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ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS' CRITICAL THINKING AND ACADEMIC LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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Abstract:

The growing availability of English-language information has altered the educational meaning of foreign language proficiency. Secondary school learners are no longer expected merely to recognize grammatical structures, memorize lexical units, or reproduce model dialogues; they increasingly encounter a communicative environment in which they must understand information, distinguish relevant evidence from unsupported assertion, compare viewpoints, explain interpretations, and express reasoned positions in English. This change places critical thinking and academic language development in a close methodological relationship. The present study investigates the pedagogical potential of authentic materials for developing these capacities in secondary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Authenticity is considered not simply as the use of texts originally produced for native speakers, but as a relationship among the source, the communicative purpose, the learner, and the intellectual operation required by a classroom task. The study adopts a qualitative analytical and pedagogical-modelling methodology drawing on scholarship concerning authentic language materials, critical thinking, academic language, reading and listening pedagogy, and communicative foreign language education. It examines how appropriately selected real-world texts, public information materials, interviews, reports, infographics, short audio and video resources, announcements, reviews, and other naturally occurring English-



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language materials can be transformed into pedagogically manageable sources without reducing them to conventional comprehension exercises. The analysis identifies a progression from comprehension to interpretation, comparison, evaluation, synthesis, and reasoned production as the principal mechanism through which authentic input can support both linguistic and intellectual development. Particular attention is given to source selection, cognitive accessibility, lexical density, cultural transparency, scaffolding, questioning strategies, evidence-based discussion, and the transition from receptive processing to productive language use. The findings indicate that authentic materials become educationally productive when students are required not merely to locate information but to determine its significance, compare claims, justify conclusions, and reformulate information for a defined audience or purpose. A methodological model is consequently proposed in which authentic input functions as a common basis for the integrated development of reading, listening, vocabulary, discourse organization, argumentation, source awareness, and communicative independence. The article argues that critical thinking in EFL should not be treated as an additional abstract skill separated from language learning; rather, it can develop through carefully structured language activity in which learners use English to investigate, interpret, question, connect, and communicate meanings.

Keywords: authentic materials, EFL, critical thinking, academic language, secondary education, reading comprehension, evidence-based reasoning, language pedagogy, learner autonomy, English language teaching.



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Introduction

The place of authentic materials in foreign language education has been discussed for several decades, yet the contemporary information environment gives the question a different urgency. Learners now meet English not only in textbooks and examinations but in websites, public notices, short videos, interviews, digital media, educational platforms, product information, infographics, news reports, reviews, instructions, social communication, and an expanding range of multimodal texts. Exposure, however, should not be confused with understanding. Access to large amounts of English does not automatically develop the capacity to interpret information critically, and the ability to translate individual sentences does not necessarily enable a learner to identify a writer's purpose, distinguish a central claim from supporting detail, compare competing explanations, recognize uncertainty, or construct a reasoned response. This distinction is particularly important in secondary education because school language learning occupies an intermediate position between foundational linguistic development and the more demanding forms of reading, writing, discussion, and information use that students encounter in further education and adult life. An EFL curriculum that focuses predominantly on correct forms may produce knowledge that is useful but insufficiently transferable, whereas an approach based entirely on unrestricted exposure to real-world English may overwhelm learners whose linguistic resources are still developing. The pedagogical problem therefore lies not in choosing between textbook language and authentic language as mutually exclusive alternatives, but in determining how authentic materials can be selected, mediated, and transformed into learning experiences that simultaneously develop language competence and intellectual engagement. The term "authentic material" itself requires caution. In language pedagogy it has often been used to describe material created for purposes other



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than language instruction, but authenticity is not adequately explained by origin alone. A newspaper article remains an authentic public text in terms of provenance, yet a classroom activity asking learners only to underline ten past-tense verbs may remove much of the communicative purpose for which the text was created. Conversely, a teacher may select a short real-world announcement and design a task in which learners must interpret its implications, compare it with another source, and make a decision; here the pedagogical activity preserves something of the original relationship between language, information, and action. Gilmore's examination of authenticity in language learning shows that the concept has been associated with several dimensions, including text, participants, social situation, and the purposes attached to language use (Gilmore, 2007). For secondary school teaching, this broader understanding is useful because it prevents authentic materials from becoming a decorative category. The educational value of a text lies not merely in the fact that it was found outside a textbook, but in what students are required to do with it. This issue becomes particularly significant when authentic materials are connected with critical thinking. Critical thinking is sometimes introduced into language lessons through isolated questions such as "What do you think?" or "Do you agree?" Such questions can stimulate participation, but opinion alone is not equivalent to critical thought. A learner who states a preference without giving reasons, examining evidence, or considering alternatives has communicated, yet the intellectual demand remains limited. Critical engagement requires a more disciplined relationship between information and judgment. Facione's influential account of critical thinking identifies interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation among its central cognitive components (Facione, 1990). Although such categories were not developed specifically for EFL classrooms, they provide a useful conceptual basis for



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understanding why certain language tasks are cognitively richer than others. When students compare two short sources, identify the evidence supporting each claim, determine which information is relevant to a defined question, explain discrepancies, or revise an initial conclusion after encountering additional evidence, they are using language in ways that require both comprehension and reasoning. Academic language development is closely related to this process. In the present study, academic language is not restricted to highly specialized terminology or university-level writing. At secondary-school level it includes the linguistic resources needed to define, classify, compare, explain cause and effect, express degrees of certainty, distinguish fact from interpretation, introduce evidence, connect ideas, summarize information, qualify claims, and present conclusions in an organized manner. These functions are central to educational discourse across subjects and become increasingly important as students progress through school. Cummins' distinction between conversational language and cognitively demanding academic language has historically drawn attention to the fact that everyday communicative fluency and academic linguistic proficiency do not develop in identical ways (Cummins, 2000). In EFL contexts, the distinction should not be treated as an absolute division, but it highlights a genuine pedagogical challenge: students who can participate in familiar social exchanges may still find it difficult to explain a process, synthesize two texts, justify an inference, or formulate a cautious conclusion in English. Authentic materials can provide a productive context for these functions because real-world texts normally exist to inform, persuade, instruct, entertain, warn, describe, evaluate, or prompt action. Their discourse therefore contains relationships among ideas that isolated sentences cannot adequately reproduce. Yet authentic input also creates difficulties. Vocabulary may be dense, syntax may be compressed, cultural references may be unfamiliar, assumed background knowledge may be



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absent, and audio or video may contain natural speed, accent variation, hesitation, or overlapping information. If authenticity is treated as an educational virtue independent of learner readiness, the material can become inaccessible and reduce rather than increase meaningful participation. The methodological question is consequently one of mediation. How can a teacher preserve the informational and communicative integrity of an authentic source while making the cognitive and linguistic work achievable for learners? This study addresses that question through an integrated model connecting authentic input with critical inquiry and academic language production. Its central premise is that simplification should occur primarily through task design, support, selection, sequencing, and purpose rather than through excessive rewriting of the source itself. Learners do not need to understand every lexical item in order to work intelligently with a text; they need to understand enough to perform a meaningful operation. This distinction changes the teacher's role from explaining all unfamiliar language before reading to creating conditions in which students learn to identify what information matters, tolerate manageable uncertainty, infer meaning, use contextual evidence, consult appropriate support, and return to the text for a reason. The research problem arises from a common discrepancy in school EFL education: curricula increasingly emphasize communication, independent thinking, and functional literacy, while classroom reading and listening may still be dominated by reproduction of information explicitly stated in instructional texts. The aim of this article is therefore to determine the pedagogical conditions under which authentic materials can be used to develop critical thinking and academic language skills simultaneously and to formulate a methodological model suitable for secondary-school EFL classrooms. The study proceeds from the assumption that language learning becomes intellectually richer when learners are not simply asked whether they have understood a text, but are given a reason to examine what the text



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means, how its information is organized, what evidence it provides, how it relates to another source, and how its content can be responsibly communicated to others.

Materials and Methods

The research was designed as a qualitative theoretical and pedagogical study rather than as an experimental investigation claiming measurable gains among a particular group of students. This choice was determined by the objective of constructing and substantiating a methodological model that can subsequently be tested in classroom-based empirical research. The study combined conceptual analysis, comparative pedagogical analysis, functional examination of authentic materials, cognitive classification of learning tasks, and methodological modelling. The conceptual stage examined four intersecting areas: authenticity in language education, critical thinking as disciplined interpretation and evaluation, academic language as a set of linguistic resources for knowledge construction, and scaffolding as temporary instructional support enabling learners to perform cognitively demanding work that would otherwise exceed their current independent capacity. These areas were not treated as separate theoretical topics but as elements of a common instructional problem. The analytical unit was defined as the relationship among a source, a learner, a task, and an expected communicative product. This relationship was selected because no material is pedagogically effective in isolation. The same authentic text can support superficial recall in one lesson and sophisticated reasoning in another depending on the questions, support, interaction, and output built around it. For methodological purposes, potential authentic materials were grouped according to communicative function rather than medium alone: informational materials such as notices, schedules, short reports and public information pages; explanatory materials presenting processes or causes; evaluative materials such



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as reviews and recommendations; persuasive materials including advertisements and opinion-oriented texts; narrative or experiential materials such as interviews and personal accounts; and multimodal materials combining verbal information with graphs, images, icons, maps, or numerical data. Selection was guided by six criteria: relevance to the learners' age and educational experience, connection with curricular themes, manageable conceptual load, sufficient linguistic accessibility to permit partial independent processing, potential for more than one cognitive operation, and absence of unnecessary content that would make classroom use ethically or pedagogically unsuitable. Difficulty was not equated with the number of unknown words. Instead, the analysis considered lexical frequency, sentence structure, discourse organization, cultural assumptions, density of propositions, visual support, topic familiarity, length, and the amount of inference demanded by the task. This distinction is methodologically important because a short text with implicit cultural assumptions can be more difficult than a longer text whose structure and topic are familiar. The proposed model organizes classroom work through five interconnected phases: orientation, purposeful comprehension, analytical engagement, evidence-based production, and reflective language consolidation. Orientation establishes the reason for approaching the source. Rather than beginning with extensive vocabulary explanation, the teacher introduces the situation, activates essential background knowledge, clarifies the task, and supplies only the linguistic support without which meaningful entry into the material would be impossible. Purposeful comprehension then requires learners to read, view, or listen for information connected with a defined problem. The task may involve identifying options, reconstructing a sequence, locating evidence, determining a speaker's position, matching information with needs, or distinguishing main ideas from secondary details. Analytical engagement moves beyond retrieval. Learners compare



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information, identify relationships, test interpretations, classify claims, examine reasons, detect inconsistencies, or consider what information is missing. Evidence-based production requires students to transform understanding into language of their own through discussion, a short analytical paragraph, an oral explanation, a recommendation, a comparison, a summary for a specified audience, or another communicative product. Reflective consolidation then focuses attention on the linguistic resources that enabled or restricted successful reasoning: comparison structures, causal connectors, reporting verbs, hedging expressions, evaluative vocabulary, reference devices, lexical collocations, or grammatical forms associated with explanation and argumentation. This final phase is important because cognitively demanding tasks do not automatically produce accurate academic language. Learners may understand a complex issue while lacking the resources to express their reasoning precisely. The model therefore avoids the assumption that critical thinking should replace language instruction. Instead, reasoning creates a functional demand for language, and subsequent language work strengthens the learner's capacity to satisfy that demand. Question design was analysed according to cognitive function. Retrieval questions ask learners to locate explicit information; interpretive questions require explanation of meaning or relationships; comparative questions demand examination of similarities and differences; inferential questions ask learners to reach a conclusion from available evidence; evaluative questions require judgment according to stated criteria; and transfer questions require information to be reformulated for a new situation or audience. These categories were arranged as a flexible progression rather than a rigid hierarchy. A classroom may move backwards and forwards between them because evaluation often requires renewed retrieval and interpretation. The role of interaction was also considered. Individual reading or listening allows students to construct an initial



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understanding, while pair and group discussion exposes that understanding to alternative interpretations. Collaborative reasoning becomes educationally useful when learners must refer back to evidence rather than simply vote for a preferred answer. Accordingly, the proposed discussion procedure requires students to indicate where an idea came from, explain why a piece of information is relevant, or distinguish what the source states directly from what they have inferred. Such procedures help integrate language learning with elementary source literacy without requiring secondary students to engage in advanced academic research practices. Scaffolding was conceptualized as adjustable rather than permanent. Possible support includes headings, visual organizers, a restricted glossary, guiding questions, sentence openings, discourse frames, partial models, note-taking grids, and strategic first-language clarification where necessary. Support should decrease as learners become more capable of performing the operation independently. This principle prevents scaffolding from turning into scripting. A student who merely fills predetermined phrases into a template may produce formally academic-looking language without exercising significant judgment. Assessment within the model therefore considers both the quality of communication and the relationship between claims and source information. Relevant dimensions include comprehension of essential content, relevance of selected evidence, clarity of explanation, coherence, ability to distinguish evidence from personal response, appropriate use of academic language resources, interaction with alternative viewpoints, and linguistic accuracy appropriate to learner level. The study deliberately does not report numerical gains, participant counts, experimental groups, questionnaires, or statistical significance because no empirical intervention was conducted for this article. The results presented below derive from the systematic methodological analysis and



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modelling described here. This distinction is essential for academic integrity and establishes a clear basis for future empirical validation.

Results

The analysis resulted in a methodological framework showing that authentic materials contribute most effectively to EFL development when classroom activity moves beyond exposure and creates a sequence of intellectual and linguistic transformations. The first finding concerns the distinction between authentic input and authentic engagement. Bringing a real-world text into a classroom does not by itself alter the nature of learning. If students read an authentic article only to answer questions whose responses can be copied word for word from individual sentences, the material may remain linguistically genuine while the learning process is cognitively narrow. Authentic engagement begins when the source is treated as information produced for a purpose and learners must respond to that purpose or reinterpret the information for another meaningful purpose. For example, a public transport timetable can become the basis for choosing the most suitable route under specified constraints; two short reviews can be compared to recommend an option for a particular person; an infographic can be interpreted to explain a trend; an interview can be examined to distinguish experience from general claim; and two short reports on the same issue can be used to identify common information and differences in emphasis. In each case, comprehension becomes necessary but not sufficient. The learner must transform information. The second finding is that critical thinking becomes more manageable in EFL when it is operationalized through observable language actions. Abstract instructions to “think critically” provide little pedagogical guidance. In contrast, asking students to compare, classify, justify, infer, rank according to criteria, identify evidence, distinguish statement from interpretation,



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or explain why two sources differ creates a visible intellectual operation and simultaneously generates a linguistic need. Comparison requires expressions of similarity and contrast; causal analysis requires connectors and causal verbs; evaluation requires criteria and evaluative language; inference requires expressions indicating probability or evidential caution; synthesis requires cohesive devices and reporting structures. Critical thinking and academic language therefore need not compete for lesson time. Properly designed tasks make each one a condition for the other. The third finding concerns the progression from receptive to productive work. Authentic materials are often used mainly to improve reading or listening, after which the lesson moves to an unrelated grammar or speaking activity. The model developed in this study instead treats receptive input as a source for subsequent production. Learners first construct an understanding, then use that understanding to speak or write for a defined purpose. This transition is important because productive language based on a source differs from free personal conversation. Students must preserve relevant meaning while reorganizing it, which encourages paraphrase, summarization, reporting, and discourse control. These are foundational academic language practices. The fourth finding is that lexical difficulty can be managed without translating or pre-teaching every unfamiliar word. When students know what information they are looking for, they can learn to distinguish words that are essential for task completion from those that can temporarily remain unknown. A selective glossary may be provided for low-frequency items central to meaning, while other vocabulary can be approached through context, morphology, visual information, peer discussion, or strategic dictionary use. This method also changes learners' expectations about reading. Instead of believing that successful comprehension requires complete lexical knowledge, they begin to develop tolerance for uncertainty and strategic attention. The fifth finding



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relates to the use of multiple sources. A single text can support interpretation, but even a modest pairing of sources substantially increases opportunities for reasoning. Two sources create the possibility of comparison, corroboration, contradiction, perspective, and synthesis. The sources need not be lengthy. For intermediate secondary learners, two short texts, an infographic and a paragraph, or a brief video segment and a written notice may provide sufficient material for meaningful comparison. The cognitive value comes from the relationship between sources rather than from volume. The sixth finding concerns questioning. A sequence dominated by literal comprehension tends to position the teacher as the owner of answers. When questions gradually require interpretation and justification, students must assume greater responsibility for meaning. The most productive questions are not necessarily those with no correct answer; rather, they are questions for which a response must be supported. “Which option is better?” can remain superficial if students simply state preferences. “Which option better satisfies these three conditions, and what information supports your decision?” changes the epistemic structure of the task because judgment becomes accountable to evidence. The seventh finding is that authentic materials provide a natural environment for teaching degrees of certainty. School learners often write claims in absolute form because they lack linguistic resources for qualification. Real-world texts frequently contain expressions such as “may,” “appears to,” “is likely to,” “according to,” “suggests,” or “in some cases,” which allow teachers to draw attention to how responsible claims are linguistically limited. Such language is central to academic discourse because not all conclusions carry the same evidential strength. The eighth finding concerns multimodality. Contemporary authentic communication frequently combines words with images, charts, layout, icons, numerical information, or audio-visual cues. Learners therefore need to understand how meaning is distributed across



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modes. An infographic, for instance, should not be treated merely as decoration accompanying a reading text. Students can be asked what information is communicated visually, what requires verbal explanation, whether the title accurately represents the data, or how they would convert the visual information into a short oral account. This work supports both language development and information literacy. The ninth finding concerns differentiation. Authentic materials do not have to be reserved for advanced learners. Difficulty can be adjusted through task demand and scaffolding while retaining the same source. Less proficient students may identify essential information and explain one comparison using a language frame; more proficient learners may evaluate limitations, synthesize several details, or produce a more independent response. The intellectual subject matter can therefore remain shared across the class. Finally, the analysis demonstrates that authentic-material pedagogy is strongest when a lesson ends not with the source but with the learner's own communicative product. A text has then served as intellectual material from which students construct something: a reasoned recommendation, an explanatory paragraph, a comparison, a short presentation, a revised interpretation, or a decision. This transformation represents the central methodological result of the study. Authenticity becomes educationally significant when learners move from consuming language to using information through language.

Discussion

The findings require a reconsideration of several assumptions surrounding authentic materials in EFL education. The first is the belief that authenticity is inherently beneficial. Real-world materials can expose learners to natural discourse, varied vocabulary, meaningful genres, and contemporary communicative practices, but these qualities do not guarantee learning. Gilmore



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(2007) demonstrated the conceptual complexity surrounding authenticity and noted the range of meanings attached to the term in language education. The present analysis supports the view that pedagogical authenticity must be considered relationally. A source, a learner, an activity, and a purpose interact. This explains why a carefully selected short notice may generate more meaningful language work than a sophisticated newspaper article chosen primarily because it looks “authentic.” The second issue concerns simplification. Teachers understandably simplify materials when learners struggle, but simplification can occur at different levels. Linguistic rewriting reduces complexity in the source; pedagogical scaffolding reduces difficulty in the learner’s interaction with the source. The latter often preserves more of the original discourse and provides opportunities for strategic comprehension. This does not imply that texts should never be adapted. Material containing excessive low-frequency vocabulary, inaccessible cultural assumptions, inappropriate content, or unnecessarily complicated syntax may require editing or replacement. The principle is proportionality: adaptation should remove barriers that are irrelevant to the learning objective without eliminating the very features learners need to learn to manage. The third issue is the relationship between language proficiency and critical thinking. It is easy to misinterpret limited English as limited reasoning. A learner may possess a sophisticated idea but lack the vocabulary or syntax needed to express it in the target language. Conversely, fluent speech can create an impression of strong reasoning even when claims are weakly supported. EFL pedagogy must therefore distinguish intellectual demand from linguistic demand while designing support that allows them to develop together. This distinction has important implications for assessment. If students are asked to evaluate two sources but are graded almost exclusively on grammar, the assessment does not correspond to the task. If reasoning is assessed while linguistic development is



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ignored, the activity loses part of its value as language education. A balanced approach evaluates whether learners understand relevant information, construct a defensible response, organize it coherently, and use increasingly precise English to communicate it. The fourth issue concerns academic language. Secondary EFL teaching sometimes postpones academic discourse until learners reach an advanced level, yet many of its fundamental functions can be developed much earlier. A learner does not need advanced proficiency to distinguish “I think” from “the text states,” to use “because” more precisely, to compare two pieces of information, or to qualify a claim with “may.” These apparently small distinctions are educationally important because they teach learners to signal the source and strength of their statements. As proficiency increases, the same functions can be realized through more sophisticated language: “according to the report,” “the evidence suggests,” “in contrast,” “one possible explanation is,” “this conclusion is limited by,” and related expressions. Academic language can thus be understood developmentally rather than as a specialized register introduced suddenly in later education. The fifth issue is source evaluation. In a digital environment, learners frequently encounter information whose reliability varies considerably. Secondary EFL lessons are not substitutes for full courses in media literacy, but authentic materials provide opportunities to establish basic habits of source awareness. Students can be taught to ask who produced a text, for what purpose, when it was produced, what evidence is offered, and whether another source confirms the information. Such questions should remain appropriate to age and language level. Their value lies less in teaching students to label every source as “true” or “false” than in establishing the expectation that information has provenance and that claims can be examined. The sixth issue concerns cultural content. Authentic English-language materials inevitably carry cultural assumptions. This can enrich language education, but cultural difference should



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not be presented as an exotic spectacle or as evidence that one social practice is inherently superior to another. Comparative tasks are more educationally responsible when they ask learners to understand context, identify similarities and differences, and explain how language functions within particular situations. This also supports sociolinguistic competence because learners see that expressions, politeness conventions, humor, formality, and communicative expectations are context-dependent. The seventh issue is the teacher's position in a critically oriented classroom. Encouraging critical thinking does not require the teacher to withdraw from knowledge or treat every interpretation as equally defensible. Students need intellectual freedom, but they also need standards of evidence, relevance, coherence, and linguistic clarity. The teacher's role is therefore to create conditions in which claims can be questioned without turning classroom discussion into unsupported debate. Asking "What in the source makes you think that?" is pedagogically more useful than immediately accepting or rejecting a learner's conclusion because it returns attention to reasoning. Likewise, when students disagree, the aim is not to identify a winning opinion but to improve the quality of explanation. This approach can also make speaking activities more inclusive. Learners who are less socially assertive may participate more confidently when discussion is anchored in shared material rather than requiring immediate personal disclosure or spontaneous opinion. The eighth issue is time. Authentic-material lessons may appear demanding because source selection and task design require preparation. Yet they need not occupy an entire unit or involve lengthy texts. A single advertisement, timetable, short review, graph, announcement, or sixty-second audio extract can support meaningful analytical work when the task is carefully formulated. Repeated use of a stable methodological routine can also reduce preparation: identify the purpose, extract essential information, compare or interpret it, justify a response, and reflect on



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useful language. Once learners become familiar with such routines, more lesson time can be devoted to independent processing. The ninth issue is progression. Critical thinking should not be introduced through sudden high-level demands. Learners can move gradually from locating evidence to explaining relationships, from comparing explicit details to making supported inferences, and from expressing personal preferences to evaluating according to criteria. Linguistic support should develop alongside this progression. In early stages, a teacher may provide phrases such as “Both sources show...,” “The main difference is...,” or “This information suggests....” Later, students can be expected to select their own discourse resources and formulate more nuanced claims. The broader implication is that critical thinking in EFL is not a separate content area competing with grammar, vocabulary, reading, or speaking. It is a way of organizing what learners do with language. Grammar becomes functional when it helps express relationships accurately; vocabulary becomes intellectually useful when it enables distinctions; reading becomes active when information is interpreted rather than merely located; speaking becomes more than fluency practice when claims require reasons; and writing becomes purposeful when students synthesize information for an audience. This integration is particularly relevant to secondary education, where teachers face limited instructional time. Instead of adding a separate “critical thinking” component, existing language objectives can be embedded in tasks requiring meaningful intellectual operations. The present study nevertheless has limitations. Its conclusions are methodological rather than experimentally causal. It does not establish that a particular number of lessons with authentic materials will produce a quantifiable increase in critical thinking or academic language proficiency. Such claims would require longitudinal classroom research with clearly defined participants, instruments, comparison procedures, and transparent analysis. Future studies could examine how learners



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at different proficiency levels respond to different types of authentic sources, which scaffolds are gradually internalized, whether evidence-based discussion improves the quality of written argumentation, and how teachers balance source complexity with curriculum requirements. Classroom recordings, learner texts, stimulated recall, teacher journals, and performance-based assessment could provide richer evidence than reliance on self-report questionnaires alone. Local research is particularly necessary because the effectiveness of any methodological model depends on curriculum, class size, access to materials, teacher preparation, and students' prior experience with independent reasoning. The value of the present model lies in making these variables visible and offering a principled structure through which authentic materials can be used not as occasional enrichment but as a disciplined resource for language and thought.

Conclusion

Authentic materials have substantial pedagogical potential in secondary school EFL education, but their value cannot be reduced to exposure to “real English.” Their strongest contribution emerges when they become sources for purposeful interpretation, comparison, evaluation, synthesis, and communication. The methodological analysis undertaken in this study indicates that critical thinking and academic language can develop together when learners are asked to perform intellectually meaningful operations through English and when linguistic support is connected directly with those operations. This relationship changes the function of authentic input. A report, notice, interview, review, infographic, public information text, or short audiovisual resource ceases to be merely an alternative reading or listening passage and becomes material for constructing knowledge. Students identify what is relevant, examine relationships among ideas, distinguish source information from their own interpretation, compare evidence, formulate



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conclusions, and communicate those conclusions in language appropriate to their level. Such work develops not only comprehension but also the foundations of academic discourse: explanation, comparison, causal reasoning, qualification, source attribution, coherence, and evidence-based argumentation. The study has also shown that authentic materials must be selected and mediated carefully. Excessive linguistic or cultural difficulty can prevent meaningful engagement, whereas excessive simplification can remove the discourse features that make the source educationally valuable. A balanced approach therefore preserves the communicative integrity of the material while adjusting task demands, background support, vocabulary assistance, interaction patterns, and expected output. Scaffolding is most effective when it enables performance without replacing learner judgment and when it can gradually be reduced as independence develops. The teacher remains essential throughout this process, not as the sole interpreter of a text but as the designer of intellectual conditions, provider of strategic support, guide to relevant linguistic resources, and facilitator of evidence-based discussion. The resulting classroom differs from both traditional comprehension work and unrestricted conversation. Students are expected to understand, but also to explain how they understand; they are encouraged to express opinions, but also to justify them; they encounter unfamiliar language, but learn to decide which linguistic gaps matter; and they produce English not merely to demonstrate a structure but to communicate a reasoned interpretation. For secondary school EFL education, this approach offers a practical route towards connecting language competence with the broader educational capacity to work responsibly with information. Its implementation does not require every lesson to use lengthy real-world texts or sophisticated digital resources. Even modest authentic materials can support substantial learning when the intellectual purpose is clear and the task requires transformation rather than reproduction of



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information. The principal conclusion is therefore that authenticity should be understood not as a property that a teacher imports into the classroom by selecting a particular text, but as a quality of the learner's engagement with language, information, purpose, and audience. When authentic materials are used within a structured progression from purposeful comprehension to analysis, evidence-based production, and reflective language consolidation, they can help learners become not only more capable users of English but also more independent readers, listeners, speakers, and writers who approach information with greater attention, precision, and intellectual responsibility.

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