

The Authenticity of the Algerian English Textbooks: The Case of Third Year High School Textbook “New Prospects”

Badra Hamidi

Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Languages
University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, Mostaganem, Algeria

Fawzia Bouhass Benaissi

Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Languages
University of Djilali Liabess , Sidi Bel Abbess , Algeria

Abstract

This research paper evolves from and revolves around a prevailing assertion: namely, that is the teaching-learning process has a firm attitudinal footing. Differently stated, the aim of this study is to explore and evaluate the authenticity of the Algerian English textbooks at high school level as they are considered as an important instructional materials and fruitful resources for helping English language learners develop communicative competence. This investigation is tackled by inquiring about the following questions: To what extent are the texts and tasks included in the Algerian secondary school textbooks authentic? And how far does “New Prospects” help English as a foreign language (EFL) learners improve their communicative competence?. It should be noted that the targeted population of this study are the Algerian secondary school teachers of English in the region of Mascara of which 35 English language teachers responded to the questionnaire copies in addition to the use of an informal observation as research instruments. The findings of this investigation disclose that the English textbook « New Prospects » that is currently used by third year Algerian high school pupils doesn't offer classroom learners adequate opportunities for learning authentic language. This is due to many reasons such as the choice of one type of English at the expense of another which is more dictated by both political and economical considerations rather than by pedagogical concerns in addition to the lack of an appropriate model because most English adopted versions lack Englishness in addition to the mechanical way in which the tasks presented in the prescribed textbook are tackled and being dealt with. According to the obtained results, the researcher suggested the use of visual aids, Informational Communicative Technologies (ICTs), and some useful communicative tasks as pedagogical recommendations so as to remedy the situation.

Key words: authenticity, authentic materials, communicative competence, English language textbooks, foreign language teaching/learning

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1-Introduction

Moving from the focus “on form” to the focus on “meaning and language use” was an imperative step in the history of English language teaching in Algeria. It aims at developing learners’ communicative competence when designing curricular for English language learning by adopting the communicative language teaching approach.

The textbooks “represent the visible heart of any ELT program” (Sheldon 1988: p238) since they offer significant chances for both the teachers and the learners to practice the target language when used in the classroom. Once communicative competence is determined as the main objective of the curriculum, textbook writers find ways to achieve this goal by setting the benchmarks to design a useful material.

There is much evidence to support the great importance of textbooks in English language teaching programs because they are the foundation of school instruction and the primary source of information for students and teachers. In other words, they are the main instrument for shaping knowledge, attitudes and principles. In Algeria, the textbook serves as the basis for much language input that the learners receive when practicing it.

For most teachers, textbooks provide the foundation for the content of lessons, the balance of the skills taught, as well as the kinds of language practice the students engage in during class activities and for the learners the textbooks are considered as the major source of the contact they have with the language apart from the input provided by their teachers.

This research focuses on one of the three English textbooks which are currently used in the third level of the Algerian high schools “New Prospects”. This study aims at finding out the extent to which the prescribed textbook can prepare learners to be communicatively competent and whether it provides learners with authentic content that can be used in a particular context so as to be qualified as appropriate and suitable textbook.

2. Literature Review

The authenticity of the teaching materials in English as a foreign language context is a significant issue that has been raised by so many scholars who study English language teaching. To begin with, Harmer (2007) defines authentic material as “language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers and it is normal, natural language used by native or competent speakers of a language” (p. 273). So, by authentic texts, we mean that genuine instances of language use as opposed to those translated versions and devised ones especially for language teaching and learning purposes. This issue of authenticity emerged as an important question within the communicative language teaching and in relation to notional “functional” syllabuses where the focus was placed on ensuring that classrooms in which English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) are required to contain natural language behaviors with content identified as relevant to the learner through the process of needs analysis. Once more, the texts should be presented in a way that make second language (L2) exposure seem similar to a native context.

2.1. What does authenticity stand for?

Authenticity is an umbrella term that covers different interrelated meanings. It has mainly to do with language produced by native speakers in a particular language community (Martinez & Roberts, 1981; Sarigleton, 1989). It may also stand for the type of tasks and the chosen texts to be dealt with as important EFL instructional materials which are our concern in this article. By authentic texts, we mean those stretches of real language produced by real speakers or writers for a real audience so as to convey a real message. Judging a particular text to be authentic or not can make the researcher think about the source of the discourse and the context of its production which are two important factors when dealing with authenticity as a corner stone in teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

“Fitness to the learning purpose” may also be considered as a factor that defines what authenticity means. Generally, both teachers and students ask a question like what are we trying to achieve with authentic classroom materials? A possible answer to such a question would be to help learners communicate effectively in the target language (Breen, 1985).

2.2. The Need for a New Paradigm Shift

Being aware of the importance of discourse and having the willingness to take on a view about what language as discourse implies can only make us better and more efficient as syllabus designers, tasks analysts, dialogues writers, materials adaptors and evaluators of everything we do and tackle in our classrooms.

Above all, the approach that has been adopted recently enables us to be more faithful to what language is and what people use it for because the time when educators start to think of language as discourse, the entire landscape changes. (Widdowson, 1990). So, a paradigm shift would be the best solution because we are in front of so many models that are far from comprehensive but serves to illustrate how inadequate many current language textbooks are in enhancing learners' overall communicative competence. Since the language of this English language textbook is poorly presented to the learners though researchers endeavor to improve it, the gap is deeper.

It is time to change as learners are supposed to know much more than any time how they can make meaning through language as a reaction to the research revolution into different areas of communicative competence such as pragmatics , discourse analysis , sociolinguistics...etc

2.3. Textbook Role in ESL/EFL Classroom

Textbooks are considered as the potential that serves additional roles in the ELT curriculum (Cunnings worth, 1995). He argues that they are effective resources for self –directed learning and a source of ideas and activities, a reference for language learners, a syllabus where they reflect predetermined objectives and a support for less experienced teachers. Hutchinson and Tows (1994) too point out that textbooks play a pivotal role in innovation. They suggest that textbooks can support teachers through potentially disturbing and threatening change processes, demonstrate new or untried methodologies, introduce change gradually and create scaffolding upon which teachers can build a more creative methodology of their own.

Many of the aforementioned scholars are quick to point out that textbooks have long been considered central to English language learning and teaching. They are not only a source of knowledge that teachers rely on to prepare and deliver a lesson but also the basis of language input for language learners. Gilmore (2007) literally labels the language in textbooks as “a poor representation of the real thing despite the fact that much have been done to redress the balance between authentic language and the language in textbooks” (p. 6)

2.4. Presentation of « New Prospects »

New Prospects is designed for Algerian third year high school learners. It is determined to all streams: literary, foreign languages, scientific, and economy and management. It consists of 270 pages divided into two sequences and six units, which are as follows: Unit One: Ancient Civilizations- Unit Two: Ethics in Business- Unit Three: Education in the World-Unit Four: Food Safety-Unit Five: Feelings and Emotions-Unit six: Are we alone? .Each unit includes a project to be fulfilled at the end.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

After an observation of more than five years teaching third year classes, the researcher decided to evaluate the textbook that is currently used by third year high school learners so as to improve their communicative competence. The current work is a cross sectional descriptive study that took place at different Algerian high schools where a total number of 40 questionnaire copies were randomly handed to teachers at Algerian high schools in the region of Mascara.

3.3. The Research Instrument

The researcher makes use of an unstructured observation and a questionnaire to test the research hypotheses and find out some solutions to the problem at hand.

3.3.2. The questionnaire

To validate the research findings and to cross check them the researcher used a questionnaire as a research tool. It should be mentioned that the total number of the filled questionnaires is 35 by the respondents who participated and they were not reluctant to fill out the questionnaire copies anonymously.

3.4. Main Findings and Discussion:

The first part of the questionnaire includes teachers' background information and the second part contains questions related to the research theme i.e Algerian English textbooks authenticity, this part of questionnaire is formulated through the use of close-ended and open-ended questions which aim at providing answers to the research questions. While the second part aims at finding out their reference to the use of English textbook in their mundane teaching practices.

a. The teaching experience

In order to ensure realistic facts on the personal level, teachers were asked about their experience. This can be a reference point which provides the researcher with more facts if the teachers have witnessed the different changes that English language teaching (ELT) in Algeria has

undergone. In action, the majority of teachers that presents 70% of the total respondents were experienced instructors i.e. their experience range from 15 to 20 years. While 30% of them were novice teachers who have been teaching English for two to six years.

Table 1 *English language teachers experience*

Possibilities	Teachers' number	Percentages
Experienced Teachers	28	70%
Less experienced Teachers	12	30%

b. Teachers Reference to the Text book

Concerning the teaching materials used in EFL classroom, the researcher asks the participants whether they refer constantly to the text book in their teaching. Around 90% of them say that they depend continuously on the text book in their everyday teaching practice as it is mentioned in figure01. However, ten percent of them refer to it in frequent ways (from time to time). In this regard, Hall (2011) believes that well-designed textbooks have a number of recognizable benefits for teachers and learners since they provide language input and exposure for learners.

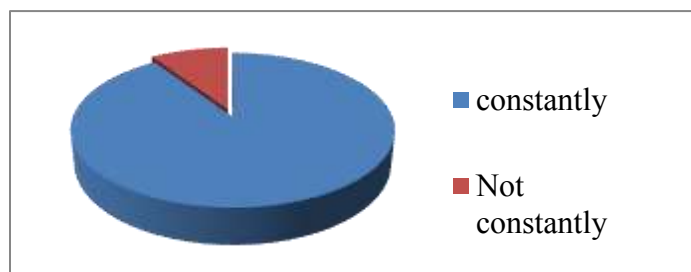


Figure 1 Teachers reference to the English language textbook

C- EFL Teachers Perceptions and Attitudes toward Using Authentic Materials in their EFL Context.

According to the elicited results that appear clearly in table 02, there has been an overall indication among EFL Algerian teachers on the merits of using authentic materials in second language classes. 95% of the informants indicate their preference for using such materials in language teaching. While five percent of the other participants express their opposition to the use of authentic materials in their English sessions and when they were asked about the reasons behind such a view, they justify their answers as follows: authentic materials can add more responsibility on the teacher as they are sometimes obliged to prepare activities and questions since authentic materials are usually found without activities or issues which is not an easy task that any teacher can handle.

Table2 *English language teachers perceptions toward using authentic materials*

Possibilities	Teachers' number	Percentages
Yes	33	95%
No	02	05%

D-Reasons for Using Authentic Materials in EFL Classes

When asking about the reasons for using authentic materials, 17 of our informants said that the most important factor behind using authentic materials in their EFL classes is to expose their learners to real life context and make them in front of genuine instances of language use as opposed to translated versions. In this regard (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 161) states that authentic materials can provide meaningful exposure to language as it is actually used to motivate learners and help them develop a range of communicative competencies and enhance positive attitudes towards learning the language .However, nine informants selected item b which states for using authentic materials to attract their learners interest and raise their motivation to learn a foreign language and the other seven teachers state that developing their learners language skills and applying effective teaching strategies is the main interest behind using authentic materials at class and this what figure 02 can highlight.

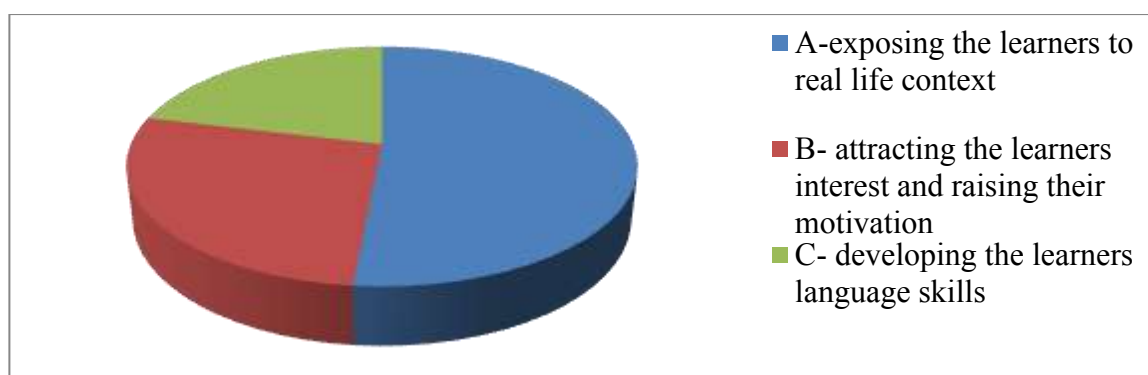


Figure 2 The causes behind using authentic materials in English language classes

E- The Authenticity of the Tasks Presented in « New Prospects » Textbook

As far as this question is concerned and according to figure 03, 25 teachers select the option No which means that the tasks presented in « New Prospects » lack authenticity, they add that this is because the language of the prescribed textbook is of poor representation and it is no more of a simplified version of English that impedes learners communicative competence besides the mechanical activities that don't go beyond classroom context. However, ten of the participants answer that some of the tasks represent genuine instances of language use such as in dialogues where the learners are asked to express suggestion, apology or offer and the rest of the activities seem to be far from the native speakers instances.

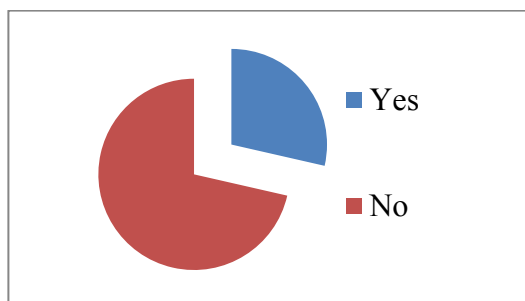


Figure 3 The authenticity of the tasks presented in « New Prospects »

F-The Contribution of the Content and Tasks presented in « New Prospects » in Enhancing Algerian EFL Learners Communicative Competence

The contribution of « New Prospects » Textbook in enhancing EFL learners' communicative competence was another significant question addressed to the study participants; their answers were distinct as same as the previous ones. Twenty teachers say that although the prescribed textbook activities and content are meant to be communicative, when being put into practice things are different especially if the learners were not exposed to real life situations or put the language in use. The teachers in such a case should be careful of the hidden implications of some appealing looking activities that may not always target the right skill, the other 15 informants reply that « New Prospects » can encourage Algerian EFL learners to feel free to interact, negotiate meaning and finally be communicatively competent but this can be achieved only if the teacher is innovative in his selection of the tasks and the content being taught to support his/her teaching with authentic materials.

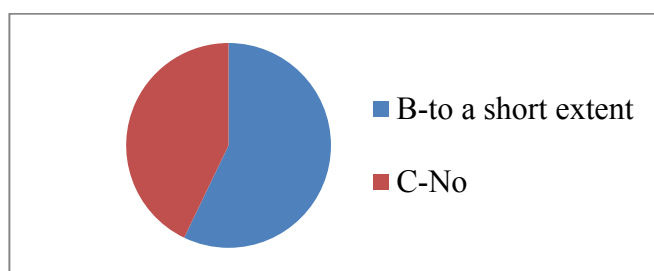


Figure 4 The contribution of the content and tasks in enhancing learner's communicative competence

F- The Use of audio-visuals in EFL Classes

According to the answers provided by teachers in relation to this question 22 participants say that they don't use audio-visual aids although they are aware of its great importance, while 13 informants express the fruitful usage of audio-visual materials. The former participants justify their choice for not using audio-visual materials by raising the following causes: overcrowded classes, lack of materials sources and workshops in many schools, difficulties in time management, extra work for teachers, lack of teacher training. This result can be linked to the previous question. In other words, audio-visual materials can be of great importance in helping Algerian English learners be communicatively competent because they provide a solid basis for teaching and learning as well.

Table3 The use of audio-visuals in English as a foreign language classes

Possibilities	Teachers' number	Percentages
Yes	13	37%
No	22	63%

G- The Criterion that EFL Teachers Take into Account when Selecting Authentic Materials

Most teachers (30) selected all the options mentioned in figure 05 that were given by the researcher so results that have been seen out of this question agree with when they refer to the importance of using such principles in materials selection and this goes hand in hand with what

Gilmore (2004) approves in his comparison between natural and authentic interaction and textbooks content. As far as figure 05 is concerned, twenty participants answered that needs analysis is the most fruitful aspect that should be taken into account when selecting authentic materials and audio-visual aids to be used at class. Since the learners are involved actively and motivated when taking their opinions and suggestions in the learning process into consideration. On the other hand, ten teachers shed light on the necessity of respecting the course objectives when using authentic materials. While, other five informants highlight the role of learner's individual differences, language level and cultural differences in materials adaptation should be taken into account too.

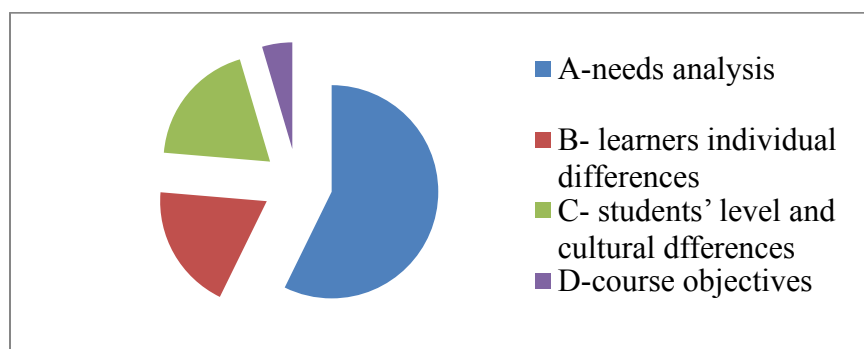


Figure 5 EFL Teachers criterion when selecting authentic materials

H-The Need for Specific Training for Using Authentic Materials Appropriately

Almost all the teachers who participate in the current study as data providers agree that using authentic materials or audio-visuals at an EFL setting require specific training. Only two teachers were against teacher training for using authentic materials as shown in table 04 below. Thus, another question was added here for those who express the necessity for teacher training using authentic materials in their language classes. Most teachers 28 selected the option yearly workshops as they think that this will not only help them use authentic materials but even how they can use them effectively and appropriately. Seven teachers highlighted the need for curricular adjustment. The findings here indicated that EFL teachers need assistance to be able to use authentic materials appropriately. Assistance could be in designing activities, sources of authentic materials (websites, TV programs, handouts...), this will be of great importance particularly for recently qualified lecturers.

Table 4 The importance of specific training for using authentic materials effectively

Possibilities	Teachers' number	percentages
Yes	33	94%
No	02	06%

The final question was an open-ended question in which the research participants were asked to express or add any comments in relation to the topic of the current investigation. All of them agree on the great importance of using authentic materials in enhancing Algerian EFL learners communicative competence and most teachers confirm that « New prospects » is far from achieving such a communicative objectives because both the content and the tasks presented in this textbook lack authenticity and are of poor representation due to many reasons that have been highlighted above in addition to the lack of innovation at the level of Algerian EFL textbook designers and writers as working with the same textbook that we have used when we were students at the level of high school is really something that makes us dissatisfied and afraid of what is happening in our educational system because when books remain unchanged for years and years , the learners will not look for answers as they can first copy and paste from the old books . This kills the sense of innovation and creativity in both the teachers and students. On the one hand, the teachers don't feel it necessary to stay updated. They have memorized every corner of the teaching program. On the other hand, learners won't be attracted to a textbook content unless a need analysis of the things they like to study is done. Because I strongly believe that suitable textbook is the one that can establish a link between the world inside and outside the mind of the learners. These findings are also in uniformity with those of Garton and Graves (2014) who contend that textbook gives structure to lessons and to a course; saves time; gives a sense of security; promotes autonomy as learners can use and refer to it outside the classroom And, this is what Algerian English textbooks in general and « New prospects » in particular fail to achieve at present.

4. Pedagogical Implications

It is essential for learners of English in a non-English setting to experience real communicative situations in which they learn how to express themselves, negotiate meaning, and develop their oral fluency and accuracy. Unfortunately, that is not the case for the Algerian setting, in which such skills and competencies are not given much concern. Although it is of a major importance to evaluate the prescribed textbook, researchers noticed that students are not given much practice to develop their oral proficiency. Furthermore, the very few activities that are found treat some skills in a very negligible way at the expense of others. Such activities do not call for interaction or communication between students. As a result, students are very passive and demotivated. After the analysis of the third year textbook, many deficiencies at the level of the authenticity of both texts content and tasks are found and unfortunately this was what the questionnaire results confirm. The alternative task below is one of the most fruitful and pedagogical implications that the researcher experienced at class with her third year high school pupils and the results were really satisfactory and fruitful as well.

First Unit: Exploring the Past (Ancient Civilization)

Saying it in writing (textbook activity):

Prepare a short historical account of the development of western civilization using the timeline on the next page. Before writing and giving your account to the class, list, select and organize the major events in a timeline of your own.

Start like this: Western civilization is one of the world's twenty-six civilizations...

Evaluation:

In the above activity, students are asked to write a historical account about a civilization and present it to the class. Although this activity is intended to be a speaking activity, it is entitled “say it in writing». The way this activity is structured makes it obvious that it involves more writing than speaking. Moreover, instructions maintain that it is an individual work. So, there will not be any interaction or negotiation of meaning between students. In addition to this, students would normally write the account and then « read » it out loud to the whole class. Where is speaking then? If the class is overcrowded, not all of the students will have a chance to present their work. Because of time constriction the teacher will not be able to provide all of them all the efficient feedback on their work. So, with the absence of feedback and assessment, how can students measure their progress? And whether or not they are on the right path? Usually, students find that history and civilization is a boring subject. So, it would be better if some entertaining activities are planned in order to motivate them. In some cases, it would be better if students are asked about their personal impressions.

An Alternative Task:

Assignment: using posters, students will present one of the ancient civilizations to their classmates.

Teacher’s instructions: students will form groups of seven members. Each member has a role to perform within that group (spokesman, writer, timekeeper, artist...). Each group is given randomly a package (texts, videos, images, coloring pen, markers...) containing all the necessary resources to complete the given task. When time is up, each group’s spokesman will come to the board with the final product (poster) and presents the work for the rest of the class. Feedback is given before the end of the session.

Guideline to follow:

When /where did this civilization emerge?

What was significant about it?

Were there any myths, beliefs, rituals? What were they?

How/ when did it decline?



In this activity, the teacher gathers his students in groups. It means that members of one group will cooperate with one another in order to complete the task. Since each group has to present his work, there would be much motivation and challenge between the different groups. Usually in such a collaborative task, each member of the group has a specific role to play. Students will discuss ideas and negotiate meaning which are two important aspects in learning. Thus, they are very active. Unlike the teacher, they do much of the classroom work and talk. They interact and influence one another in so many ways. Moreover, students are given authentic materials to work on. So, they will be very motivated and enthusiastic. In such a way, students are given the

opportunity to communicate and exchange views. They are given the chance to practice and use the language they are learning at all stages. As far as the teacher is concerned, he/she has to step out of the learning process and let the learning take care of itself, as it had been emphasized by Harmer (2001). Instead; the teacher can act as a timekeeper and makes sure that his learners are not using their mother tongue unless when it is highly necessary. After the presentation of posters, the teacher has to give his feedback to each of the groups. This way, students are able to measure their progress and work for more. Grouping students is an effective technique to push students to interact. However, teachers get quite frustrated since learners can get very noisy and might attempt to communicate through using their mother tongue.

5. Conclusion

Teaching students how to apply words in sentences correctly, presenting some phonetic rules, learning new vocabulary items and pronunciation can never be an objective of a whole English program because language teaching is something more complicated than fast dealing with tasks and activities to prepare the learners to overcome the problems they encounter in real life. As a whole there are, however, many inconsistencies between the learners' needs, and the text books content.

After having identified the teachers' perspectives of the use of New Prospects and their perception on using authentic materials to enhance EFL Algerian learners communicative competence, it is important to consider the way forward. Teachers need to perform similar tasks of evaluation of the textbook before using it in the classroom and find ways to combat with its defect. Teachers are the ones who will finally decide how to use the textbook. Therefore, they should use the textbook as their core material, make adaptations and supplement it with other authentic materials according to their learners' needs and their teaching situation. Once more, textbook designers should make retrospective evaluation and make the necessary changes to improve its content. Finally, regular revised editions of the textbook should be made in order to constantly update the content according to the learners' needs and the teaching context. So, a paradigm shift is an ultimate solution in such a case.

To put it in a nutshell, the elicited data confirmed that all Algerian EFL teachers, despite the differences in their teaching experiences and academic degrees are fully advocated the great importance of using authentic materials in language teaching and all of them agree that "New Prospects" doesn't offer classroom learners suitable opportunities to learn authentic language and they confirm that the prescribed textbook should be supported with the adaptation of authentic teaching materials such as audio-visual, posters, handouts, songs...etc as they express the urgent need either for a new textbook or a new edited version at least as soon as possible.

About the Authors

Badra Hamidi is a PhD student in Didactics and Applied Linguistics at University of Mostaganem, Algeria, and an instructor at high school. Her scholarly interests include authenticity in language teaching and learning, pragmatics and discourse analysis. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5176-9854>

Prof. Fawzia Bouhass Benaissi holds an MPhil in Arts Education and applied linguistics from Warwick University (Great Britain) and a Doctorate from Djilali Liabes University (Algeria). She is currently employed by the University of Sidi Bel Abess, Algeria as a professor in applied linguistics and psycholinguistics and a visiting teacher at two other Algerian universities.

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