

# Investigating the Propensity of Non-English Major Students Regarding Authenticity

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to find out the students' needs for English learning with a focus on authenticity. Among non-English-major students, they are not all interested in learning English. This is because in many cases, English is compulsory for graduation. Prior to the 1991 amendment of the Standards for the Establishment of Universities by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 1995), foreign languages were compulsory. Since the establishment of the standards, Japanese universities are not obliged to offer English as a foreign language subject, but many of them continue to make English a requirement. Therefore, some students do not enjoy learning or are not willing to improve their English competence; instead, they attend lessons merely to get the credit required to graduate. Therefore, finding out students' interests is necessary to make compulsory English lessons as effective as possible. One way is to introduce authentic materials in English classes. A questionnaire related to authenticity was administered to investigate non-English-major students' needs. The results of this study might be pedagogically useful for teachers who are teaching non-English-major students in EFL educational settings.

## Literature Review

### *Motivation and Authenticity for Foreign Language Learning*

Motivation is one of the critical factors in foreign language learning, and is an important factor in deciding the success of students' achievement in their language goals. Kent (2021) stated that students' motivation can be very low when they need to study foreign language as a compulsory course. Their attitude toward language learning is one of the key factors to the success of learning a language; therefore, it is necessary for teachers to stimulate students' positive attitudes by incorporating activities and resources that match students' needs (Kent, 2021).

As a teacher, it is necessary to realize what learners' motivations are based upon and to continuously discern how to sustain their motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2002) stated that individual motivation arises intrinsically, and to maintain motivation, it needs to be controlled by individuals themselves, not by others. Thus, it is critical for instructors to make lessons that act upon and enhance students' intrinsic motivation so they can be independent learners. As one method to enhance learners' intrinsic motivation in English lessons, authenticity should be considered.

There are actually numerous definitions of authenticity that have arisen over time within the literature (Gilmore, 2007). Richards defined authentic materials as teaching resources, including texts, photographs, videos, and others, which are not particularly made for educational purposes, and he further defined non-authentic materials as teaching materials that are particularly made for instruction such as textbooks (2001). In addition, Tomlinson (2011) defined authentic materials as texts that are not used for the purpose of language-teaching. Examples of authentic texts include newspaper articles, novels, songs, interviews, and instructions.

Many researchers have also examined the relationship between authenticity and motivation. The advantages of authentic materials are due to their positive influence on learners' motivation (Phillips & Shettlesworth, 1978; Clarke, 1989; Peacock, 1997). According to proponents, authentic materials are more interesting than created materials to learners and motivate them intrinsically. When learners feel

obligated to learn something that they are not willing to, they lose motivation. Thus, the chief principle is to understand learners' goals and topics in which they are interested to try to incorporate these into a curriculum because learners are only motivated when they view the teaching material as worthwhile to learn (Dornyei, 2001). Peacock (1997) investigated the relationship between authentic materials and learners' motivation in the classroom. In his study, it was found that learners' motivation in the classroom increased significantly when using authentic materials. Peacock (1997) also found that the use of authentic materials significantly increased learners' focus on tasks, motivation, concentration, and active participation in the classroom compared to non-authentic materials. Additionally, Peacock (1997) argued that even for low-level learners, authentic materials can be more motivating than inauthentic materials.

While there are benefits to authentic materials, Richards (2001) stated that there are also some negative points to using authentic materials. These points include difficulty levels of the language, or unneeded words contained in authentic materials. These unnecessary words could obstruct teaching or learning. Additionally, as authentic materials contain real-world language usage, they often contain more advanced language than that at the learners' levels. Additionally, some non-authentic materials contain real-world elements that can motivate and interest learners just like authentic materials. Moreover, textbooks are better at covering necessary teaching topics according to a syllabus, and it may be a burden for teachers if they need to find appropriate authentic materials and create relevant activities or tasks. Therefore, in many cases, teachers are more likely to use a combination of authentic and non-authentic materials (Richards, 2001). From this, it can be said that the use of authentic materials depends on how much discretion is given to the teachers. In order to lead the teaching, teachers should be involved in designing curriculum and syllabus so that those are based on the needs of students (Ahmad & Shah, 2022). Gilmore (2007) stated that authentic materials need to fit students' educational needs, and texts can be adapted to students at different proficiency levels if tasks are varied. Therefore, as instructors, it is important to determine students' needs so authentic materials are appropriate for their learning levels.

### ***Research questions***

This study includes a research question related to students' preferences in authentic material: Are non-English-major students who take compulsory English courses interested in the incorporation of authentic topics into their English lessons? If so, what types of authentic materials do these students prefer?

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

The participants in this study were 167 first-year students who took a compulsory English course at a women's university in Tokyo, Japan. Students took a placement test before the semester began, and were placed into three different proficiency levels. The aim of the course was to learn general English as a liberal arts subject. There were around 30 students in each class, and classes were held once a week for both the spring and fall semesters. Generally, classes were conducted face-to-face, but during the height of COVID-19, classes were conducted on-demand. Since each English teacher wrote their own syllabus, some discretion was allowed in the content of each course. Students who participated in this study were from the intermediate class. All students belonged to one of four departments which were Sports Science (hereafter Department 1), Sports and Health Science (hereafter Department 2), Dance (hereafter Department 3), and Movement Education for Children (hereafter Department 4). Most students were polite and energetic. Also, many were sociable and preferred pair and group work. The motivation of students was related to their majors of sports, health, dance, music, and children's education.

### Instruments

A questionnaire was used to survey the students. In the questionnaire, students answered a yes/no question regarding authentic topics and a selective question regarding authentic materials. In a selective question, students were asked to choose two of their most preferred authentic material types, with the choices including News/Articles, Blogs, Audios, Videos, Songs, and Others. Additionally, a comment section was provided to allow for more detailed information on students' views toward authentic topics and materials.

### Procedure

The questionnaire was prepared with Google Forms, and students individually responded to the questionnaire online. Prior to the survey, the purpose of the study was explained to all participants, and voluntary participation in the survey with strict protection of personal information was assured. Therefore, only the answers of students who agreed to participate in the survey were included. For the questionnaire, 134 students responded (the response rate was 80.2%). Additionally, 109 students responded to a selective question (the response rate was 65.3%). Students' answers as well as their student number were collected through Google Forms, and all answers were exported as a Microsoft Excel file for the analysis.

### Results

In total, 134 students answered the questions about their interest in authentic topics. Of these 134 students, who answered whether they prefer authentic materials related to their field of study, 80% answered *Yes*, while 20% answered *No*, indicated in Table 1. In addition to the yes/no question, students were asked about their preferred form of authentic materials, which you can see in Table 2. Finally, Table 3 highlights the comments given by students supporting their answers.

Table 1. Preferences for authentic topics in English lessons

Department	Number	Students who answered <i>Yes</i> (%)	Students who answered <i>No</i> (%)
1	32	24 (75.00%)	8 (25.00%)
2	53	40 (75.47%)	13 (24.53%)
3	42	38 (90.48%)	4 (9.52%)
4	7	5 (71.43%)	2 (28.57%)
Total	134	107 (80%)	27 (20%)

Table 2 shows the results of a selective question regarding authentic materials from the questionnaire. In total, 109 students answered the questions about their preferences regarding authentic materials. In Table 2, the preferences regarding authentic materials are shown. Amongst the six alternatives, 31 students selected news/articles, 11 students selected blogs, 29 students selected audio, 64 students selected videos, 80 students selected songs, and three students selected others. As a result, the most selected combination was videos + songs, followed by news/articles + videos, and audios + songs, respectively.

Table 2. Preferences for authentic materials

Authentic Materials	Number
News/Articles + Blogs	4
News/Articles+ Audio	7
News/Articles+ Video	3
News/Articles+ Songs	17
Blogs + Video	2
Blogs + Songs	5
Audio + Video	10
Audio + Songs	12
Video + Songs	46
Video + Others	3
Total	109

Table 3 shows the additional comments from students regarding authentic topics and materials.

Table 3. Additional comments from students

Answer Types	Comments
Students who answered “Yes”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-It is more interesting to learn my major-related topics in English.</li> <li>-It’s more useful.</li> <li>-I want to learn more vocabulary or expressions in my major in English.</li> <li>-I have more motivation if the topic is related to my major.</li> <li>-I enjoy English more if the topic is related to my interests such as topics in my major.</li> <li>-I want to deepen my knowledge in my major.</li> <li>-I want to communicate or express in English about the topics in my major.</li> <li>-I have more intention to learn if the topic is related to my major fields.</li> <li>-I can push myself more if it is related to my major.</li> </ul>
Students who answered “No”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-I want to extend my knowledge other than my major.</li> <li>-I’m interested in world news or world issues.</li> <li>-I’m interested in movies and songs.</li> <li>-I’m interested in English literature.</li> <li>-I’m interested in various topics.</li> <li>-I’m interested in gossip or comedy.</li> <li>-I’m interested in the real conversation in drama.</li> </ul>

## Discussion

According to Table 1, it was found that the majority of students (80%) are interested in incorporating authentic subjects in their English lessons. This result showed that students are interested in real-life learning and practical English. In addition, students' majors are what they are mostly interested in, and students tend to have higher intrinsic motivation in the topics they are majoring in. If students' intrinsically motivated topics are incorporated in their English lessons, this may increase the students' intrinsic motivation towards English learning as well. This result is understandable by looking into the results in Table 2, which showed that students are interested in authentic materials such as songs, audio, and videos. These materials, especially songs, may have a stronger relationship to dance, so dance students would naturally be interested if they could incorporate songs into their English lessons. According to Table 2, songs and videos were preferred by students as authentic materials. This implies that students are interested in lessons that stimulate auditory and visual senses. This may be because students who participated in this study belong to the faculty of physical education. Therefore, they may be able to learn more effectively through physical stimulation. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, all lessons were conducted online. Through these online lessons, authentic materials were used, specifically videos and blogs. Students watched 7 videos and read 5 blogs about goal setting, the benefits of exercising and sports, healthy lifestyles, healthy foods, the benefits of dancing, and music. Videos and blogs were chosen by the teacher and sent to students through Google forms. Students could watch the videos or read the blogs as many times as they wanted to before answering a variety of vocabulary and comprehension questions. The purpose of these assignments was for students to learn about realistic vocabulary and expressions, and also to understand the content. While these authentic materials were used in online-only lessons, in the future, I plan to incorporate authentic materials, such as songs, audio, and video in face-to-face classes as well, in order to satisfy students' desire to use these resources in their learning.

In compulsory courses, it is important to consider students' needs and interests, and to try to incorporate those into the lessons to maximize their learning experience effectively and enjoyably. In her study, Imamura (2020) found that introducing songs into English lessons lowered students' anxiety toward learning and increased students' motivation. Students may need a hook to be more interested in learning English. Incorporating authentic topics from students' major can shift the purpose of English lessons from "learning English" to "utilizing English as a means of learning".

A limitation of this study was that students' competency levels were not considered. Therefore, for future research, how the use of authentic materials affects the students' learning should be investigated.

## Conclusion

In this study, the results showed that 80% of non-English course students preferred to incorporate authentic topics into English lessons. Among authentic materials, visual and aural materials such as videos and songs were most preferred. The study's results can be used to guide English lessons. Future research can utilize an experimental research design to examine the influence on student motivation and competence after using authentic materials in English lessons.

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**Appendix 1. Survey questions**

1.	以下のうち、授業に関心があるのはどちらですか。 (自分の専攻に関連した内容、自分の専攻とは関連がない内容)
2.	学んでみたい具体的な内容について記入してください。
3.	以下のうち、授業で取り上げて欲しいものを2つ選んでください。 (英語のニュース・記事、英語のブログ、英語のオーディオ、英語の動画、洋楽の歌詞、その他)
4.	その他を選んだ場合は、授業で取り上げて欲しいものを記入してください。