# USING TEACHER-MADE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS FOR EFL VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' CAREER-RELATED VOCABULARY LEARNING

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#### ABSTRACT

Although using authentic materials has advantages and disadvantages, it is evident that they bring many benefits to EFL learners, especially in terms of developing communication skills and cultural understanding. Moreover, they offer an opportunity to learn how English is used in real-life situations. This study adopts accidental ethnography as the research methodology. It illustrates, through content and language integrated learning (CLIL), how authentic materials are effective and useful to EFL learners in a specialised vocational high school. The findings indicated that the participants genuinely learned English and acquired career-related vocabulary that would be beneficial to their prospects, hence lending credence to the potential of authentic materials.

**Keywords:** authentic materials; content and language integrated learning; EFL; accidental ethnography

### Introduction

Textbooks are essential in achieving educational goals. Good English materials can help students learn English more efficiently, providing adequate language and content with consideration of student needs and proficiency levels. In the current digital era, a strong command of language is required, and textbooks should work based on individual, societal, and global needs. In this regard, it is argued that the use of authentic materials is effective in helping learners use the target language in real life, increasing their motivation to learn it, and making language instruction meaningful (Hwang, 2005; Kodirova, 2021; Mishan, 2005; Widdowson, 2003). Learning English with appropriate materials can meet learners' needs, including the development of communication skills and future career prospects. Preparing students for real-life environments and situations is of utmost concern. Often, Korean EFL vocational schools may not provide practical textbooks or satisfy the needs of vocational students. Furthermore, vocational students seem to not pay attention to learning aligned with the national or school curriculum. To make English instruction meaningful and effective, English language teachers can develop and present materials that meet students' needs related to their career.

Hence, incorporating authentic materials in English education enables teachers to use practical, culturally relevant resources such as newspaper articles, websites, advertisements, and songs in language instruction. This helps students develop language skills that are applicable to their everyday life, academic pursuits, and future careers. Moreover, authentic materials expose students to diverse cultures and perspectives, promoting cultural awareness and global competency, resulting in more engaging and meaningful language learning experiences. Bacon and Finnemann (1990) emphasised that teachers should explore ways to incorporate authentic materials into language instruction.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to utilise authentic materials for vocational high school students to learn career-related content and language, preparing them for the workplace after graduation. Additionally, this study investigates the perceptions of vocational high school students and their teacher regarding the use of authentic materials in content and language integrated learning (CLIL). The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What type of authentic materials were employed?
- 2) How did vocational high school students and the teacher perceive English language instruction with the use of authentic materials?
- 3) What were the suggestions recommended by the students and the teacher?

#### **Literature Review**

# The Use of Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are defined as materials designed for real language use within its community (Kilickaya, 2004). Jacobson et al. (2003) regard authentic materials as printed materials used in the classroom context in the same way they would be used in real life. Authentic materials are described as materials that represent real-life contexts and situations with actual language use (Herod, 2002; Wulandari & Waloyo, 2018). Thus, students are likely to be exposed to authentic contexts through authentic materials including texts, photographs, video selections, and realia, which are used in teaching but not specially prepared for pedagogical purposes (Richards, 2001). Several studies have revealed the benefits of using authentic materials. Authentic materials have a positive impact on learner motivation (Lang & Jiang, 2008). Learners can have meaningful experiences with authentic materials because they feel that they are using the target language (Kilickaya, 2004). Oguz and Bahar's (2008) study showed that authentic materials meet students' needs and expectations. Nunan (1999) believes that exposure to authentic materials is crucial due to its rich language input. This can help learners cope with communication and interactions in real life. Richards (2001) argued for the use of authentic materials in language learning with five reasons:

- 1) preparing the language learner for real life;
- 2) providing the necessary information to the language learner;
- 3) motivation arises in the language learner;
- 4) encouraging teachers to use effective teaching methods; and
- 5) authentic information helps to teach culture as well.

Richards (2001) further stated that authentic materials are closely related to learner needs by providing genuine cultural information about the target culture. They also encourage language teachers to create innovative approaches to teaching. Generating and using authentic materials may be of concern because authentic materials often contain difficult language and can be a burden for teachers (Richards, 2001).

Selecting the proper instructional materials is challenging but critical for both teachers and students. To ensure authentic materials support learning, it is important to make sure they are at the appropriate level for learners and that their use does not frustrate them. Authentic materials can be a practical tool for vocational high school students. Authentic materials can help make learning processes enjoyable and stimulating (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014; Kilickaya, 2004; Oguz & Bahar, 2008; Richards, 2001; Wulandari & Waloyo, 2018). This study, inspired by Jacobson et al.'s (2003) definition of authentic materials, explored the types of authentic materials that were developed and utilised for vocational high school students as well as the students and teacher's perceptions and responses.

# Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in ELT

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is a combined language teaching approach focusing on students' language learning in the context of subject-matter teaching (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). CLIL encompasses activities in which "a foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both language and the subject have a joint role" (Marsh, 2002, p. 58). Both language and content, having mutually beneficial roles, are conceptualised on a continuum in CLIL (Gibbons, 2002; Marsh, 2002; Stoddart et al., 2002). CLIL can be described as a dualfocused instructional approach where a certain curriculum is taught through the medium of a foreign language (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). CLIL helps learners increase vocabulary learning skills and grammatical awareness, raise linguistic competence and confidence, motivate learner independence, develop risktaking and problem-solving skills, and encourage positive attitudes and cultural awareness (Coyle, 2007; Dalton-Puffer, 2007). It also offers the authenticity of purposeful instruction, realigning language, content, and cognitive development (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009). CLIL fosters flexibility and cognitive development through constructivist approaches, acknowledging a language as a fundamental tool

in language learning (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Lyster 2007). CLIL can also lead to a greater intercultural understanding and prepares learners better for internationalisation (Coyle et al., 2009). In essence, CLIL can be regarded as a dynamic unit providing language instruction that goes beyond language and subject teaching and learning (Coyle et al., 2010).

CLIL involves two main pedagogical principles: (1) making content comprehensible with understandable language input and (2) encouraging learners to use the target language productively (Escobar Urmeneta, 2019). CLIL often links its political and cultural frame of reference to the program's actual features (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009). English is the dominant language in CLIL, reflecting the belief that English proficiency is a key global literacy skill. Classroom content usually covers academic subjects or disciplines (e.g., biology, engineering, geography, math, music, etc.), while the target language remains a subject in the form of foreign language instruction taught by language teachers (Wolff, 2007). Any subject can fit into CLIL instruction. CLIL is characterised by its dynamism, flexibility, and versatility (Papaja, 2014). Meyer et al. (2015) argue that CLIL not only enables learners to acquire knowledge but also to take ownership of it.

Authentic materials play a crucial role in CLIL for several compelling reasons. CLIL is an educational approach that integrates the teaching of content from various subjects with language learning. In CLIL, authentic materials provide learners with real-world content, such as newspapers and multimedia, which relate directly to the subject matter being taught (Coyle, 2007). This contextual relevance makes the content more engaging and meaningful to students. Furthermore, authentic materials expose learners to genuine language use including language registers, accents, and dialects in specific contexts, helping them develop both their language skills and subject knowledge simultaneously (Harrop, 2012).

However, there are some pitfalls in CLIL that language teachers should be aware of. Escobar Urmeneta (2019) identified several. First, CLIL may not always produce the expected results in terms of language or content gains. Second, academic standards in the content area may need to be lowered due to learners' poor command of the target foreign language. Third, teachers, institutions, or even students themselves may assume that students must possess above-average intellectual abilities, prior knowledge of the subject matter, and high levels of communicative competence to meet the communicative and cognitive demands of a CLIL class (Escobar Urmeneta, 2019). Despite the challenges, teachers can help EFL learners develop their academic, cognitive, and linguistic skills with patience. Learners need time to improve and see progress in their daily academic performance (Nunez Asomoza, 2015).

# Methodology

# **Research Design**

This study employed accidental ethnography to investigate the effective use of authentic materials for EFL learners in a vocational high school. Accidental ethnography refers to a systematic analysis of prior fieldwork, which examines past experiences in academic discourse and uses existing data "accidentally" collected to offer insight into phenomena, culture, and/or lifestyles (Levitan et al., 2017). Accidental ethnography is "a reflexive, reflective, and praxical method of inquiry" (p. 2) in which the researcher explores and gathers data from daily routines in the workplace or research context to reveal significant findings and offer insights into educational practice (Levitan et al., 2017). The accidental ethnography method provides a way to explore the researcher's prior learning or teaching experiences and reflections (Levitan et al., 2017). Accidental ethnography involves unplanned moments that occur outside structured methods, such as interviews or surveys (Fujii, 2015). The researcher may overlook ordinary scenes that appear to become surprising or momentous data.

There are six practices in the process of accidental ethnography: (1) initiation, (2) reflection, (3) re-examination, (4) data collection, (5) coding, and (6) recursive consultations. Merriam (2014) maintains that accidental ethnography ensures quality and trustworthiness through the systematic research process with these six practices. The first practice of initiation generates a connection between research and the researcher's previous experiences in the field. Reflection as the second practice is relevant to reflexivity, which induces an in-depth reflection of the researcher's experiences based on power, positionality, and learning moments (Merriam et al., 2001). The third practice of re-examination is based on re-evaluating literature to find a gap that can improve theory and/or practice connected to theory testing or theory building. The fourth practice is data collection. It is essential to include extant data. Newly found data may also be added as part of the same research. The fifth practice of coding involves the use of emergent coding grounded on emic understandings of the context. The last practice is recursive consultation. This suggests that it is critical to co-create meaning through a regular circuit of research and reflection to practice so that the findings can be conveyed directly into action (Levitan et al., 2017). These practices can make accidental ethnography more rigorous and enlightening to the field.

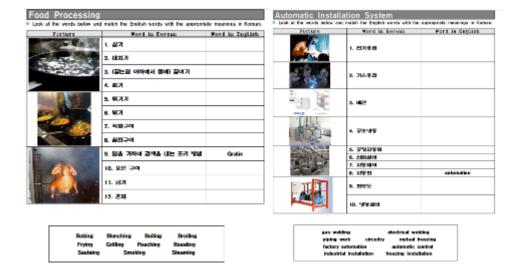
# **Context and Participants**

This study was conducted in a specialised vocational high school located in an urban area of Korea. The population of this school consists of a homogeneous group of Korean male students. The school has five different departments: Electrics, Electronics, Food Processing, Machine, and Manufacturing. Each department has two classes, with approximately 40 students in each class, totalling 400 tenth graders. This study focused on English language instruction in two departments: Food Processing and Manufacturing. The students in these departments were the primary participants in the study. Their English proficiency level was intermediatelow. While innovative career-related instruction with authentic materials was implemented with all students in all departments, most of the data was extracted from the two departments mentioned. The study took place in one semester, which comprised 17 weeks. During the lessons, English was taught twice a week.

# The Description of Teacher-Made Authentic Materials

The participants at the vocational high school were learning Business English with the aim of pursuing careers after graduation. Thus, it was practical to focus on teaching practical expressions and vocabulary related to communication and business. Taking this purpose into account, I developed authentic materials specifically for students majoring in Food Processing and Manufacturing. Given that the students had a low-intermediate level of English proficiency, learning English vocabulary would benefit them. Samples of the authentic materials are shown in Figure 1.

# Figure 1



Authentic Materials Focusing on Career-Related Terms

After completing basic English lessons, I implemented more advanced instruction using authentic materials, as shown in Figure 2. The first material was developed for Food Processing students, whose main interests were cooking and baking. I had the students create their own recipe for an assigned food item using the vocabulary they had learned in the previous lesson. The second material was designed for Manufacturing students, who were familiar with gadget-related terms. Through the activity, I encouraged them to consider the function and use of the given gadgets and to write the appropriate expressions or words on the worksheet.

# Figure 2

How do we cook ? Date   May 14, Name:	
How do we cook         ?           First.	You can bring only two of the gadgets above. You may add one more function of each gadget     (1) What two gadgets did you choose 2.     (2) What two gadgets did you choose 2.     (2) What have been want to each gadget 2.
Serverth, Eighth, Trate Color	Gadger Pareties      Vision house to make gadget which is needed in order to store for jobs      (1) What gadget do you want to make 2      (2) Elser are you going to use the gadget ?
Art Creative Rocipe	

#### Authentic Materials Focusing on the Individual Department

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the Ohio State University (Protocol Code: 2016B0642 (approval date: 12 Dec 2017)).

Several data sources were collected to report on pedagogical experiences, practices, and significant contributions to the field of education. These sources included semi-structured interviews with participants, teacher reflection logs, and artifacts such as lesson plans, pictures, and teacher-made materials. Four participants were interviewed, with each interview lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The interview questions focused on the participants' learning experiences and perceptions of the authentic materials used in class. For example, one of the interview questions asked about their overall perception of the instruction with authentic materials and whether the use of the materials was helpful for their language learning. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Korean, and then translated into English. Teacher reflection logs were written after each instruction, noting down reflections on whether each class had accomplished its learning goals.

Document analysis was used to analyse interview transcripts and other relevant data. Document analysis is a type of qualitative research that involves interpreting and analysing documents to discover the meaning of certain subjects. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (p. 27). This ensures that the researcher is not affected by changes to the data or external influences during the research process (Bowen, 2009).

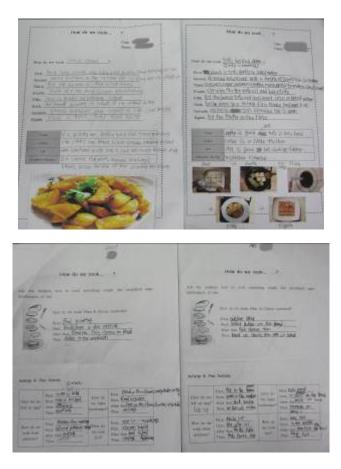
# **Results and Discussion**

# Authentic Materials Used in the English Language Instruction in CLIL

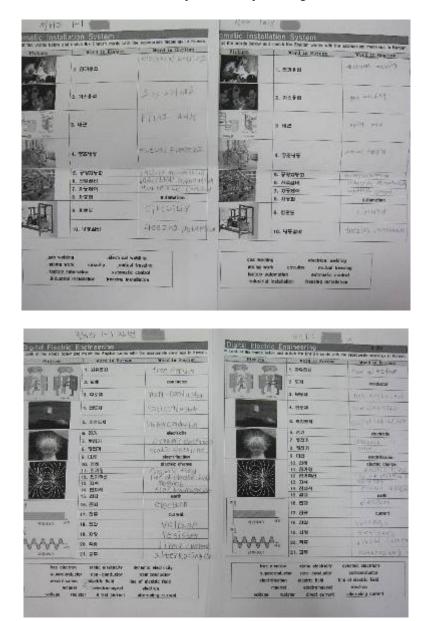
The first research question asked about the type of teacher-made authentic materials. Implementing content and language integrated instruction (CLIL) was appropriate for the language instruction in this study. Two types of authentic materials were developed and utilised using English instruction: One about the students' careers and the other about daily life. Food Processing students were especially interested in the lessons related to food. I had them brainstorm their favourite recipes that they could introduce and make, and they paid attention to the instruction with interest and excitement. Samples of their work are shown in Figure 3. Manufacturing students were also given English instruction along with teachermade authentic materials. They seemed to have difficulties filling out the worksheet by matching the pictures with relevant terms in English but gave full cooperation in completing the task. Samples of their work are shown in Figure 4.

# Figure 3

Authentic Materials: Recipes from Food Processing Students



# Figure 4

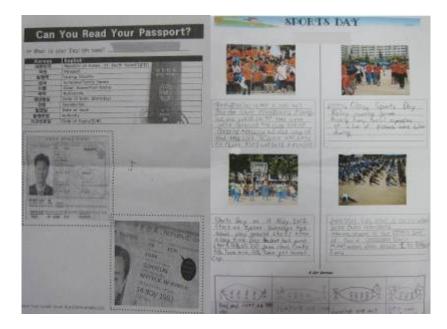


Authentic Materials: Technical Terms from Manufacturing & Electrics Students

The second type of authentic materials was related to the students' daily lives. With international borders consistently opening post-pandemic, it has become common to visit other countries for sightseeing or business. It would be useful to know what components are included in a passport. To introduce this topic, I used my own passport and developed a lesson about familiarising oneself to a passport. The students seemed delighted with the passport activity because many of them actually wanted to go abroad. Another authentic material used was pictures of Sports Day. I utilised pictures of the students' activities on Sports Day and had them describe what happened in the given pictures. Both the passport and Sports Day materials are shown in Figure 5.

# Figure 5

Authentic Materials: Passport and Sports Day



Tomlinson and Masuhara (2010) asserted that authentic materials should lead learners to actually produce and use language, emphasising authenticity. Authentic materials are one of the necessary conditions in CLIL. The materials suggested in this study, as shown in Figures 3 through 5, illustrate how authenticity can be achieved in the classroom context.

# Vocational High School Students' Perceptions of Using Authentic Materials

The second research question is to find out vocational high school students' perceptions of using authentic materials. Most students mentioned that the instruction was positive, and the materials were intriguing. Several students shared their opinions as follows:

I enjoyed the English class. The content was useful and relevant to my career. Even I didn't know some cooking terms before and learned them from this class. In the future when I become a baker, these words may be used. So, I liked the class. (S1, interview translated)

In fact, I don't like English at all. I have some negative feelings on English. But, when the English teacher taught us cooking terms, I was interested. The words were about cooking or baking, which I didn't learn before. I may forget the terms, but this class was better than other general English classes. (S2, interview translated)

Food Processing students mentioned that learning cooking-related terms and expressions were useful, and they completed the given task enthusiastically, as illustrated in Figure 6. The Food Processing students especially liked the instruction about designing their own favourite ice cream:

Among the lessons, I particularly favoured the ice cream design one. I like ice cream and it was an interesting experience to think about differently shaped ice cream with various flavours. I want to become a baker, so I may open a bakery and make ice cream someday. (S3, interview translated)

It would be a rewarding moment for teachers if students discussed their career related to the well-designed instruction. I perceived S3's comment as a compliment. It shows the potential outcome from using authentic materials for EFL students' language development and progress as well as their potential career.

# Figure 6

Authentic Materials: Designing Favourite Ice Creams



Despite the positive feedback on the use of authentic materials, some other students had different opinions and mixed feelings. For example, several Manufacturing students, in fact, did not pay attention to the instruction because English itself was challenging and daunting to them. One student from Manufacturing commented:

To me, English itself is too difficult. I'm going to get a job related to manufacturing or installation. So, I don't know why I should study English. I haven't learned English properly from the beginning. Even if the materials

are relevant to my future job, I still have a lot of difficulty in focusing on the English subject. (S5, interview translated)

I found S5's comment critical to develop English instruction for EFL vocational high school students. Some students choose to attend a vocational school because they want to pursue specialised career, while others have no academic interest. EFL teachers need to be able to understand the reason for this divergence. Although teachers strive to make their instruction fulfilling, they should also realise that discrepancies that occur in the real classroom context would influence students' perceptions and interest.

The role of authentic materials has been emphasised in language teaching in two ways: linguistic and non-linguistic merits. Firstly, authentic materials help EFL learners develop their language skills (Harmer, 1994; Richards, 2001). Richards (2001) maintained that learners can be exposed to real language use and contexts connected to learners' academic needs. Furthermore, authentic materials boost intrinsic motivation (Berardo, 2006; Gilmore, 2007; Kilickaya, 2004) and cultural awareness (Sherman, 2003). Authentic materials can affect language learning positively by scaffolding learners with sufficient exposure (Guariento & Morley, 2001). For these reasons, EFL teachers should have a clear pedagogic and instructional goal and implement innovative instruction with authentic materials in the classroom.

# Suggestions by Vocational High School Students and the Teacher

The last research objective is to obtain suggestions concerning the use of authentic materials in EFL teaching and learning from vocational high school students and the English teacher. The participants' responses were helpful in answering Research Question 3. Several students were inquired to about their recommendations for the improvement and development of authentic materials:

I hope we can learn more career-related words or expressions. If I become a baker or chef, I may meet foreign customers and may have to communicate with them. In this regard, I would like to learn more about cooking-related words and expressions. (S3, interview translated)

Writing sentences is very hard. I wish there was no sentence writing because I cannot make any English sentences. But, knowing and learning cookingrelated words was a good part. I think it would be beneficial for us to learn about cooking-related words. Also, if there's a chance, I also want to learn about the expressions that may occur in a bakery shop or a restaurant. (S4, interview translated)

These comments were all connected to the students' career and jobs. Compared to general English instruction, the specialised English lessons with authentic materials appeared to work well. It can be said that the curriculum for vocational high school students should be flexible in order to meet students' needs and interest.

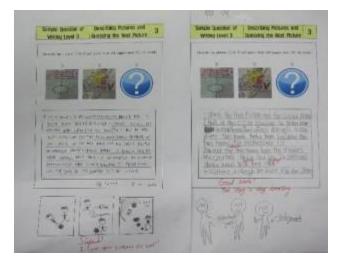
In addition to the students' opinions, teacher reflection logs were resourceful in exploring suggestions for improvement of authentic material use. Two ideas emerged from the document analysis: (1) continuous development of careerrelated authentic materials and (2) authentic material use as an interactive channel. The first suggestion sounds obvious, but this requires the teacher's determination and consistent effort. Here is one part of the teacher reflection log:

It is quite time-consuming for an individual teacher to generate authentic materials. But, it's worth doing so because students are more interested in the career-related materials. Normally, technical high school students may not focus on academic work. Similarly, they don't like the English subject. Often, English teachers have difficulty encouraging students to pay attention to the class. If the content is not relevant, students are less likely to be engaged in the class. So, I decided to develop more career-relevant materials and utilize them whenever I have extra time in my English class. (Teacher reflection log)

The second idea is that authentic materials can function as an interactive channel between the teacher and students. The size of a vocational class with 40 students is relatively bigger than general class size. Therefore, it is normally impossible to interact with each individual student in class. Authentic materials can become a means of interactions with students. Figure 7 shows teacher feedback on students' work.

# Figure 7

Teacher Feedback on Students' Written Products



I believe that my teaching practice to give comments to students might have started from this moment. Even if the comment was short, some students thought

of it as valuable. After implementing this lesson, I wrote about how I performed and perceived it as presented below:

I thought many students enjoyed the lesson. I can tell this from their completed worksheets. So, I decided to give small comments to them this time. Usually, it's very hard for me to offer comments because I teach more than 100 students. But, they also worked hard and deserve getting compliments and feedback. Maybe, I can use the materials as a dialog journal. (Teacher reflection log)

Research on authentic materials provides useful suggestions. Thomas (2014) suggested using locally relevant materials for EFL learners with surface culture topics such as arts, customs, holidays, and traditions that are relevant to local contexts. Locally relevant materials boost learner engagement in critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding, and deepen attitudes and societal values (Thomas, 2014).

# **Conclusion and Implications**

This study explored the types of authentic materials used in the EFL language classroom setting and the perceptions of both the teacher and students regarding their implementation. The participants considered the use of authentic materials as a practical means of arousing interest and motivation and exposing them to authentic English language use. Guariento and Morley (2001) also supported the effectiveness of using authentic materials in instruction as these can motivate learners to learn and expose them to the use of language outside of classroom. It is essential for EFL teachers to be able to not only develop authentic materials but also adjust their use according to learners' needs, interests, and levels of language proficiency.

CLIL can be an effective instruction method when using authentic materials. This study demonstrated that integrating authentic materials into CLIL instruction can enhance EFL students' language development and understanding of careerrelated content.

For research, accidental ethnography should be promoted as it is a useful way to bridge research and practice (Fujii, 2015; Levitan et al., 2017; Poulos, 2009). This study attempted to use existing data to generate new knowledge and data for educational research (Bensimon, 2007; Levitan et al., 2017; Zeichner, 2007). Accidental ethnography empowers teachers and practitioners to make their instruction more effective and participate actively in communities of practice (Levitan et al., 2017).

Despite the benefits of accidental ethnographic research, several limitations need to be addressed in future studies. Observations of a single EFL classroom may not be representative of the entire population, so research in diverse contexts would be valuable. Accidental ethnography can produce messy data as it allows for unstructured perspectives, and determining effective and useful data can be challenging. Researchers need to carefully analyse the collected data and examine as much data as possible to find significant results. In English language education, the most important thing is the student engagement in the process of language learning and development. Using authentic materials enables teachers to reflect on their teaching skills and materials and encourage students to interact and communicate using different language skills, improving their language proficiency. It is crucial to explore innovative ways to create an authentic environment where students can use the target language actively and freely.

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