THE BENEFITS OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN THE ESP CLASSROOM. CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *Everyday classroom activity has revealed problems students have in fields like efficient reading, understanding the overall meaning of the text not just the words, or understanding native speakers' language, communicating in a foreign language. At present, it seems to be crucial that students be exposed to authentic learning situations which have a connection to the real world in which they can have the opportunity to practice language using authentic materials. Starting from the assumption that authentic materials and media can help students develop and enhance the connection between the language classroom and the outside world, the goal of this paper is to offer a new perspective on how language teaching can be improved through the use of authentic materials in ESP classes. In this respect, we conducted a study in order to assess the impact that the use of authentic materials in teaching ESP classes has on the developing of students' communicative competences.*

Key terms*: ESP classroom, communication, competence, language teaching.*

Introduction

The role of foreign languages in modern society has made educators devise new ways of teaching them so that their results match the learners' needs and expectations. Acquiring a foreign language implies developing several skills in the target language which sometimes can be a challenge for pupils, especially when they are exposed to real-life situations of communication. Therefore, using authentic materials in the class can be a useful tool to motivate pupils and make them feel comfortable using the foreign language. In this sense, Nuttall (1996: 172) argues that "authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people".

Norman Fairclough suggests that "language is part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are linguistic phenomena" (2001:19). Language as a social experience provides individuals with information, emotions and interactions to solve the everyday problems. Language is considered a social phenomenon because all the individuals use it to construct interpersonal relations. Using authentic materials represents a relatively easy and convenient way to improve not only pupils' communicative competences, but also their confidence in real life situations. Rogers and Medley contend that if students are expected to function effectively in a foreign language, they should be given the opportunity to develop and internalize the necessary strategies which enable them to deal with real language outside the classroom. Therefore, teachers should "bring authentic materials into the classroom and make them consistently accessible to the students" (1988: 475).

The present paper is attempting to offer a new perspective on how language teaching can be improved through the use of authentic materials in English classes. Everyday classroom activity has revealed problems students have in fields like efficient reading, understanding the overall meaning of the text not just the words, or understanding native speakers' language, communicating in a foreign language. At present, it seems to be crucial that students be exposed to authentic learning situations which have a connection to the real world, in which they can have the opportunity to practice language using authentic materials.

Widdowson (1990: 162) believes that "exposing learners to authentic materials is indispensable because of the rich language input they provide." Pupils are generally

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fascinated by the use of authentic materials, especially if these materials refer to topics they are interested in, such as cinema, fashion, music, food offering them the opportunity to further inform and use English in their day-to-day activities and enabling them to communicate their opinions, feelings and thoughts with confidence whether inside or outside the classroom.

The approach presented in this paper is that teaching English through authentic materials can help students to bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and their capacity to participate in real-life communication situations as they "bring pupils closer to the target language culture and this will result in making the teaching-learning process more enjoyable and useful and thus, motivating" (Peacock, 1997: 144).

Introducing authentic materials in teaching English can be beneficial for students as these materials prepare them for real life communication. Authentic materials 'expose' students to real language as it is used in real life situations by native speakers. The ability to handle real language outside the classroom is also highlighted by Rogers and Medley (1988: 467) who point out that teachers should help students to see and hear the target language "being used as the primary medium of communication among native speakers - as language with a purpose."

The case study conducted within this paper describes the authors' investigation carried out for assessing the effect that the use of authentic materials in teaching EFL classes has on developing students' communicative competences, which involves the ability to use the target language either in classroom environment or in real life communication situations.

Reasons for Using Authentic Materials

There are many reasons for using authentic materials in EFL classrooms as they are effective in various ways (Jacobson et al., 2003). First of all, students have the opportunity to read and extract information from authentic texts which means that they read the real language that the native speakers use in their interactions and the language learners usually prefer to be native speaker like in terms of pronunciation, idioms use or accent.

There is a general consensus among researchers in language teaching that "the use of authentic materials in the classroom is beneficial to the learning process" (Guariento and Morley, 2001: 347). They are affective as they are genuine in time, location and people. In other words, they inform about current events in the real world and thus, it is easy for students to relate the events to their own experience, to what they know, and to what is familiar to them. Authentic materials are considered the most suitable means of showing the real use of English for communication rather than materials which were designed especially for teaching purposes. As a consequence, they represent good opportunities of bridging the classroom to the outside world.

The significance of using authentic materials is generally acknowledged as they are "a way of maintaining or increasing students' motivation for learning as they give the learner the feeling that they are in touch with a living entity and the target language as it is used in the community which speaks it" (Guariento and Morley, 2001: 347). Most researchers also share the opinion that "learners should be exposed to authentic text so that they may have direct contact with input data which reflects genuine communication in the target language" (Breen, 1985: 63). Another reason for using authentic materials is that they represent an unlimited source for planning and organizing teaching and learning activities. Authentic materials are extremely helpful in enhancing pupils' experience in learning new vocabulary in order to use them in daily conversation, and making them better understood in real world communication. "Mastering even a small degree of comprehension of authentic texts gives students the confidence in dealing with reading for real purposes" (Richard, 2004).

Of the many reasons for using authentic materials, the most common one concerns the affective dimension of English language teaching. Students find authentic materials

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interesting and culturally enlightening. Listening to real conversations on the radio or watching TV programs are significant types of authentic materials that enhance learners' awareness over the difference between real and contrived language. Students can hear a conversation in a supermarket between a shop-assistant and a customer and learn from the vocabulary used by each person in the interaction. Students usually learn very formal ways of speaking in their textbooks, and this is not the reality in everyday situations. Therefore, using role-play activities can help students practice the conversations they watch and hear from TV or radio.

Authentic materials and media can help students to develop and enhance the connection between the language classroom and the outside world. According to Gebhard (1996), authentic materials are a way to "contextualize" language learning. He thinks that when lessons are focused on comprehension of a restaurant menu or a newspaper article, students tend to concentrate more upon the content and meaning of the text rather than upon the language itself. This represents for students an invaluable source of language input and cultural elements specific to the community of the target language.

Little et al., (1989: 26) hold the same position that learners who use authentic materials become motivated as the materials bring them close to culture of the target language. If students want to visit a foreign country and perform appropriately in the foreign community, they have to get familiar with the authentic materials.

Berardo (2006: 64) states that "authentic material can be used to promote motivation". Extracting real information from real texts can be exciting and motivating for students as these materials reflect the changes in language use, which do not occur in the textbooks. This gives the learners "the proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people" (Nuttall, 1996: 172), and not only studied in the classroom.

Brosnan (1984: 2-3, cited in Nunan (2005: 51) offers the following justification for the use of these real-world resources:

- Language is natural. By simplifying language or altering it for teaching purposes (limiting structures, controlling vocabulary, etc.) we may risk making the reading task more difficult.
- Authentic material offers students the chance to deal with a small amount of print which, at the same time, contains complete, meaningful messages.
- Authentic printed material provides students with the opportunity to make use of non-linguistic clues (layout, pictures, colors, symbols, the physical setting in which it occurs) to help them discover the meaning more easily.
- Adults need to be able to see the immediate relevance of what they do in the classroom, and to what they need to do outside it.

The Impact of Authentic Materials on Motivation

Research has shown that authentic materials represent a motivating force for learners (Peacock, 1997; Berardo, 2006). Motivation is defined as "an interest and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for an extended duration; and level of concentration and enjoyment" (Peacock, 1997: 145).

Authentic materials facilitate "exposure to real language" (Guarineto and Morley, 2001) and represent significant tools for students to participate in interesting activities in the classroom. When students feel motivated, their anxiety decreases and their involvement in class activities increases considerably. Furthermore, students' achievement in understanding authentic input leads to the increase of confidence and autonomy as readers. Some attribute the motivating nature of authentic materials to the fact that "they can be selected to meet

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students' needs, unlike textbooks which cater to an international audience" (Gilmore, 2004: 46).

Little et al. (1989: .26) believe that learners who use authentic materials become motivated because these materials bring them close to the culture of the target language. There is disagreement, however. Some researchers in this domain consider that motivation and attitude can be negatively influenced by the use of authentic materials. Bacon and Finneman (1990) investigated the relationship between authentic aural and written input and found that their subjects reported somewhat negative reactions concerning the use of authentic materials in the language classrooms. Peacock (1997: 148) also investigated the impact of authentic materials on students' motivation and the results were mixed. On the one hand, he did find evidence in support of that position, on the other hand, the results of the questionnaire revealed that "overall, learners found authentic materials to be significantly less interesting than artificial" (Peacock, 1997: 151).

Research has demonstrated that students' motivation increases when they use authentic materials, especially when authentic texts are practiced for reading with advanced English as a foreign language (Berardo, 2006). They find authentic materials engaging and more up-to-date than textbooks. When students feel motivated, their anxiety reduces and confidence increases while involved in class activities.

In addition, authentic material content includes interesting topics which are very attractive for students, such as popular cultural topics which can motivate students and raise their cultural awareness. Newspaper and magazine articles often refer to themes like Thanksgiving, Halloween, Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day and these topics can raise students' interest and bring dynamic conversations into the classroom or outside it. For example, working in groups to design specific invitations for Valentine's Day, describing the fashion trends for next season, or listening to a song are effective ways to motivate students and make them interact successfully. Authentic materials such as pictures, photographs, videos, or cartoons can be used efficiently to make students engage in discussions about foreign cultures. Such materials have a great role in fulfilling students' psychological and social needs and interests. They also enhance students' attitude toward foreign cultures and civilizations.

Authentic materials have a high value due to their relevance to "the real-world goals" (Richard, 2004), keeping learners informed about what is happening in the world they live in. Therefore, they have an intrinsic educational value (Martinez, 2002). Richard (2004: 105) argues that authentic materials can help learners "achieve the aims of enriching students' experiences in the learning and the use of English, sensitizing them to use English in the real world, and helping them to generate a learning strategy for learning not only English but also other subjects."

Nuttal (1996: 172) states that authentic materials are "motivating because they are proof that language is used for real life purposes by real people" and Kilickaya (2004) sustains the same opinion considering that the use of authentic texts is one way for increasing students' motivation for learning since they give the learner the feeling that they are learning "the real language – the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it" (McNeil, 1994: 130).

Furthermore, the variety of text types and language styles of authentic materials also affects learners' motivation positively. It is difficult to find this variety in conventional teaching materials, which include only the proper and fluent language (Martinez, 2002). This means that it is easier to find something in authentic materials that will interest learners and may encourage them to read and enjoy reading as they contain topics of large interest to learners, especially if learners are given the chance to talk about such topics in the classroom. Authentic materials increase motivation and interaction between students and teachers. This

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idea is also supported by Nunan (1999: 212) who asserts that "the use of authentic sources leads to greater interest and variety in the material that learners deal with in the classroom. This authentic material helps bring the contact to life, and makes learning and using language more meaningful, and, ultimately, easy for students".

Therefore, we can consider that authentic materials have at least three layers of learning: language (vocabulary and structures), cultural input (cultural norms and values of the community in which the language is used for interaction) and practical application (using them in the way it was intended). These layers motivate learners intrinsically because they have the opportunity to enjoy both learning the language and the culture where this language is spoken, putting into practice what they have learnt as used in the real world. Bringing authentic materials into the classroom can be motivating as they add a real-life element to the students' learning experience.

Moreover, it is essential that authentic materials should meet students' needs and interests. It is equally significant that authentic materials should serve as a stimulus for learning the target language. Thus, if they contain some difficulties and are time consuming for being selected and prepared for teaching purposes, they are important sources of input and have a positive contribution in the field of language teaching and learning.

Case Study

Methodology

The present study was conducted for the purpose of assessing the impact that the use of authentic materials in teaching EFL classes has on the developing of students' communicative competences.

The Romanian curriculum for foreign languages has adopted the recommendations of *Common European Frame of Reference* and this is reflected in the fact that it sets the task of developing students' communicative competence in foreign languages. At the end of a cycle, the student has to prove that they are competent users of both written and oral language in different communicative situations, that they are masters of the conditions that ensure meaningful communication. Using a language entails the ability to both interpret and produce language in context in spoken and written communicative interaction.

This study assumes that by using authentic materials in teaching language classes, students 1) will develop their communicative competence in the target language, 2) will enhance their general confidence to apply their acquired knowledge in "real" life communicative situations and 3) will be motivated to become more interested in the target language, which is English.

Subjects

This study was conducted within a period of four weeks of the second semester of 2015 – 2016 academic year on two groups of students from the Faculty of Medicine, the first year of study; it is noteworthy that these students had a certain level of language proficiency. The first group represented the focus group and the second group represented the control group. The total number of participants in this study was 50 students. The focus group consisted of 26 students, 10 boys and 16 girls, while the control group was formed of 24 students.

Hypotheses

The present study is based on three major hypotheses:

1. The students will show positive attitudes toward using authentic materials in EFL classes.

2. The use of authentic materials will stimulate and motivate students to develop their communicative skills in the target language.

3. The use of authentic materials will enhance students' confidence to apply their knowledge in "real" life communicative situations.

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Data Collection Instruments

The following data collection instruments have been used: observation of students' activity and attendance during the study, a questionnaire at the end of the semester and statistical analysis data.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was applied at the end of the semester to assess the students' attitudes and motivation when authentic materials were used for teaching English as a foreign language.

Observation

In order to observe how much the students are aware of their initial and final level of English acquisition, we administered two questionnaires referring to the language skills that the students should develop. We counted their answers and came to some conclusions regarding their language skills. Throughout the study, we observed and registered the students' reaction to the methods used, in terms of their attendance in the English classes and participation in the task-based teaching.

Procedures

Teaching procedures for both experimental and control group focused on developing learners' communicative skills, mainly reading skills, without neglecting the rest. The control group used the textbook *Good Practice. Communication Skills in English for the Medical Practitioner*, by Marie McCullagh and Ros Wright (Cambridge University Press, 2008), while the experimental group received predominantly (but not exclusively) authentic materials, selected on the basis of their ability to enhance students' communicative skills in the English medical field, and considering the syllabus specific to the intermediate level of language proficiency. Most of the authentic materials were selected on a week-by-week basis and a number of general guidelines were followed in the process:

a) they had to reflect the same general topic as the traditional textbook; thus the chapters "Receiving the Patient", "Presenting Complaint", "Examining the Patient" and "Giving Results" were taught using the textbook *Good Practice. Communication Skills in English for the Medical Practitioner*, by Marie McCullagh and Ros Wright (Cambridge University Press, 2008) with the control group, and we selected specific newspaper articles which referred to receiving and examining the patient, presenting complaints and giving results, as close as possible to the topics existing in the traditional textbook.

b) the linguistic input had to be correlated with the students' language proficiency specific to the intermediate level.

c) they had to reflect the culture of the society in which the linguistic interactions take place in the target language to enhance students' cultural awareness;

d) they had to meet the students' interest and needs.

The materials were designed to include pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading tasks typical of foreign language methodology.

Results and Analysis

Observation sheet – analysis

As it is shown in the questionnaire (Question 1), the focus group students demonstrated a very high level of attendance and participation in the English language class activities. The general characteristic of the focus group is that the students proved a very high level of interest in language acquisition and communicative skills. The control group students also showed a very good level of both attendance and participation in the English language class activities although they registered a lower score in their language acquisition.

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Questionnaire

The focus group students were provided with a questionnaire at the end of the period whose aim was to assess the implementation of authentic materials in teaching EFL classes.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 items aimed to determine the students' attitudes toward the use of authentic materials, their class attendance, the benefits and difficulties they encountered when they were exposed to authentic materials. The first 5 items of the questionnaire were designed to observe the students' attitude regarding the implementation of the authentic materials in teaching English, the next 4 items aimed to consider the effectiveness of teaching a foreign language through authentic materials, and the last item was intended to determine the students' difficulties during the use of authentic materials in teaching English.

Q1: Did you participate in the activities based on authentic materials?

The first question referred to the students' participation in the English classes when authentic materials were used. Table 1 shows a high level of students' participation in the classes. Thus, 26 students (92.85%) chose the answer *very much* and only 2 students (7.14%) chose the answer *much*.

Table 1: Students' participation in the English classes when they were 'exposed' to authentic materials

Option	**a) very much**	**b) much**	**c) little**	**d) very little**
Participants	**26 students**	**2 students**	**-**	**-**
Percentage	**92.85%**	**7.15%**	**-**	**-**

Q2: Did you enjoy using authentic materials in the English class?

The second question was aimed to provide data referring to whether students enjoyed using authentic materials in the English class. 20 students (71.42%) answered they greatly enjoyed using authentic materials, 6 students (21.42%) admitted they enjoyed it much, and only 2 students (7.14%) acknowledged that they preferred being exposed to authentic materials little (Table 2).

Table 2: Students' options concerning their enjoyment to use authentic materials

Option	**a) very much**	**b) much**	**c) little**	**d) very little**
Participants	**20 students**	**6 students**	**2**	**-**
Percentage	**71.42%**	**21.42%**	**7.14%**	**-**

Q3: Did authentic materials motivate you to learn English?

Question 3 was aimed to determine the students' motivation to learn English when authentic materials were used in the teaching/learning process. 18 students (64.28%) stated that authentic materials motivated them very much, 8 students (28.57%) considered that such materials motivated them much (b), and only 2 students (7.14%) admitted they were little motivated to learn the target language when they used authentic materials in the English class (Table 3).

Table 3: Students' motivation to learn English using authentic materials

	a)	**b)**	**c)**	**d)**

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Option	very much	much	little	very little
Participants	18 students	8 students	2 students	-
Percentage	64.28%	28.57%	7.14%	-

Q4: Did authentic materials enhance your confidence?

The purpose of the fourth question, "Did authentic materials enhance your confidence?", was to estimate the students' confidence when they were taught English through authentic materials. Half of the students (50%) stated that the use of authentic materials greatly enhanced their confidence (a), 11 students (39.28%) considered that these materials enhanced their confidence much (b), 1 student (3.57%) admitted his confidence did not enhance much (c), and 2 students (7.14%) acknowledged that their confidence was very little (d) (Table 4).

Table 4: Students' confidence when they used authentic materials in the English classes

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	14 students	11 students	1 student	2 students
Percentage	50%	39.28%	3.57%	7.14%

Q5: Did you find authentic materials effective?

The fifth question, "Did you find authentic materials effective?", was aimed to determine the effectiveness of using authentic materials in EFL classes. The outcomes show that half of the students (50%) definitely considered them very effective, 8 students, representing 28.57%, found them effective, 3 students (10.71%) considered them as being little effective, and other 3 students (10.71%) considered authentic materials very little effective (Table 5).

Table 5: Students' options concerning the effectiveness of the authentic materials in EFL classes

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	14 students	8 students	3 students	3 students
Percentage	50%	28.57%	10.71%	10.71%

Q6: Did authentic materials help you enrich your vocabulary?

As for this question, 14 students (50%) answered that the use of authentic materials greatly helped them enrich their vocabulary, 12 students (42.85%) replied that their vocabulary enriched much through the use of these materials, and 2 students (7,14%) admitted that their vocabulary enriched little (Table 6).

Table 6: Students' options concerning the efficiency of the authentic materials in enriching vocabulary

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Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	**14 students**	**12 students**	**2 students**	**-**
Percentage	**50%**	**42.85%**	**7.14%**	**-**

Q7: Did authentic materials help you develop reading skills?

The seventh question, "Did authentic materials help you to develop reading skills?" was aimed to determine the efficiency of the authentic materials in developing reading skills. Thus, 18 students (64.28%) considered that they greatly developed their reading skills when they were provided with authentic materials, 8 students (28.57%) stated that these materials helped them much with improving their reading skills, and 2 students (7.14%) admitted that using these materials in the English classes helped them but only little to develop their reading skills (Table 7).

Table 7: Students' options regarding the efficiency of the authentic materials in developing reading skills

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	**18 students**	**8 students**	**2 students**	**-**
Percentage	**64.28%**	**28.57%**	**7.14%**	**-**

Q8: Did authentic materials help you develop communicative skills?

Question 8 referred to the development of communicative skills when teaching English was performed through the use of authentic materials. As for this question, 19 students (67.85%) asserted that authentic materials greatly helped them develop their communicative skills, 6 students (21.42%) considered beneficial the exposure to 'real' language, and 3 students (10.71%) admitted that the use of these materials helped them little (Table 8).

Table 8: Students' options concerning the efficiency of the authentic materials in developing communicative skills

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	**19 students**	**6 students**	**3 students**	**-**
Percentage	**67.85%**	**21.42%**	**10.71%**	**-**

Q9: Did authentic materials help you develop writing skills?

The ninth question, "Did authentic materials help you develop writing skills?", was aimed to estimate the efficiency of the authentic materials in developing writing skills. 11 respondents (39.28%) considered that authentic materials helped them very much to develop their writing skills, 13 respondents (46.42%) stated that their writing skills developed much and 4 respondents (14.28%) admitted that their writing skills developed through the use of authentic materials just a little (Table 9).

Table 9: Students' options regarding the efficiency of the authentic materials in developing writing skills

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Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	11 students	13 students	4 students	-
Percentage	39.28%	46.42%	14.28%	-

Q10: What difficulties did you encounter when using authentic materials?

Question 10 was aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by students when being exposed to the use of authentic material in teaching English. The question has three sub-items. The first sub-item, "Vocabulary was difficult.", referred to the difficulties encountered in understanding the new vocabulary. No student considered that it was very difficult, 6 students (21.42%) admitted that vocabulary caused some problems to them, the majority of students, namely 20 students (71.42%) considered it was a little bit difficult, and for 2 students (7.14%) the vocabulary caused no difficulty (Table 10).

Table 10: Students' options concerning vocabulary difficulties

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	-	6 students	20 students	2 students
Percentage	-	21.42%	71.42%	7.14%

2) Texts were too long and confusing.

The second sub-item of question 10 was aimed to determine the difficulties of the authentic texts, whether they were too long or confusing. Only 7 students (25%) admitted that they were too long and confusing, 12 students (42.85%) did not consider them too long and confusing, and for 9 students (32.14%) the texts caused no problem (Table 11).

Table 11: Students' options regarding the difficulties with the authentic texts being too long and confusing

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	-	7 students	12 students	9 students
Percentage	-	25%	42.85%	32.14%

3) Tasks were difficult.

The third sub-item of question 10 referred to the completion of the tasks in the English classes. For 3 students (10.71%), tasks seemed to be very difficult, for 4 students (14.28%), tasks were difficult enough, for half of the students (50%), tasks had a low difficulty level, and for 7 students (25%) tasks were not difficult at all (Table 12).

Table 12: Students' options concerning the difficulties of the tasks

Option	a) very much	b) much	c) little	d) very little
Participants	3 students	4 students	14 students	7 students

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Percentage	**10.71%**	**14.28%**	**50%**	**25%**

The outcomes of the questionnaire revealed the high level of students' participation in the English classroom tasks. The graphic representation shows that 92.85% of the students attended all the classes when authentic materials were used. Students showed positive attitudes toward the use of authentic materials stating that most of them greatly enjoyed the use of authentic materials (71.42%). The analysis of the questionnaire also revealed that authentic materials highly motivated them to wish to learn. The students developed their reading skills, communicative skills and writing skills, in general, through the use of authentic materials. They admitted the effectiveness of such materials in the sense that they had the opportunity to read and learn from authentic sources of information, i.e. the real language the native speakers use as it is applied in actual settings (see Jacobson et al., 2003). Few students encountered difficulties in using authentic materials. The difficulties referred to the comprehension of the new vocabulary - too long and confusing texts.

Conclusions

This paper aimed to discuss the authentic materials as instructional materials and to offer a new perspective on teaching EFL classes using these materials. The study aimed to assess the impact that the use of authentic materials in EFL classes had on developing students' communicative competences, which implies the ability to use the target language either in the classroom environment or in real life communication situations.

The study was carried out within a period of four weeks of the second semester of 2015 – 2016 academic year on 1st year students from the Faculty of Medicine. The teaching methods for both focus and control group concentrated on developing learners' communicative skills, mainly reading skills, without neglecting the rest. The control group worked thoroughly using the textbook *Good Practice. Communication Skills in English for the Medical Practitioner*, by Marie McCullagh and Ros Wright (Cambridge University Press, 2008), while the focus group worked predominantly (but not exclusively) with authentic materials represented by the articles selected from the British newspapers, *The Guardian, The Independent, London Evening Standard, Express, The Observer, The Metro, and the American newspaper - The Washington Post,* most of them being online editions. The articles chosen for the present study were closely related to the syllabus specific to the intermediate level of proficiency required by the National Curriculum. They were grouped according to the main topics, i.e. "Receiving the Patient", "Presenting Complaint", "Examining the Patient" and "Giving Results", existing in the above-mentioned textbook. We realized a collection of articles and appropriate exercises that we used throughout the experiment.

The second type of data collection instruments was represented by the qualitative instruments, such as the students' *observation sheets* and the *questionnaire*. The observation sheets referred to the students' attendance and students' participation in the classroom task-based activities during the use of authentic materials in teaching language. We analyzed the scores and came to the conclusion that their attendance to the EFL classes was excellent for both focus and control groups. Their participation in the classroom activities was excellent with focus group and quite good with control group.

The focus group students were provided with a questionnaire at the end of the period regarding the authentic materials use in teaching EFL classes. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items aimed to determine the students' attitudes toward the use of authentic materials, their attendance, the benefits and difficulties they encountered when they were exposed to authentic materials. The outcomes of the questionnaire revealed a high level of students' participation in the English classroom tasks. The graphic representation shows that 92.85% of

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the students participated in all the classes when authentic materials were used. Students showed positive attitudes toward the use of authentic materials stating that most of them (71.42%) greatly enjoyed the use of authentic materials. The results of the achievement tests and the outcomes of the questionnaire have shown that teaching English as a foreign language through authentic materials had a positive impact on students' language acquisition and communicative competences in the target language.

Throughout the present study, the students showed a positive attitude toward using the authentic materials in English classes and expressed the idea that these materials stimulated them to wish to enhance their communicative skills and knowledge about the culture of the English speaking countries.

We believe that the authentic materials offered the students a valuable source of language input "since they could be exposed to more than just the language presented by the teacher and the textbook" (Gebhard, 2006: 105) and we had many opportunities for planning and organizing teaching and learning activities. The authentic materials used in the present study proved to be highly motivating, giving a sense of achievement when understood, a sense of pleasure, and encouraging further reading.

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