes. The use of AMs augments language learning and streamlines instruction. It enhances classroom interactions, engages students in practical and communicative activities, and promotes learner autonomy (Pokhrel, 2021).

Mainly, textbooks are used to teach English at the basic and secondary levels in Nepal (Shrestha & Gautam, 2022). The textbooks provide basic outlines for teaching and learning the content. They are neither sufficient for all the learners nor are they equally comprehensible. In this regard, Thanajaro (2000) noted that textbooks are often designed without effectively considering learners' developmental levels and their verbal requirements. Rather, they are designed based on the curricula and a certain accepted benchmark that may not suit the context of the teachers, learners and institutions. English language textbooks in Nepal, for instance, do not foster interest and intellectual curiosity equally among students from different regional and socio-cultural contexts because the same textbooks are recommended nationwide (Giri & Gnawali, 2025). Common criticisms of textbooks generally include unclear main ideas, lack of logical reasoning, missing descriptions, and an emphasis on drills (Nayyar & Salim, 2005). However, English textbooks prescribed in schools follow the communicative approach and emphasize the functional and task-based use of the English language. In this context, the use of AMs could play a crucial role in achieving the designated curricular goals. An important aspect of this debate is assessment, a fundamental component of education. In preparing for the examinations, students lack English communication skills, even when they have great potential to learn (Dawadi, 2023). Classroom teaching mainly focuses on the textbook knowledge and preparation for the final paper-and-pencil tests (Kandel, 2015).

AMs provide students with real-life language exposure, enhance motivation, and improve linguistic competence (Iroda, 2024; Kandel & Raskoti, 2025). Rao (2019) argued that AMs enable English language teachers to employ a range of teaching methods and the latest techniques in their classes. Learners get opportunities to be

exposed to natural, authentic English language exposure with comprehensible input required for the target language acquisition through the facilitation of the teachers (Brown & Lee, 2025). In a similar vein, Dhakal (2022) reported that all teachers responded positively to the use of AMs in ELT. They were aware of the positive effects of the materials even when they could not use them. The study concluded that the use of AMs made English language learning more interactive and student-centred. In the same way, Silvani (2018) also found that students were active, motivated, and enthusiastic to learn when AMs were used in the ELT classrooms because it helped them understand the cultural nuances of English use. It also fostered intercultural understanding by comparing its use across their local contexts.

The exposure obtained from the AMs improves linguistic competence and cultural awareness, motivation, and confidence of the learners in using the language in real-life situations. Given this attention, there is a need to further investigate the impact and practical application of AMs in ELT classrooms in local contexts. This study focuses on discovering how the use of AMs impacts language learning and learners' motivation, in addition to establishing the challenges teachers encounter in using these materials. This study addresses this gap and attempts to investigate the secondary English language teachers' perceptions of using AMs in ELT classes. It also aims to explore teachers' practices for using AMs in ELT classrooms. Particularly, it answers the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of secondary-level English teachers towards the use of AMs in ELT classrooms?
2. How do they use AMs in their regular classrooms to convey their beliefs into practice?

Literature Review

The use of AMs in ELT has been a topic of much discussion in applied linguistics and language teaching. Numerous scholars argue that AMs, texts, and media created for real-life communication have the potential to substantially enhance learners' language proficiency and communicative competence. The use of AMs in ELT has been a key topic in second language acquisition and pedagogy. Iroda (2024) claimed that AMs expose learners to real-life language, raise motivation, and build linguistic competence. Sayi (2024) further notes that AMs foster a sense of cultural authenticity and connectedness, thereby encouraging learners to use the language beyond academic requirements. Therefore, the inclusion of AMs in language learning programs can significantly influence learners' motivation, allowing students to be more effective in language learning and proficiency acquisition. Similarly, Rao (2019) argues that, because genuine materials enable English language teachers to apply various tactics

for teaching learners using new approaches in their classrooms, learners have the opportunity to learn the language in a fresh way.

Omid and Azam (2016) state that the use of AMs in language teaching is advocated among the majority of professionals in the language teaching field. Pokhrel (2021) found that AMs fostered student-created tasks such as role plays, letter writing, and community interviews, which led to higher learner autonomy and meaningful use of English in different learning contexts. This study demonstrated the feasibility of using AMs as supplementary materials, accompanied by occasional textbook-free authentic teaching, even in resource-limited settings. Lafta (2024) also identified that AMs notably improve vocabulary retention and reading fluency when supported by structured pre-post-task instruction. This approach aligns with Sharma (2022), who highlighted the inclusion of authentic Nepali and global literary texts in ELT, showing how they enhance cultural understanding and language skills. Similarly, Mitrukescu and Negoescu (2024) highlighted the pedagogical importance of AMs such as newspapers, social media, and videos for improving students' learning outcomes in EFL classrooms.

Likewise, Tamang (2022) identifies criteria such as cultural relevance, linguistic appropriateness, and learner engagement as essential criteria for selecting AMs. In this way, this finding also aligns with Kramersch's (1993) statement on the essential role of cultural appropriateness in language teaching. Fitria (2022) states that AMs refer to texts, photographs, and movies that were not created for educational purposes. Abidjanova (2024) notes that genuinely created AMs provide teachers with opportunities to expose learners to the English language. They can also pursue various approaches and the latest techniques in their classrooms that employ AMs and texts for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Dhakal (2022) identified the perception of teachers on the use of AMs in English Language classes. The results of this study showed that teachers had positive perceptions towards using AMs in English classes at the secondary level. It was also found that using AMs helped to develop the quality of education. It helped both teachers and students achieve their language-learning goals. AMs made language learning more interesting, attractive, enthusiastic, and motivating and expanded the existing knowledge horizon of teachers and students.

AMs are materials used to engage, motivate, and make the classroom authentic in its use of the target language. Using AMs in the ELT classroom helps learners engage with the language as it is truly used by native speakers. In addition, these materials improve listening and reading skills and expose students to vocabulary, grammar, and cultural context. Similarly, they develop the teachers' professionalism too. While they can be challenging, especially for beginners, when carefully chosen and supported, they make learning more meaningful, practical, and enjoyable.

Methods and Procedures

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. It employed semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to examine the use and impact of AMs among secondary-level teachers in ELT classrooms. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into participants' perspectives, experiences, and the contexts in which they worked. Among the various qualitative research designs, we employed a phenomenological approach. Under this design, we explored the essence and individual teachers' lived experiences of the use of AMs in the ELT classroom.

Participants and Sampling

We purposively selected 10 teachers from 10 government-funded community schools in Birendranagar Municipality. Selected sample participants consisted of seven males and three females, all qualifying a master's degree. Initial contact was made through the head teachers of the respective schools. Then, we built rapport with the participants. After establishing rapport, the purpose of the study was explained, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected using semi-structured interviews and participant teachers' classroom observations. Each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded using a mobile phone with participants' consent. These interviews aimed to elicit teachers' perceptions, practices, and experiences with materials not primarily designed for teaching and learning in the ELT classroom. Following the interviews, classroom observations were conducted to assess their arguments that they shared during the interviews. Permission for classroom observation was secured from both the head teachers and the participating teachers. A total of 30 classroom sessions (three per teacher) were observed. The purpose of the observation was to examine how the teachers used the AMs in actual classroom practices. Observation protocols were used to record the observation data.

Data Analysis

The interview data were first transcribed and then organized with the observational data into raw datasets. The researchers read and reread the data to get the meaning. Then, the data were coded and categorized thematically under different themes and subheadings relevant to the research guidelines and research questions. A thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify patterns and

insights across participants' responses and classroom behaviors. This process allowed for a comprehensive understanding of teachers' lived experiences and the contextual factors influencing the use of AMs in their respective ELT classrooms.

Results

Based on the research questions, we organized the data into the following themes: teachers' perceptions of secondary-level community school English teachers' use of AMs and the use of AMs in action observed in their classrooms.

Teachers' Empirical Perceptions of Using AMs in ELT

The findings of the study showed that the teachers possessed positive perceptions regarding the use of AMs in teaching English. They shared that AMs were highly effective for the purposeful instruction of the English language in their contexts, as they identified many advantages of using them. To illustrate, T1 argued:

Authentic materials are very important in ELT in our context because English is not a native language for us. It is taught as a second language. So, we are teachers, but not always authentic sources. We can use authentic materials that contain natural use of language in context. Magazines, audio recordings, videos, and literary texts, for example, show how language is used in real communicative situations.

The teachers agreed that the use of AMs exposed the learners to the real-life, natural use of the English language. It consequently helped them acquire language. Moreover, they motivated learners and engaged them in practice with language through audio, video, and texts used in different disciplinary contexts. They also identified that materials helped students become habitual to the appropriate use of language. T2, for example, reasoned: "Authentic materials are very essential to create a helpful teaching environment. They capture students' attention and give a long-lasting impression. So, they are very useful...in the ELT classrooms". The participant teachers cheered the advantages of AMs in students' learning. They also made learning meaningfully engaging and interactive. It enhanced students' motivation and exposed them to the practical use of the English language across diverse sociocultural contexts. These resources are relatable and relevant to real life, which makes lessons more meaningful and engaging. While sharing the advantages of AMs, teachers also mentioned the ease and accessibility. In this regard, T3 added:

Authentic materials are needed to make the classroom more effective. They help students understand more easily. In addition to helping students, they provide knowledge and resources outside the textbook. For example, pieces of newspaper can be brought into the classroom that contain current news. We can

use mobiles and laptops to access and share materials from the internet with the students in classes.

The teachers opined that AMs enhanced classroom learning. It made learning more practical and accessible through the extracts of language used in real contexts. These resources, drawn from everyday life, such as newspapers, advertisements, or casual conversations, supported students in understanding how English is used in real-world contexts. The teachers also highlighted the role of digital tools like smartphones and laptops in finding useful multimedia content appropriate for their students. They reported that they could select appropriate materials from a large repertoire of resources to meet their students' needs. To intensify this idea, T4 elucidated, "Using authentic materials is highly beneficial in our case. They increase enthusiasm, inspire students for critical thinking, and help them prepare for real-life conversations". He meant to explain that the AMs increase students' motivation because they find the content more interesting and relevant. Similarly, these types of materials help students explore natural, everyday language as it is really spoken or written. Moreover, those materials encouraged critical thinking by exposing students to real-life content that may require analysis or discussion. Additionally, T5 revealed, "Authentic materials usually integrate various language skills, reading, listening, speaking, and writing within a single task; reading a news article can lead to a discussion, a writing activity, or a related listening task, like watching a news video". His response highlights that AMs often combine several language skills, such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing, in one activity. For instance, they shared that they used video for listening initially and speaking followed during the discussion on it. Similarly, their sharing, for instance, clarified that reading texts allowed them to teach listening as they read it for the students, speaking as they asked students to read and say the answer to the questions. They could also practice writing by asking the students to write a summary of the text or write answers to the comprehension questions. In this way, the teachers engaged the students with the content of the authentic materials to the full extent.

Similarly, T1 also stressed, "Authentic materials are more important and have great significance, such as increasing student engagement, developing critical thinking, promoting real-life communication, and supporting various other learning activities". His view holds that real materials are important because they motivate learners, develop critical thinking, facilitate real-life communication, and enhance other study skills. Additionally, T2 wrapped up, "The impact of using authentic materials in the ELT classroom is positive because it enhances students' pronunciation and develops their comprehension skills". He added that AMs also help develop the pronunciation and comprehension skills of the students. T3's insight further intensifies the idea, "Authentic materials facilitate comprehension. They help develop language

skills. So, they have a very positive effect”. His explanation illustrates that AMs help to facilitate comprehension skills and other language learning skills of students. They also noticed that it helped their students develop intercultural awareness and negotiated understandings of the controversial issues. To this reference, T5 said, “The impact of using AMs in ELT class includes increased engagement, improved real-world understanding, improved dialect skills, heightened awareness, and critical thinking in students”. The response implies that the use of AMs in English language teaching develops student engagement in learning, real-world and dialect skills, and sociocultural awareness and critical thinking in addition to the basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Teachers’ Practices in Classrooms

The data revealed that teachers in the study context used AMs in different ways, with varying levels of concentration and motivational intent. Some were regular users of AMs, while others used them occasionally to bring a difference in their usual teaching, even among the ten participant teachers of this study. For instance, we observed that T1, T2, T4, T6, and T9 occasionally used AMs in their classroom, while the rest of the teachers (T3, T5, T7, T8, and T10) were frequent users of AMs, which they collected and brought into their classes every day. In the meantime, it was visible in the classroom observation that T1, T2, T6, and T9’s use of AMs noticeably engaged the students in additional learning tasks. Similarly, T3, T5, T7, T8, and T10 used AMs in the ELT classroom to help students learn curricular content more illustratively and contextually. In the same vein, T1, T2, and T6 used AMs to improve students’ language skills more effectively in comparison to T7, T8, T9, and T10 in their regular classrooms. On the other hand, T1, T2, T3, and T4 were very well integrated in the use of AMs into the lesson, and the rest of them, i.e., T5, T6, T7,... T10, used AMs in the lesson to accomplish certain skills or tasks at a time. However, T1, T2...T7 were very confident in selecting and using AMs in their lesson. Among them, T8, T9, and T10 were somewhat confident in selecting and using AMs in their lesson.

All the teachers engaged students with AMs. They used language while describing or using them. For instance, T7 brought a newspaper, shared it with all the groups and asked students to prepare a short news report about the event they organized in their school that morning in the assembly. All students got engaged, discussed, collaborated and shared the group-wise final news paragraph in the class. Similarly, T1, T2, and T3 used online resources in their classroom to engage the students to use English through the projector, and the remaining T4, T5,... T10 used the extracts of the children’s stories, poems, and essays related to the environment, good behaviours and familial and school cultures. In the meantime, T1, T2.....T5 were very interested and motivated students while using AMs. Similarly, T1, T2...T5 encouraged students

in learning activities by using AMs. They used AMs in a variety of ways to practice language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, they also used AMs to help students practice pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structures through the online and printed materials they brought into the classrooms. Likewise, T7, T8...T10 were more focused on classroom activities in using AMs. The use helped teachers to accomplish curricular as well as extramural activities, such as socialization in societies and in formal and informal events inside and outside school premises, acquisition of good habits and their performance in speech and writing in English.

Students' reactions were very positive to getting engaged with AMs in the ELT classroom. Teachers had very good instructions by using AMs to motivate the students to use English appropriately in different contexts, orally and in writing. The observations of ten secondary-level English teachers' classrooms reveal diverse patterns in the use of AMs in ELT. While T10 also incorporated AMs in assessing students' language skills and aspects, the rest (T1–T9) used them for classroom delivery and student practices. However, the observation showed that the teachers used AMs in classroom presentation, practices, and student evaluation. It made students learn English implicitly without as much conscious effort of the students as in the conventional practices or the use of the pedagogically prepared materials.

The findings showed that participant teachers in Birendranagar Municipality, Nepal, integrated AMs moderately into ELT. Learners also appreciated the use of AMs in their classroom and participated actively in learning English. This shows that contextual use of relevant AMs is appreciable in EFL teaching and learning. The data showed that both teachers and students acknowledged the academic benefit they received from the use, as AMs allowed them to practice English in real and simulated communicative settings. It also provided natural English language exposure, which triggered students' English learning aptitudes and justified the pedagogical benefits of using AMs in ELT. Nevertheless, the findings unveiled the instrumental difference in EFL pedagogy through AM-integrated teaching that increased interactivity and encouraged student-centred teaching. Yet, the teachers' readiness, efforts, and confidence in using AMs varied significantly in the study site, although all the teachers agreed that the use of AMs in ELT builds cultural awareness, critical and higher-order thinking skills, and intercultural understanding among the students.

Discussion

The study found that secondary-level English teachers in community schools in Birendranagar held a positive attitude toward AMs in ELT. They shared their success stories about using AMs to create better learning environments in their classrooms

as they induced genuinely communicative contexts for using the English language interactively. Students were actively engaged and highly motivated using the multimodal authentic resources more easily than conventional teacher-tailored materials. The teachers' use of printed texts from newspapers and magazines, literature, fictional books, daily conversations in different contexts, restaurant menus, and multimodal texts such as audio-visual materials, podcasts, and social media content provided students with exposure. AMs supported teachers in enhancing students' communicative interactions, intercultural awareness, and learning autonomy in their learning contexts (Kandel, 2019). Many students participated in class discussions and learned through sharing and collaboration in such AM-integrated classrooms. The findings of this study corroborate with Dhakal (2022), as the study reports teachers' appreciation towards the use of AMs to expose learners to authentic linguistic input that contributes to quality English language acquisition. Additionally, aligned to the findings of this study, Mishan (2021) also highlighted the importance of AMs for developing cultural awareness and linguistic proficiency within the learners' sociocultural contexts.

The findings of this study substantiate the motivational potentials of the AMs in ELT. The participant teachers' perceptions and practices depict a critical appraisal of the pedagogical use of the AMs. In this regard, Peacock (1997) and Gilmore (2007) reported that real-life texts and media content boost learners' engagement and bridge the gap between classroom language and language used in real contexts. The teachers' experience in this study, as they observed heightened student motivation and engagement with AMs, further underscored the usefulness of AMs for scaffolding the complex process of English language acquisition among Nepali learners. Bist and Kandel (2024; 2025) identified that literary texts helped learners develop communicative skills and the linguistic structures implicitly by exposing them to authentic discourse that depicted contextual English use. The use of AMs also includes the avenue of integrating ICT in ELT, as it addresses the concern of accessing appropriate materials in resource-limited contexts. Kandel (2023; 2025) identified that ICT-induced AMs facilitated students' integrative language development. Akin to these studies, the teachers in this study also reported that AMs engaged learners in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and learning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. It consequently reduced students' cognitive strain and effort in English language learning and helped increase their language proficiency. Fang and Webb (2020) also reported that the use of the AMs gave exposure to real-language input. Additionally, they suggested scaffolding the exposure for better pedagogical mediation. The findings of this study, in this way, justified that AMs assisted in developing learners' readiness, motivation, learning awareness, socio-cultural sensitivity, and confidence.

Similar to the findings of this study, current studies corroborate that AMs are supplementary teaching tools in ELT. For example, Mitrulescu and Negoescu

(2024) highlighted the importance of AMs in the classroom to attain optimal student comprehension and motivation. Likewise, Husnawati and Yundayanu (2024) identified that such materials positively affect student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and cultural curiosity. Morton (2024) also argued that learners who use AMs acquire vocabulary and communicative competence that are immediately applicable to professional and real-life contexts. The study found that most of the instructors favoured using AMs ELT on a varied scale based on the teaching content. Some used them habitually, while others used them selectively, as dictated by time, material, or professional pressures, including the demand of the lesson and students. However, all the participant teachers acknowledged a significant role of AMs in language teaching, particularly in bridging the gap between the theoretical knowledge that they have acquired during the teacher education courses and modules, including the preservice teacher preparation courses of the universities and communicative language use in the context of ELT in Nepal.

Conclusion

This study illustrates that AM integration in ELT in the context of secondary-level government-funded community schools in Nepal exerts remarkable influence on learner motivation, intercultural awareness, and English language acquisition. The findings showed that real-life language use in the AMs justified the appropriate use of language to learners more than teachers' mere explanations. It developed sustainable habits of the students in engaged learning and critical comprehension of the language in meaningful contexts. AMs also provide exposure in different forms and media of language that reinforce the dynamic nature of language learning in different social contexts. It helps learners gain linguistic competence and strategic as well as communicative competence through contextually grounded, academically relevant, and engaging language input. Furthermore, such material offers invaluable opportunities for cultural exploration, making language learning more meaningful and enjoyable. In this study, identified that AMs also promote critical thinking and holistic language competencies of the students. However, effective use of AMs requires meticulous planning, creativity, and contextualization. Teachers need to prepare for selecting and utilizing appropriate AMs to ascertain their alignment with lesson goals and students' needs.

The findings of the study imply more innovative and planned utilization of AMs in ELT in Nepal. This includes selecting materials that are age-appropriate, level-appropriate, and based on the interests of the learners. Proper planning is required on the part of the teachers in order to benefit from the optimum pedagogical potential of AMs in the classes. The study suggests that curriculum planners integrate AM into English language curricula, textbooks, and supplementary materials. Such integration

will enhance a communicative and practical approach to language learning, bridging the gap between classroom learning and daily use. Revisions in the secondary-level English curricula and textbooks in Nepal can consider revisiting the examination system to offer flexibility to AM-based activities. This would foster a more vibrant and learner-centred pedagogy while aligning assessment with real-life language use and communicative competence. Similarly, school administration should support teachers by providing resources, training, and institutional support to incorporate AMs. While the use of AM-based lessons may initially seem burdensome, with appropriate support, teachers can adapt lesson plans to incorporate AM to augment textbook content. Through collective efforts on the part of teachers, curriculum planners, policymakers, and school managers, AMs can be an empowering tool in ELT in Nepal.

Meanwhile, the study was limited to exploring the perceptions and experiences of 10 English language teachers from Birendranagar regarding the use of AMs in ELT classrooms, employing semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Those delimitations had been established to maintain a focused and manageable scope for the study. This study adds to the literature on English language teaching by capturing secondary teachers' perceptions and practices of using authentic resources in the context of Nepali EFL instruction. The phenomenological design further unveils teachers' lived experiences and practical efforts that depict how they embrace materials for enhancing learner autonomy and communicative competence. Also, it suggests evidence-based recommendations for teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers to integrate authentic materials systematically in school-level English education.

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Authors' Contribution

The first author was responsible for data collection and writing the initial draft of the manuscript, while the second author led the conceptualization of the study and the development of research instruments. Both authors reviewed the final version and provided informed consent for publication. The second author further contributed to the substantive revision of the manuscript and oversaw the correspondence for the publication process.

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