



## Authentic materials in classroom: A case study on students of faculty of social sciences – Kuwait University

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### Abstract

This paper examines the influence of authentic materials on the motivation of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University. The target population is male and female students of two intermediate levels at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University. All students received both artificial and authentic materials. Data from two observation sheets as well as self-report questionnaires showed that on-task behavior and observed motivation increased when authentic materials were used, but self-reported motivation increased for all classes only in the last two to three weeks of the experiment. On the other hand, students believe that artificial materials are more enjoyable than authentic materials. The result of this experiment generally found that artificial materials are more interesting than authentic materials.

*Keywords:* Authentic Materials; EFL Kuwait Students; motivation; syllabi; artificial materials

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional syllabi or course books have been criticized because they are believed to be repetitive, inappropriate in many ways (Harmer 2001:6). However, authentic materials are also criticized for being hard for learners (Hyland 2003:94). Moreover, Ewy and Gmiro (2009: 10) criticize both course books and materials as being "not perfect".

There is not enough accurate research on the positive impact authentic materials leave on foreign language learners although many researchers strongly believe that such materials have positive effect on foreign language learners (Hyland 2003 & AlTameemy, Alrefae & Alalwi, 2020). Therefore, there should be more research on this issue in order to justify the claims that authentic materials increase motivation (Sarıçoban, 2005). According to many English teachers, authentic materials are believed to be effective in raising learners' motivation (Hyland 2003), so testing teachers' impressions might lead to better selection of teaching materials.

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It is not confirmed that authentic materials can help learners in the learning process, so that there is not enough rationale for or against the use of authentic materials. Many researchers think that authentic materials can motivate learners as they are essentially more interesting or stimulating than non-authentic materials or artificial materials. Supporters of this view include Little and Singleton (1991:124) – who call it “classic argument” – ; Freeman and Holden (1986:67); and Allright (1979:179); King (1990:70), and Bacon and Finnemann (1990:459-60); and Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989:26) – who believe that authentic materials help learners understand the culture of the target language, so that the learning process will be more pleasant, leading to motivation. On the other hand, there are some researchers, such as Williams (1983:187; 1984:26), and Morrison (1989:15), who believe that authentic materials are too difficult for foreign language learners to understand, so that students’ motivation will be decreased.

Among the researchers who conducted research on the effect of motivation on learners by adopting authentic materials are Gonzales (1990) and Kienbaum et al. (1986). The former focused on the effect of authentic materials on learners’ motivation, culture, attitude and language development. The sample students of the study were about 43 Spanish learners. No statistically substantial differences were detected regarding motivation when authentic materials were applied (Gonzales 1990:106). However, learners showed positive reaction for the use of authentic materials (Gonzales 1990:118). Kienbaum et al., on the other hand, focused on the communicative approach when conjoined with the use of authentic materials compared with the influence of the traditional second language instruction by applying traditional grammar methods (Kienbaum et al. 1986: 1). The researchers tested the linguistic progress as well as the attitudes of the sample students. Kienbaum et al., for example, suggested that both authentic materials and communicative methods can enhance the motivation of students in their process of learning a foreign language (Kienbaum et al. 1986: 7). The sample of Kienbaum’s et al. study was twenty-nine Americans taking French or German classes for about eight months. Data were collected from the answers to the questions related to students’ attitude to evaluate the “method used to teach the course” (Kienbaum et al. 1986: 21). Students' questionnaire focused on whether the course was stimulating or not; whether the materials used, such as texts and audios, were interesting or not. Other materials were totally ignored in the survey (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006). The results of both groups, control and experimental, showed no statistical differences. However, Kienbaum et al. said that authentic materials made the learners enthusiastic and motivated (Kienbaum et al. 1986: 25-26). Content validity of the attitude was questioned because only three items – out of twenty-three – tackled method or material. The qualities data collected over eight months back the conclusions, which recommend the use of authentic materials in classes of foreign language. However, the authentic materials were reported in their conclusions; while the communicative teaching approach applied along with the authentic texts was ignored. Based on the above experiments, the researcher believes that authentic materials have positive effect on learner’s motivation in class.

## **2. Definitions**

According to Crookes and Schmidt (1991: 498-502), motivation is student's interest and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; and persistence with the learning task, as directed by attentions' levels or actions for prolonged duration, as well as levels of gratitude and concentration.

Authentic materials, according to Nunan (1989:54), are "any material which has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching". Harmer (1983: 146) identifies authentic text as either spoken or written, and designed for language native speakers rather than foreign language learners. Little et. al (1989: 23) defines the authentic text as "a text that was created to fulfill some social purposes in the language community in which it was produced. Authentic texts can be used for low-level language learners’ influential filters (Mishan 2005: 28). In his criticism of the

authentic materials, Hyland (2003: 94) says that authentic text contains poor language structure, and "places high demands on teacher expertise and time" (Hyland 2003: 94). Hyland also believes that authentic materials entail hard language for learners to cope with. Accordingly, authentic materials might impede language learners' comprehension and sound response. Examples of the authentic materials include newspapers, literary and art publications, marketing brochures, business proposals, formal letters, and poems. However, the authentic materials used in this study include articles from an English language newspaper, editorials, and some ads in English mainly taken from local media such as Kuwait Times.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Participants*

The sample students are four classes of pre-intermediate and intermediate English 141 and 142 in classes at Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University. The first course includes 64 female learners, distributed on two classes; while the second course contains 70 male learners, distributed on two classes. The average age of both classes is 19.

#### *3.2 Collection of Data and Analysis*

The hypothesis of the study is based on the idea that authentic materials will enhance motivation, levels of on-task behavior, and self-reported motivation. Data were collected along the experiment which lasted for ten weeks, three hours a week, with 30 classes in total. All classes alternated using artificial material on one day, and authentic materials on the next day. Learners worked in pairs, each two students sharing one table. No control group was used because the researcher wanted to make the groups of the students as their own control groups, reasoning that variables in motivation among the same students taking a whole course with the same teacher, and practicing the same activities, but with different forms of material, might be attributed to the materials at hands at the same time with more assurance than would be the case with differences between two classes. The activities were very similar, which consisted of discussion nature in couples about given topics. The potential influence of topic and activity as intervening variables are tackled as follows:

To start with, some procedures had to take place: the researcher had to look for, adapt, and pilot the tools of data collection required to assess on-task behavior, class motivation, and self-reported motivation. Observation sheet number (1) aimed to quantify the on-task behavior of the learner. If (1) is chosen, the learners would be considered in on-task. If (2) is chosen the learners would be considered off-task (See Appendix 1). Observation sheet number (2) is designed to assess the overall class motivation produced by the material in use. It is displayed by the student interest level, enthusiasm, importunity along with the tasks and duties, focus, and pleasure (See Appendix 2). Items were labeled from one or low to five or high. Actually, observations were primarily conducted at the end of the experiment. Scores were collected on every class basis according to the number of the students present (approximately 31 students were reported present in each class). The final data collection tool was extremely organized, unidentified, self-report questionnaire that sought to evaluate levels of motivation made via materials applied (see appendix 3). This tool includes seven items with a scale of adjectives referring to motivation, such as "dull/exiting, repetitious/ varied, etc.). Every student was requested to complete the questionnaire after each activity. Items were scored from one to seven individually with total number of between 9 and 44 for every complete questionnaire. A class mean score was made after each class activity. Since the students are in the intermediate level and in order to avoid any misunderstanding, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic. Students were

interviewed to express in their own words their opinion, beliefs and attitudes towards the materials being used.

The tools of data collection were tested over several days during the pilot study. The purpose of such action is doubled: first, it aims to verify the validity of the tools and to avoid any hidden problems; second, it aims to test the reliability of the instruments. Some other tests were done later after the main study. In these studies, 30 teaching hours were observed; observation sheets 1 and 2 and 300 questionnaires, and 55 interview notes were completed. The researcher reported the inter-rater reliability for observation sheet (1) as  $r=0.90$  ( $p=0.02$ ). The interpretation of this coefficient is attributed to the relation between the independent on-task and off-task frequency counts. The counts were collected over one working week of the pilot study. Sheet (1) was completed by the teacher during the class in order not to miss any point if the researcher wanted to fill the sheet after the class. Actually, it was preferred if the class could be recorded then reviewed later, but due to social barriers, especially in female classes, this idea was cancelled. However, the intra-rater reliability was evaluated over three days and computed at  $r=0.96$  ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $n=33$ ). This coefficient is related to the link between on-task counts collected from the observation sheets. The researcher believes that such correlations are a reference to the link between high level of both inter-rater and intra-rater reliability.

On the other hand, it was reported that the inter-rater reliability for observation sheet (2) was  $r=0.70$  ( $p=0.008$ ). The figures of equivalence are attributed to the link between the scores of non-participant observer and the teacher who, in turn, filled in duplicate sheets on the one-week pilot study. Moreover, a check related to split-half reliability was completed to verify the internal consistency of the observation sheet, in correspondence with items number 1, 2, 3, and 7 against items 4, 5, 6 and 8 over the period. The full instrument reliability was  $r=0.90$  ( $p=0.003$ ) applying the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula (Hatch and Farhady 1982:246), proposing that a high level of both inter-observer and internal reliability took place. The students' questionnaire internal reliability was assessed during the main study by both item analysis and split-half reliability check. The first tool was implemented to verify the internal consistency of the questionnaire; these items were properly understood by the students. The correlations were all reported based upon the 300 questionnaires completed. Significance levels were  $p<0.001$  for relations in all items, referencing sufficient student understanding of meaning of all items. The split-half reliability check coordinated with scores on items 1, 2, and 4 against items 5, 6, and 7. The reliability of the full tool was  $r=0.90$  ( $p<0.001$ ,  $n=300$ ) applying the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula, proposing a high level of reliability.

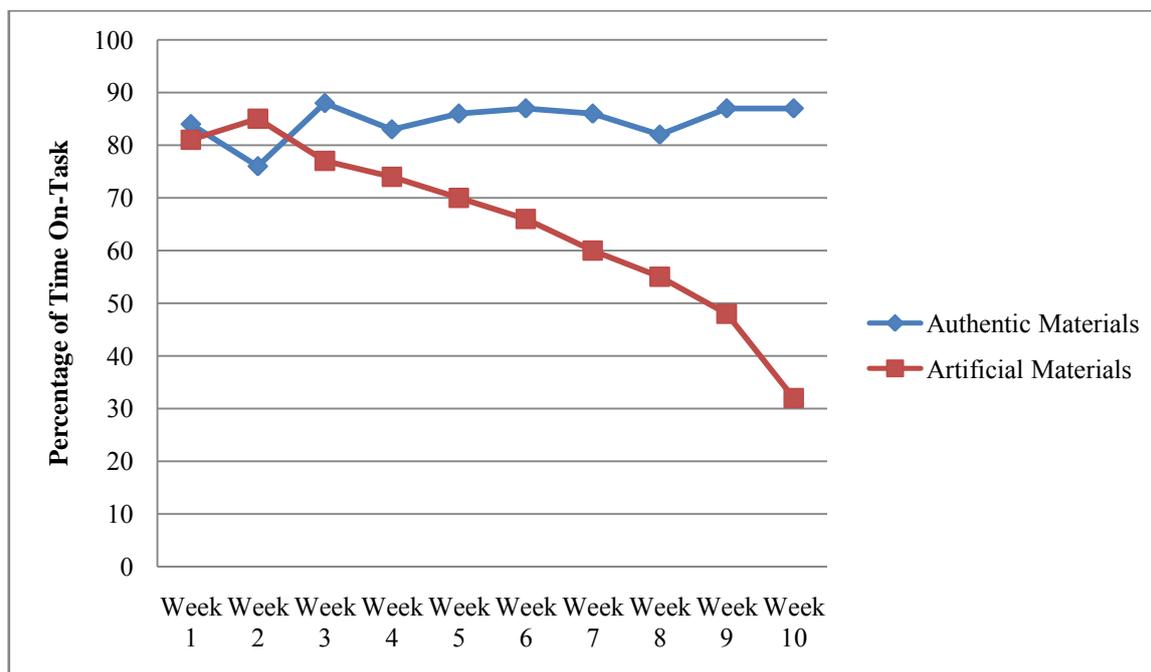
In order to investigate whether any material applied-authentic or artificial – leaves influence on motivation, the researcher collected data from the two observation sheets (1) and (2) as well as the students' questionnaires. Then, the researcher analyzed all the data separately by frequent-measures multivariate analysis of divergence.

#### **4. Findings**

In general, students spent different times on the on-tasks and off-tasks: about 75 percent of students' time was spent on artificial materials, and 85 percent of their total time was spent on authentic materials. This means that authentic materials increased students' on-task behavior. However, the difference in the mean percentage was at  $p<0.001$  – which means the chance of a difference is less than one in a thousand.

Figure (1) displays the time influence – the variability by type of material turns out to be marked only in the middle of the second week of the study. It is more likely that the curve of Figure (1) shows the idea that students took time to cope with the unknown or new practice of the authentic materials. Moreover, the graph line shows that by the passage of time the on-task behavior declined in the days

when artificial materials were applied, and augmented in the days when authentic materials were applied.

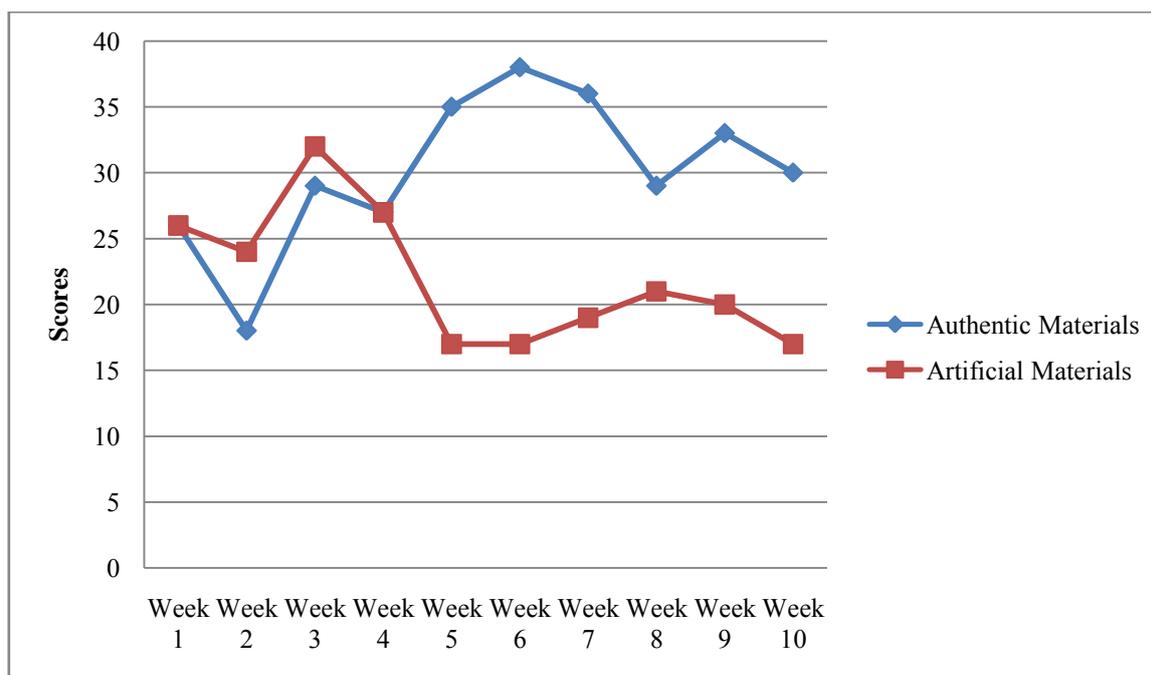


**Figure 1.** On-task Behavior for All Students

## 5. Class Motivation

According to the findings, using authentic materials substantially increased overall class motivation. Mean scores for both classes were 20 out of 40 when using artificial materials and 26 when using authentic materials. This result clearly shows that using authentic materials augmented overall class motivation. The variable in mean total scores was quite immense at  $p < 0.001$ .

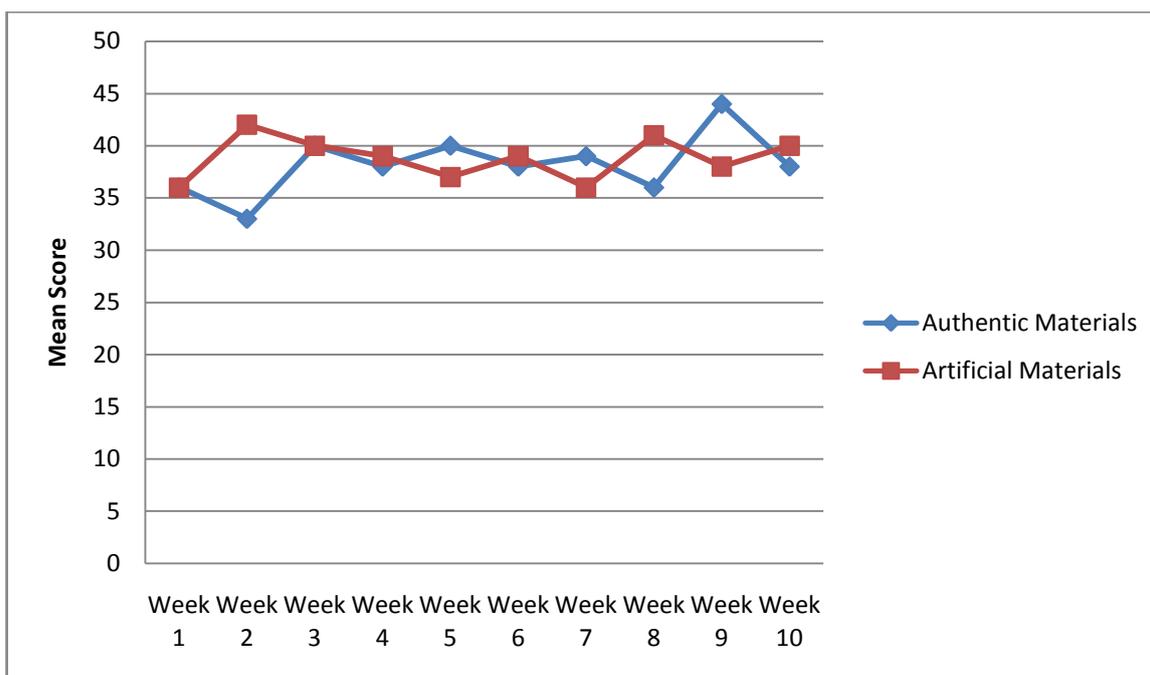
The difference in type of material is displayed in Figure (2). It has been noticed that there is conspicuous time effect – as this difference became obvious from the middle of the second week of the experiment. It is more likely that authentic materials motivated the class more than the artificial materials did. This motivation became prevalent only in the middle of the second week of the study because students needed some time to adjust themselves with the new type of materials.



**Figure 2.** Overall Class Motivation Scores for all students

## 6. Students' Motivation

According to questionnaire's results in the first three weeks of the study, no significant difference was found in self-reported learner motivation when students used authentic materials. A little difference in mean scores between authentic and artificial materials was reported. The mean scores for both classes were 35 of 45 when using authentic materials, and 36 when using artificial material. From these figures, it is clear that there was no significant difference as  $p = 0.308$ ,  $n = 300$ . Data in Figure (3) show the daily questionnaires completed by every class. In addition, the figure shows little difference by type of material. After extra deep study of Figure (3), it has become clear that a time influence is present for student questionnaires as is the case in on-task behavior and levels of observed motivation. In general, the students preferred artificial material in the first two weeks and the authentic material in the following weeks. The logical interpretation of this preference is that students were used to artificial material on one hand, and afraid of using the new material on the other hand. Therefore, the researcher statistically analyzed questionnaire scores, using the t-test, starting from the middle of the second week of the study. Generally speaking, the mean scores were 37.4 when artificial materials were used, and 39.8 when authentic materials were used. With simple mathematical operation, the difference in mean scores by type of material is 2.4, which is significant at  $p=0.06$  ( $n = 300$ ); therefore, the possibility of chance occurrence is less than one in twenty-five. This probability is higher than the  $p<0.05$  earlier set for the study. This shows that levels of self-reported motivation were recorded when students used authentic materials starting from the middle of the second week of the study.



**Figure 3.** Students' Questionnaires Mean Scores for All Students

## 7. After-Class Interviews

For the entire study period that lasted for ten weeks, the researcher interviewed two students after each class to cover all the students present in both classes, with 94 interviews. The questions of the interview focused on students' own opinion about the materials being used in the class earlier. The problem with students' responses was that their level was intermediate, so that they could not express themselves appropriately. Accordingly, students' responses varied dramatically. Next are samples of some responses (with their mistakes included) after using artificial materials ordered chronologically:

the material was not new  
 similar to materials we have before  
 material not allow me speak  
 language is easy (not difficult)  
 it make me think more in (deeply)  
 interesting more than other one  
 not difficult ..... not very good  
 I want more words  
 it is funny  
 not practical  
 too much for me  
 topic good  
 not very good  
 sometime boring

The following are samples of chronologically ordered students' responses and their opinions about using authentic materials (with their mistakes included):

good idea is this material  
many materials more boring than another  
difficult to do  
I do not understand the words of the ad, but the picture helped me  
cannot talk about (discuss)  
we know more about life and society  
interesting but difficult words  
more difficult from the another one, it is useful. I like it  
information is real  
I love it. I want more from it  
interesting because it is different  
not very interesting because it is difficult  
I like it  
it is very difficult  
boring because I do not understand  
I do not like the ad  
interesting but difficult because words are difficult  
useful but it give me good information

## **8. Discussion & Conclusions**

At the end of the experiment, the researcher recommends that teachers of English at the Faculty of Social Sciences need to use authentic materials in their classes in addition to the already existing course books. This is because students need to raise their levels of on-task behavior, focus, and engagement in the target activity more than artificial materials. It is expected that authentic materials can be used for both pre-intermediate (141 Course) and intermediate (142 Course) levels. However, such material might minimize the levels of student interest produced by the materials applied. It is essential that the chosen materials motivate students.

The result of this experiment generally found that artificial materials are more interesting than authentic materials. Paradoxically, this result is in sharp contrast to the assertions mentioned earlier, to the effect that authentic materials are more interesting than artificial materials. Such results primarily refer to the opposite. Motivation was at higher levels when using authentic materials not because they were more interesting.

Moreover, these findings show that interest and levels of concentration are separate components of motivation. Therefore, it was impossible to decide whether authentic materials motivated students or not. Earlier researchers working on authentic materials could not distinguish between separate components of classroom motivation. The researcher suggests that these two components can be considered as separate entities of motivation; may lead to a clearer understanding of the meaning of "motivation", and provide a more accurate view of the various materials on learner behavior.

It is difficult to generalize the results because of the small scale of the study and the level of the students. One can say that the topic itself and to some extent the activities adopted leave an impact on the topic. The researcher was incapable to both control their impacts and inconsistently segregate and enumerate their intrinsic motivation level. It has been noticed that class interest levels in either the

topic or the activity had no substantial influence on levels of motivation. However, after the middle of the second week of the experiment higher levels of overall class motivation and on-task behavior were elevated by the use of the authentic materials. If we consider that the changes in motivation levels of the topic are substantial, this will not most likely be the actual case. Indeed, they most probably remain just a minor variable.

The researcher believes that the sample students of the study represent Faculty of Social Sciences at large. In addition, the findings that classes showed no significant difference in the on-task behavior, observed motivation, or scores on the post-class questionnaires, give credit to speculations that influence is probable in other classes. It is worth mentioning that in spite of the fact that classes were not exactly the same in the whole study – as some students missed classes – the researcher thinks that the major variable in the experiment is the type of materials being used. Therefore, it has become more probable to credit differences in motivation more indubitably to this issue.

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## Appendix 1

### Observation sheet (1) On-task behavior (adapted from Hopkins 1985:95)

Observer ..... Dates: D.....M.....Y.....

Teacher ..... Time of Class .....

Number of students present ..... Level of Class .....

Type of materials (circle one): artificial / authentic

Description of materials .....

Activity .....

#### Instructions

1. These observations aim at evaluating learner motivation levels spawned by the adopted materials.
2. You are not part of the lesson. Your position is inconspicuous.
3. Your observation should begin once students work together whether in groups or pairs for three minutes.
4. Observation should be conducted individually, successively, and clockwise around the class. Call students by name.
5. In a very short time, between five to seven seconds, write down the category that describes students' behavior at the moment before passing to the following student.
6. Numbers should be sequenced in the data sheet.
7. Every student should be observed ten times before you go to Observation Sheet (2).

Student No.	Scan Number									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										

12										
13										
14										
15										
16										
17										
18										
19										
20										
21										
22										
23										
24										

Categories: 1 = student on-task; 2 student off-task

"on-task": pedagogically involved in the task

"off-task": no concentration at all in the task

**Appendix (2)**

**Observation Sheet (2): Overall class motivation (adapted from Nunan 1989:110)**

Observer ..... Dates: D..... M..... Y.....

Teacher ..... Time of Class .....

Number of students present ..... Level of Class .....

Type of materials (circle one): artificial / authentic

Description of materials .....

Activity .....

*Observation Focus:* Motivation levels of the students as produced by the teaching materials at hand.

*Instructions*

1. This sheet is designed to observe the class collectively, not individually.
2. This sheet should be fulfilled as the activity is about to be completed.
3. Circle ONE number for each statement below.
4. You can add comments at the end if you like.

1. Mark the degree of students' engagement in the learning task.  
not very engaged 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      very engaged
2. Mark the amount of students' focus in the learning task.  
low 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      high
3. The students love the activity.  
not really 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      very much
4. The level of students' extra attention to the learning task.  
not really 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      very much
5. Identify the level of students' activity (exertion/strength of application).  
low 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      high
6. The students believe that the teaching materials are motivating.  
not really 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      very much
7. The materials at hand are exigent for the students.  
not really 1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      very much
8. The materials in use are suitable for the students.  
not really                      1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      very much

Comments: .....

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### Appendix 3

#### Leaner questionnaire (adapted from Gliksman et al. (1982: 646)

Teaching materials .....

There is no need to write down your name in this sheet. Once you complete it, give it back to the teacher.

This questionnaire is designed to evaluate the value of the above teaching materials as they were in use in today's class ONLY. The questionnaire neither evaluates your work nor your teacher's performance in the class.

Do not panic. This is not a test, so there is no need to worry. There are no right or wrong answers; we seek your own ideas, beliefs, and impressions.

You are kindly requested to put a check "√" on each scale to express how you regard each concept.

Instructions to use the scales:

- If the word at one end of the scale very strongly expresses your ideas, beliefs, and impressions about the concept, you would place your checkmark as shown below:

boring  : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ interesting  
boring \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : OR : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ :  interesting

- If the word at one end of the scale express somewhat your ideas, beliefs, and impressions about the concept (but not strongly), you would place your checkmark as follows:

boring \_\_\_\_\_ :  : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ interesting  
boring \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ : OR : \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_ :  : \_\_\_\_\_ interesting

- If the word at one end of the scale only slightly expresses your ideas, beliefs, and impressions about the concept, you would place your checkmark as follows:

boring \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ :  \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ interesting  
boring \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ :  OR  \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ interesting

Mark ONE "" on each line:

boring \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ interesting  
dull \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ exciting  
repetitious \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ varied  
appealing \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ unappealing  
meaningful \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ meaningless  
pleasing \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ displeasing  
enjoyable \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_ not enjoyable

### **AUTHOR BIODATA**

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