Unconventional Materials for Promoting Autonomous Learning

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ABSTRACT

Variety is the spice of life! The prescribed textbooks and other teaching materials are quite common to the learners. Handling of such conventional materials can be partially disinteresting and monotonous, too. Such materials limit the users of their creative and critical thinking, restricting learner autonomy in the long-term learning process. Hence, teachers can use a lot of learner-friendly unconventional supplementary materials such as newspapers, tabloids, stories, jokes, riddles, realia, etc., for ELT (English Language Teaching). The writer attempts to highlight the significance of such materials in promoting learner’s autonomy and critical thinking through a variety of collaborative activities. The article contains an overview of selected unconventional ELT themes and classroom activities for readers to consider.

Keywords: Unconventional, autonomous, materials, activities

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Introduction

The field of ELT is ever changing to cope with the changing trends and needs of this modern and high-tech time. Traditional teacher-centered curriculum gave way to student/learner centered curriculum. Conventional teacher-student interaction is replaced students-student interaction in ELT lessons. From Traditional Grammar Translation methods (Rechards & Rodgers, 1986) to present Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Andrews, 2005) where Cooperative Learning - CL (Schul, 2012) and Task Based Language Learning - TBLL (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996) are practiced. Thus, it has witnessed a lot of noticeable changes in the curriculum design (Warren, 2002) and methods (Harmer, 2007) of implementation over the past years. ELT materials are also reviewed and published to meet the demands in the field. With the advancement of communicative approach to language teaching and learning (Belchamber, 2007), it has become more or less impossible to confine an ELT lesson within the framework of certain prescribed textbooks and related conventional materials. The professionals in the field (here, teachers) have been given ample freedom to select and adapt suitable materials to facilitate the language learning. Unconventional ELT materials, therefore, promotes Student-centred learning allowing students to actively participate in discovery learning processes from an autonomous viewpoint. Students consume the entire class time constructing a new understanding of the material being learned without being passive, but rather proactive (Estes, 2004).

In such a scenario, conventional materials such as text books and the ready-made teaching resource can be easily substituted with unconventional supplementary materials (Makovičková, 2007) such as web/internet based materials, newspapers, magazines, various kinds of stories, jokes, unique pictures of interesting topics and so on. Most conventional materials are authentic. The term ‘authentic’ is quite frequently used in ESL/EFL research for identifying real materials produced by the native speakers of English. “But with the origination of “world Englishes” and further development of English as an international language, the understanding of “authenticity” is gradually becoming disputable”(Tuzlokova & Eltayeb, 2009) and the term ‘unconventional’ gives a wide variety of choice to teachers in their selection and methods of implementation and to students in promoting their autonomous learning strategies. Unconventional materials maintain flexible characteristics as they aren’t graded for English learners’ use whereas conventional materials are graded to suit the level of the learners. Hence, when conventional materials limit the learners within the pre-set learning outcomes, unconventional materials can provide the learners with a wide variety of real life topics and linguistic items promoting their independent learning and thinking skills (Dickinson, 1995). A strategic handling of conventional materials can really promote autonomy in the field of English Language Learning. Kolb (1984) suggests strongly that when critical reflection is part of the learning process, the resultant learning is deeper, more effective, more transferable and greater autonomy is encouraged.

[The writer uses the term ‘unconventional’ to refer to any suitable supplementary materials for ELT –mostly authentic and occasionally graded - which are not parts of a regular curriculum.]

Unconventional Vs Conventional

Makovičková (2007) points out the following differences between unconventional supplementary material and the conventional materials such as text books.
Table 1. Differences between the use of unconventional and unconventional materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional Material (Eg. Textbooks)</th>
<th>Unconventional Materials (Any Suitable Supplementary materials)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less time and effort-demanding in terms of preparation; it is more convenient for teachers.</td>
<td>Time-demanding for teachers. They need to think up the idea and spend a lot of time with preparing materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not take a lot of teacher’s energy.</td>
<td>more difficult to organize lessons in order to reach the educational aim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier for teachers to maintain discipline. Activities are readily planned and set.</td>
<td>Require good teaching skills – empathy, friendliness, calmness, etc. Activities are positively noisier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less space for preparing and storing the materials.</td>
<td>Require more space for preparing and storing the materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The materials are readily available – schools/institutions usually buy the textbook, workbook and manual for their teachers.</td>
<td>More expensive if the school has not enough money for purchasing materials. Teachers might need to invest their own money in the materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful for creating the syllabus for the year, it can be used as a guide, clue or main structure.</td>
<td>Teachers have to prepare the syllabus all by themselves in using unconventional materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The excitement and fascination with pictures in the textbook or workbook wears off after the first few lessons and the study materials become commonplace for both the pupils and teachers.</td>
<td>Original and attractive – will catch children’s eyes immediately; it is more amusing, give more opportunities for implementing variety in the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conventional teaching material does not cater sufficiently for the various needs of the different types of intelligence.</td>
<td>The unconventional are better suited for the reality that each child is original, they are flexible in approach and focus to develop the various types of intelligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is greater level of uniformity in the textbooks and workbooks</td>
<td>Help gifted children in their further development because the unconventional challenges their creativity and supports diversity of opinions. Talented children like change and dislike stereotypes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conventional study materials are created with the expectation that all pupils have the same level of knowledge. The use of unconventional materials allows for diversity in the classroom.

A Quick Glance at Different Types of Unconventional ELT Materials

A lot of research has been done in exploiting teaching materials outside the prescribed curriculum while conventional English textbooks have been criticized for not offering classroom learners adequate opportunity for learning authentic language (Bardovi, 2001; Grant & Starks, 2001; Vellenga, 2004; Wong, 2002). Most or all of the unconventional materials are authentic with the exception of teachers’ own classroom addition or edition of the same. The following are some of such authentic (Davies, 1984:185) unconventional materials that can be effectively used in the ELT field.

Newspapers and Magazines

“English teachers around the world are realizing that newspapers provide excellent materials for learning English. This authentic material can be used to enhance reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Using newspapers also expands vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. In addition, newspapers are an excellent resource to use for teaching critical reading” (Forum, 2006,) and thinking. Language classes are particularly appropriate for teaching critical thinking owing to the richness of material and the interactive approaches used. “…..learners may bring learned indifference, irrational fears, acquired hostility, and inflexible ideas into the classroom so their learning is limited to the surface (Kurland, 2000; Paul & Elder, 2002). The conventional text material may not be suitable to facilitate such thinking needs of the learners as they are limited, topic wise and graded, in terms of language. Newspapers (Bndaka, 2007) and magazines have a wide variety of interesting topics. They clearly reflect every aspect of human life – social, economic, religious, cultural, aesthetic, and political and so on. Moreover, they are very well illustrated to attract the attention of the readers. The real life is depicted in various forms in newspapers and magazines. A discrete exploitation of these media can expose students to the real life language (Grellet, 1981:7), enhancing their language learning and the skills.

Video and Audio materials

“Recorded materials can go a long way toward bringing a unit to life”, (Bernice & David, 1987). There are ample of conventional audio materials used in ELT lessons as part of the learners’ main curriculum. However they are focused on the target language or the content specified in each lesson or unit. This limits the learners’ autonomy in listening to real life situations which they come across outside the classrooms. The use of video texts allows listeners to view the kinesic behavior of speakers (Kellerman, 1992). Adding to it, video tapes are seldom used in most of the Language Centres for one or the other reason. But in tune with the changing technology and easy availability of numerous video tapes/CDs, it could be made an integral part of the course. Burgoon (1994) described how listeners often rely more on non-verbal than verbal cues when interpreting spoken texts, especially when the non-verbal cues conflict with the verbal message. “video tapes can add a new dimension to the students’ experience of other places, capturing sounds, sights and the non-verbal behavior of the speakers of the language for repeated viewing and analysis” (Bernice & David, 1987). “….the most important element in a written passage
or an audio cassette is usually the words, a video sequence contains not only words, but visual elements (and often sound effects and music) that provide essential evidence on behavior, character and context, which are not usually in the script (Susan & Stempleski, 1994).

**Internet/ web based materials**

“Conventional instructional materials and approaches are based on a one-size-fits-all paradigm that unequivocally does not meet all the needs of English learners. ……. In this cyber age, it has become possible to explore electronic alternative to printed books with “built in” means of access to address varied learners’ needs. The internet has the potential to provide such a framework that helps achieve the kind of curricular flexibility that can meet all needs of learners” (O’Neill, 2001). The increasing use of internet as a medium of communication and a resource of unlimited information has given it an unprecedented importance in the ELT field. It can supplement a wide variety of interesting materials for carrying out ELT lessons leading the learners to use English language independently online. The use of emails, online tests, job application, uploading and downloading data, online news - oral, aural, video and web based interactive activities open immense opportunities for the learners to use English without limit or boundaries. Nevertheless its unconventional nature has posed challenges to both the teachers and the learners. Hence “….in attempting to integrate online teaching, it’s best not to be overly ambitious in the beginnings. A situation which overwhelms both students and teachers in technical difficulties is not likely to bring about the desired results.”(Mark & Fawn, 1997).

**Jokes**

Humour is said to be the best physical exercise - laughter relaxes all facial muscles, unwrinkles the forehead, the body receives more oxygen, and the breathing deepens automatically (Pecnik, 2001). One of the aims of foreign language learning is to get to know the nation's culture and to learn to respect it. Humour reveals the most hidden parts of a nation's culture. Only few teachers include humour systematically into the educational process. Most of them are certain that students can learn less if they are laughing. The truth is quite the opposite. Laughter brings people closer together and therefore effects in the same way teachers and students (Seliskar, 1992). “Jokes have two parts the first two utterances form the set up and the final utterance functions as the punch, which contains an element of surprise. It is this surprise relationship between the set up and the punch that produces humour and makes the listener laugh” (Thakur, 2005). Jokes can be exploited to facilitate English Language Learning (ELL) through a variety of activities. The learners use language in a stress -free atmosphere.

**Anecdotes**

“Anecdotes are short, interesting or amusing stories about a real person or event. These stories are generally simple and easy to understand. Anecdotes are designed to launch or promote a moral or an ethical issue which is generally implied in the climax of the story. The moral of the story can be understood only by reading between and beyond the lines. Such an exercise activates and enriches the students thinking, feeling and sensibilities” (Thakur, 2005). EFL teachers can carefully select learner friendly anecdotes and design suitable activities within the framework of all the skills. These are unconventional, authentic and interesting to their users in ELT. Such activities are “the means through which individuals engage and manipulate both resources and their own ideas.” (Driscoll, 2002:1)
Stories

“Stories have power. They delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate, challenge. They help us understand. They imprint a picture in our minds. Consequently, stories often pack more punch than sermon. Want to make a point or raise an issue? Tell a story ….” (Litherland, 1991). Different types of stories from real world written by famous authors – detective, crisis stories- ‘some stories and situations involve complicated crisis/crises” (Thakur, 2005; Jose, 2008), etc can be used in ELT.

Pictures – cartoons, pictures of advertisements, optical illusions

Pictures are widely used in EFL/ESL lessons. However, the use of highly creative and imaginative pictures is unconventional. For example, cartoons conveying different messages, highly creative adverts-pictures, optical illusions, etc. “the humor, empathy and satire created in cartoon enable us to better understand the world” (Thakur, 2005). Advertisements are the most persuasive form of writing or illustrations. They promote imaginative and critical thinking of the audience, readers or viewers. Such materials can be very effectively incorporated into ELT for promoting independent learning -“the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.” (Scriven & Paul, 1992). Critical thinking as one of the thinking skills should be given much attention while designing and implementing ELT materials. Such unconventional pictures in ELT can promote the learners thinking skills.

Dramas and Poems

Classroom activities too often lack real “activity” as they do not involve much action or movement. “An excellent way to introduce action is through the production of a drama, a poem, or some other literary work. Students will likely make concrete advances with such a technique” (Doyum & Ozturk, 2006). When we combine language learning with creative products of language like dramas and poems, it adds variety to learners’ learning experience.

Sample EFL/ESL Classroom Activities

All the activities listed here are student-centred and teacher functions as a facilitator throughout. The pupils do the activities in pairs or in groups while the teacher is walking around the class monitoring the learner’s work and helping them where needed (Newbold, & Hutchinson, 2002). Teacher makes sure that learner autonomy and critical thinking skills are promoted through these activities. The authority of the tutor must be used to promote critical thinking and personal autonomy rather than to dictate conclusions (Kelly, 1995: 114). Studies found that self-competence and innovativeness were most closely related, and the activities should promote learner interaction giving opportunities to shy and slow learners to interact with their peers Marcinkiewicz (1994). As Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) point out that teachers who apply the concept of instructional conversations (Goldenberg, 1993; Perez, 1996; Stipek, 2002 & Williams, 2001) embrace the philosophy that talking and thinking go together, and assume that the student may have something to say beyond what the student's teacher or peer is thinking or already knows.
Activity 1

**Materials:** Different types of newspapers, tabloids, magazines, Venn diagram

**Aim:** To compare and contrast a newspaper with tabloids/another newspaper promoting critical thinking.

**Time:** 20 – 30 mts

**Step i.** Teacher divides the learners into different groups and distributes the materials such as used copies of *Times of Oman, Hi, The Week, Youth Observer* which are freely available in shopping complexes or college/school libraries. (*Teachers can use locally available materials suiting to their cultural context. The materials used here are in the context of Middle Eastern countries especially in an Omani context.*)

**Step ii.** A Venn diagram is given to each group to make notes about the differences and similarities between the two types of papers. The learners discuss and make notes.

![Venn diagram](Google Images)

**Step iii.** The students are asked to present their groups finding to the whole class taking turns.

**Step iv.** As an extension of the activities, students are asked to write a compare and contrast essay/paragraph about the two types of newspapers/tabloids/magazines using the notes from the Venn diagram.

**Implication:** The whole copies of newspapers and tabloids are unconventional in an ELT classroom except using excerpts from them at times. The variety of topics, pictures of different colors and themes, various writings, etc. keep the learners interested and motivated to read them. They involve in purposeful discussions and critical thinking while comparing and contrasting the given materials. Meanwhile, they are exposed to real life use of English.

Activity 2

**Materials:** Selected news articles or features from internet, newspapers, tabloids and so on which are enlarged and pasted on charts.

**Aim:** To promote reading strategies and skills using supplementary materials.
**Time:** 55-60 mts

**Step i.** The articles/features are displayed at different places on the class room walls.

**Step ii.** The learners in groups in groups are given pictures and captions in jumbled order corresponding to the articles/features.

**Step iii.** The learners are instructed to discuss and match the pictures with captions in their respective groups.

**Step iv.** The learners are instructed to match and paste the pictures and their captions with the article/feature put up on the wall. The members in each group take turns in matching and pasting the pictures and captions against each article/news item on the chart corners earmarked for each group by their group numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline/captions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** Matching captions/titles with untitled news articles.

**Step v.** Finally, the teacher moves around and checks the learners’ work.

**Implication:** It could be done as a warm up or pre-reading activity. There’s a lot of predicting/guessing, discussion, movement and fun in the learning experience appealing to learners with different learning styles. Learners work on their own to finish the task underlining the importance of learner autonomy and collaborative learning. An element of competition is also incorporated as each group races to finish the matching and pasting task. The group that finishes first correctly will be the winner!

**Extension:** The same articles could be later used for extensive reading (Bell, 2001; Cho & Krashen, 1994) tasks. Teachers can design and implement different tasks/exercises based on the articles which are familiarized to the students during steps i – v. A few comprehensive questions of different types could be set, about the articles, enabling the learners to use skimming, scanning and guessing strategies to carry out the reading effectively.

**Activity 3**

**Materials:** Parts of a news item or a story in jumbled order- missing the climax. Here the author has chosen a news items about Kennedy Assassination from the internet (www.kennedyassassinationarchive.com)

**Aim:** Promote independent language learning through integrated framework of skills (Jose J, 2008).

**Time:** 40 – 50 mts.
Step i. The learners are given jumbled parts (a-d) of an incomplete news items individually in groups of four. The learners are instructed not to read from each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After giving a speech in San Antonio in which he defended the Space program, attending a testimonial dinner for Representative Albert Thomas, D-Tex, in Houston and delivering a breakfast speech in Fort Worth, the couple arrived in Dallas.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The President and the First Lady climbed off of Air Force One at Love Field in Dallas and entered the Presidential Limousine, which was to take them to the Dallas Trade Mart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The motorcade would travel through downtown Dallas on a highly publicized route.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, were in Texas on a two-day trip to bolster support for Texas Democrats as they moved into the election season.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step ii. Each group member reads aloud his/her part to the rest of the group, taking turn. Listening to each other they reorder the parts to get the complete story.

Step iii. Teacher gives students the original version as shown below. The students compare their work with the original version by listening to the teacher or reading from the handouts distributed among them. The correct order is given below.

President Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, were in Texas on a two-day trip to bolster support for Texas Democrats as they moved into the election season. After giving a speech in San Antonio in which he defended the Space program, attending a testimonial dinner for Representative Albert Thomas, D-Tex, in Houston and delivering a breakfast speech in Fort Worth, the couple arrived in Dallas. The President and the First Lady climbed off of Air Force One at Love Field in Dallas and entered the Presidential Limousine, which was to take them to the Dallas Trade Mart. The motorcade would travel through downtown Dallas on a highly publicized route. Later ……………………………………….

(https://www.newspaperarchive.com)

Step iv. The learners are asked to discuss and complete the story climax in groups.

Step v. The group is asked to present their written climax to whole class. The group representatives present their group’s work.

Step vi. Teacher gives the original climax (as given below). The students compare their climax with the original story climax.
...at 12:30 PM as the motorcade was approaching Dealey Plaza, shots rang out. Three shots were fired in total, two of which struck the president, first in the throat and then in the head. President Kennedy died less than an hour later. (http://www.newspaperarchive.com)

**Step vii.** The learners are asked to suggest a suitable caption for the story/the news items.

**Implication:** It is an activity that integrates all skills using unconventional learning material as the example given above. They are interested and motivated to use such real news/story items in contrast to their graded course books/conventional learning materials. The strategies of implementing the activity at different levels keep the learners engaged at varying levels.

**Extension:** Learners can be asked to browse the Net or read book/newspapers to find similar news/story items of their interest. Important features of such a news article/story can be discussed. For example, a news item should have a title, place and date, lead in/intro, body, conclusion, etc..

**Activity 4**

**Aim:** To Promote critical and creative thinking enhancing speaking skills.

**Time:** 30 – 40 mts

**Materials:** Highly creative advertising pictures or pictures of optical illusion. (Here the writer has selected a few such pictures from <http://www.hemmy.net/2006/10/15/creative-advertisements-around-the-world>)

**Step i.** The participants/learners are given selected pictures of advertisement/optical illusion. They are instructed to guess and discuss what the pictures/adverts convey to them.

**Step ii.** Each group is asked to show their pictures to the class and explain/present different ideas about the picture discussed or expressed by the group members.

**Step iii.** The learners are asked to turn the reverse of the pictures to read and to know what exactly they convey or persuade the viewers or readers about. [*The original description of the pictures are printed/written on the reverse of each and sealed. The learners can break it open and read the texts.*]

**Implication:** The activity enhances creative and critical thinking skills which are essential for an independent learner or a thinker. It also encourages the learners to analyze and understand different pictures of adverts and other creative work which they find during their everyday lives and travels (Gu, & Johnson, 1996). Also, they are thrilled to discover some of the creative ideas of painting and advertising which they often ignore. The students involve in a lot of interaction using English. Effective teachers encourage their students’ participation in classroom discussions, welcome their contributions, and motivate them by such practices (Cazden, 2001; Stipek, 2002).

**Extension:** The learner could be asked to write what they’ve discussed. They may be asked to design and present some adverts which can be displayed on classroom walls on some topics of their interest. Later, they can be asked
to find some interesting pictures/adverts online or from newspapers/magazines and to describe them in writing. These pictures with their description could be added to the learner’s portfolio.

**Activity 5**

**Materials:** Captions/headlines from newspaper/magazines/tabloids/internet.

**Aim:** To promote critical and creative thinking using English as a medium of communication.

**Time:** 20 – 30 mts

**Step i.** The learners in groups are given sets of random-selected news captions/headlines from different newspapers. They are instructed to be highly interactive, creative and imaginative and to construct some meaningful collage of the given news captions. They can use any number of captions/headlines to form something meaningful or funny.

The following news captions which are randomly selected from various newspapers, magazines and tabloids are given to the learners in different groups. [The captions here are chosen from *Oman Daily, Youth Observer, the Week, Hi, Oman Daily and Times of Oman* in the writer’s context i.e. Oman. Teachers can use locally available materials for this task]

*Too Little Food for so many Mouths*

*I’m confident we can work well together*

*Country’s Poor Left behind by Blistering Growth*

*Off to a fresh start*

*Gulf Common Market from January 2008*

*Families have fun at the Muscat Club Sports Complex*

*Somali President hospitalized in ‘Serious Condition’: Source*

*Taking fear out of presentations*

*Shell organizes 3 Training Courses in Muscat, Salalah*

*Sarah Silverman love comedy*

*Female Suicide Bomber Strikes the Checkpoint*

*The World of Whales and Dolphins*
What do you know about alternative energy?

Smile and smile on

Oman through Other Eyes

Built to last – Amazing World of Engineering careers

Younis saves Pak with Century

IMF warns of Global Meltdown

Marriott owner launches fund to help victims’ kin

| a) | How to move a rig - Smile and smile on. |
| b) | Fish Exports to EU on the Rise: say the Minister - Country’s Poor Left behind by Blistering Growth |
| c) | Taking fear out of presentations - Female Suicide Bomber Strike the Check point - Somali President hospitalized in ‘Serious Condition’: Source. |
| d) | What do you know about alternative energy? - Smile and smile on. |
| e) | Muscat GCC meet start of a new economic era - Sarah Silverman love comedy. |

Table 2. Sample Collages prepared by the EFL learners

Fish Exports to EU on the Rise: say the Minister

Muscat GCC meet start of a new economic era

How to move a rig

Figure 3. Titles/ Captions for making meaningful collages.

Step ii. Each group is asked to present their ideas to the whole class. The learners present some funny, satirical or critical collages of given captions. The learners in groups or individuals have all freedom to make their own collages by explaining and interpreting what they have meant. A closer look at the following grouping or collages of given headlines will surely convey to us some fun, irony, satire or facts. A few examples of students’ work from one of the writer’s EFL lessons.

Implication: The learners work independently in groups. Using higher order of thinking skills - critical and creative - are used. The learners have a lot of fun, laugh and talk using real news captions. However, this activity is a bit challenging, and it is suitable for advanced or post-advanced level of learners. The activity undoubtedly
broadens the learners’ imagination and creativity (Robinson K, 2001). This also helps the learners to master the skill of ‘read between the lines and beyond the pages’ (Billings, G.L 1992).

Activity 6. Cracking Jokes in ELT

Humorous activities can be used as an introduction to a lesson; a starting point for a discussion, creative activity or project work; a means of help to relax the students and prepare them for more serious work; a device which enables students to concentrate their attention to one topic and a pleasant conclusion of a lesson (Seliskar 1992; Pecnk, 2001). Teachers can use jokes as warm-ups in ELT. They can ask the learners to share jokes in English in an ELT class. It can increase the rapport between the teacher and the learners. The following are two examples of jokes to highlight their significance in ELT classrooms.

(i)

**Teacher:** John. Give me a sentence beginning with ‘I’.

**John:** I is the...

**Teacher:** No, John. You must say “I am” not “I is.”

**John:** All right. I am the ninth letter of the alphabet. (Hutchinson 1985, 86)

(ii)

**Customer:** This restaurant must have a very clean kitchen.

**Waitress:** Thank you, sir. How do you know?

**Customer:** Everything tastes like soap. (Hutchinson 1987, 52)

Conclusion

To conclude, it is not simply the selection of unconventional materials that bring about variety to the lessons but how we design and implement them so as to promote autonomous language learning. The use of effective classroom management and learning strategies are also equally important for a successful exploitation of unconventional and authentic materials. “The real mastery of a teachers’ profession includes ability to approach the children’s world, to pay adequate attention to each child, to assign extra tasks to more capable learners, to encourage the weaker and to direct and lead their attention by co-experiencing. The condition of success is a teacher’s experience, kindness and sense of humour, as well.” (Čacka, O. 2000). Teachers can prepare a number of exercises and activities based on unconventional materials. Later, those activities could be used appropriately to meet the learners’ learning style (Felder R.M. & Brent, R., 2005). Over the years, teachers will have a bank of unconventional EFL/ESL teaching materials which will enable the learners to explore the real life situations independently using English as a means of communication with a goal of achieving autonomy in the field of English Language Learning (ELL) and beyond. A professional approach to ELT cannot do away with exploiting unconventional materials and their meaningful classroom application, facilitating learner autonomy in a learner-centered and learner-friendly atmosphere.
References


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