English Education Students' Perceptions of Using Authentic Materials to Enhance Critical Thinking in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study explores English teachers' perspectives on the use of authentic texts in language learning. It aims to provide a clear understanding of how teachers perceive and apply authentic texts in various classroom contexts. The research focuses on identifying teachers' attitudes, strategies, and challenges in integrating authentic materials into teaching practices. The urgency of this research is located on the increasing demand for 21st-century education that develops students' abilities to think critically, solve problems, and apply knowledge in real-life contexts. A qualitative descriptive approach is employed, using an open-ended questionnaire as the main instrument to capture teachers' experiences and perspectives. The collected data will be analyzed thematically to reveal patterns and key issues emerging from teachers' responses. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by offering insights into effective and contextual English language teaching. Furthermore, the study benefits pre-service teachers, especially seventh-semester students of English Education programs, by helping them connect theoretical knowledge with real classroom practices. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and teaching reality in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Critical thinking skills; Authentic materials; Teachers' perspectives

1.   INTRODUCTION

The 21st century requires students to have important skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and especially critical thinking. Critical thinking is one of the main skills that helps learners understand,

analyze, and solve real-life problems effectively (Herlinawati et al., 2024). In response to the growing complexity of real-world challenges, critical thinking has emerged as an important competency that assist students evaluate information critically and provide appropriate decisions in diverse condition (PRAKONG, 2024). Awareness of the challenges in fostering critical thinking through authentic materials is crucial for pre-service teachers in their seventh semester'.

In this context, English Education Students' demands to direct EFL learners to develop communicative competence, which refers to the ability to use suitable language in real-life situations to address global challenges particularly to verify information, express ideas clearly, and interact effectively by negotiating meaning with others.(Chamba et al., 2019). As a result English Education Students' required to provide variety of activities such as problem-solving, interactive, and creative tasks (Alamri, 2025). In addition, they may integrate authentic texts. For Example: news articles, opinion pieces, podcasts, speeches, short stories, and advertisements. (Sheraliyevna, 2025).

In the context of authentic text, Gilmore (2009) argue that language which naturally occuring samples created for genuine communicative purposes. Lytvynko et al. (2025) states that Authentic texts play significant role to enhance learners' interest in learning a foreign language by connecting real examples of English use with their practical communication in modern contexts. Hence, The materials selected by teachers required mirror natural use to represent relevant cultural contexts, as typically manifested in everyday conversations among native speakers (Febrina, 2022). To develop critical thinking skills, students require exposure to authentic materials. This exposure enables EFL learners to engage with complex ideas, interpret information critically, and evaluate diverse perspectives.

Implementing critical thinking in the classroom is often challenging because many learning environments are still dominated by teacher-centered practices. Teachers may want to promote higher-order thinking, but time limitations, rigid curricula, and pressure to cover exam-related content make it difficult to design activities that encourage deeper analysis or problem-solving.(PRAKONG, 2024) Although authentic texts have strong potential to stimulate critical thinking by exposing students to real-world issues, arguments, and perspectives, many teachers feel

unprepared to use them effectively (Al-Shammari, 2021). Authentic materials often require additional scaffolding, vocabulary preparation, and guiding questions, which teachers may not have time to develop (Huda, 2017). As a result, teachers tend to rely on factual or recall-based questions, especially in large classes, rather than facilitating discussions that would help learners interpret, evaluate, or critique the ideas found in authentic sources.

Ran (2025) explore that critical thinking is fundamental for EFL learners to enhance academic and personal growth. From English Education Students' Perceptions perspectives, the use of authentic materials presents challenges that require careful planning and adaptation to align with learners' proficiency levels and classroom objectives. Sajidin (2025) argue that developing critical thinking skills in EFL classrooms is challenging due to learners' limited exposure to authentic language, but the integration of carefully selected authentic materials can enhance their analytical and evaluative abilities. Moreover, encouraging active participation among EFL learners with diverse background knowledge represents a significant challenge for teachers in the implementation of authentic texts within the classroom context (Andjani et al., 2024). In today's globalized environment, EFL instruction plays a pivotal role in equipping learners with the skills necessary for academic and professional communication. Listyani (2022) stated that future educators particularly English education students need to comprehend the pedagogical challenges and develop effective instructional strategies that enable the integration of authentic texts to foster critical thinking in EFL classrooms.

The focus of this study is to investigate English education students' perception on the use of authentic texts in the classroom. It is particularly interested in the challenges they experience and the strategies they adopt to enhance students' critical thinking abilities. The main objective of this study is to investigate English education students' perspectives on the use of authentic texts in fostering critical thinking skills among EFL learners. This research emphasizes the identification of challenges encountered and strategies employed by pre-service teachers in implementing authentic materials effectively within the classroom context. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are English education students' perspectives on the use of authentic texts to enhance learners' critical thinking skills?
2. What challenges and strategies do they identify in implementing authentic texts in EFL classrooms?

The results are expected to improve comprehension of how future teachers perceive and respond to the use of authentic materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, potentially enhancing their teaching competence and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical thinking requires more than linguistic competence; it demands the ability to guide learners in analysing information, evaluating arguments, and forming reasoned opinions. (Nejmaoui, 2018). However, implementing such approaches can be challenging, including selecting suitable materials, adapting texts to students' proficiency levels and aligning them with curricular expectations (Natasya & Kembaren, 2025). English education students' perspectives are crucial in determining how authenticity is perceived and impl\emented in the classroom, as their beliefs influence the selection of materials and the strategies they plan to use in fostering students' critical thinking.(Huda, 2017). he following review examines English education students' perspectives, challenges, and learning strategies in implementing authentic texts, emphasizing their essential role as reflective pre-service teachers who actively foster students' critical thinking development.

2.1. English Education Students perspectives in the EFL Context

English education students, particularly those in their seventh semester, play an important role in preparing to become effective EFL teachers (Aslamia, 2023). As pre-service teachers, they are expected to understand not only language skills but also how to design lessons that promote students' critical thinking (Yuan, 2023). Recent studies highlight that teacher education programs should focus more on developing pedagogical competence, reflective practice, and the ability to use authentic materials meaningfully in the classroom (Pusparini et al., 2021). Another essential aspect is the enhancing of critical thinking skills both for students and pre-service teachers themselves. Suarcaya et al.(2023) explore that while English education students understand the concept of critical thinking, they often struggle to implement it effectively in

classroom tasks. Through these activities, they can strengthen their instructional strategies and become more confident in implementing authentic texts that promote students' critical thinking. As future teachers, their perspectives, beliefs, and readiness play a crucial role in shaping how authenticity and critical thinking are integrated into EFL classrooms (Hamdi, 2023).

2.2. Teaching English Materials

Teaching materials have a significant impact on both the content taught by teachers and the way in which students learn. Recent studies demonstrate that teaching materials have expanded beyond printed textbooks to integrate teacher-created resources, online materials, and task activities that combine various skills. This change has an impact on the design, implementation and evaluation of teaching materials in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2020). It has been found by studies that engagement can be increased and learners can be exposed to multimodal language if digital authentic materials. For example: videos, social media posts, online articles are combined with classroom work. Simultaneously, educators require resources to assist them in cultivating digital competence and evaluating sources, ensuring that students are not overwhelmed by untrustworthy content. (Gabdullina, 2024). The existing literature highlights lacunae and the requirements for future development. There is a demand for more practical studies measuring long-term learning gains from authentic and task-based materials, as well as further research into the impact of digital materials on different groups of learners. There is also a need for practical guides to assist teachers in efficiently designing, adapting and assessing modern materials. (Treve, 2024). The concept of using authentic materials has seen a significant jump in popularity in recent years. Materials such as news articles, videos, podcasts and social media posts allow students to experience English as it is used in the real world. students are more motivated when using authentic, meaningful content. However, teachers must guide them carefully through challenging vocabulary and cultural references. (Jannah et al., 2025)

2.3. The Concept of Authentic Materials

As citated in Huda (2017) Authentic materials is the one of the idea to introduce the learners in real-world communication. As put in Chamba et al. (2019) Authentic materials are commonly grouped into three main

categories, encompassing audio/visual, visual, and written types. The audio and visual category includes TV commercials, quiz shows, video clips, cartoons, movies, soap operas, and radio programs or advertisements. The visual category consists of photographs, pictures, children's drawings, street signs, postcards, magazine images, and stamps. Meanwhile, the written category covers various text types such as newspaper articles, song lyrics, restaurant menus, sports news, advice columns, and movie advertisements. Moreover Mestari & Malabar, (2017) explain that The use of authentic materials in language teaching has existed for a long time, starting from the introduction of the communicative approach in the 1970s. These materials are recognized for their benefits in helping EFL students learn English more effectively.

Gebhard, (2023) The book provides a comparison between the advantages and Disadvantages of Authentic text:

Aspect	Advantages	Disadvantages
Real language exposure	Authentic materials help students experience real English as it is used in daily life.	The language may be too difficult or confusing for lower-level learners.
Connection to real world	Students can learn about current topics and real situations happening around them.	Some topics may not match students' background or interests.
Flexibility	One material can be used for different lessons or skills.	Teachers need time to prepare and adapt the material.
Student motivation	Authentic materials make learning more interesting and meaningful.	Some materials can be outdated or no longer relevant, such as old news articles.
Cultural learning	Students can learn about culture and daily life in English-speaking countries.	Cultural differences may make some materials hard to understand.

2.4. The Integration of Critical Thinking in EFL Classroom Practices
Critical thinking allows students to question ideas, examine information carefully, and make well-reasoned decisions, all of which are

important for meaningful language communication. As stated by Ennis, (1991) critical thinking involves purposeful and reflective reasoning that relies on evidence, enabling learners to think more independently and evaluate ideas effectively. Critical thinking involves using doubt or scepticism carefully and wisely, based on one's experience, so that it helps find better answers or deeper understanding of a problem. In other words, scepticism in critical thinking should be reasonable and guided by the rules and standards of the specific field. Simply asking questions is not the same as thinking critically, since many questions only seek information rather than deeper analysis (Weinstein, 1985). Specifically, Critical thinking divided into five essential skills. To begin with, it involves recognizing the distinction between personal opinions and factual evidence. Furthermore, it requires the ability to provide sufficient and relevant evidence to justify one's standpoint. In addition, it emphasizes viewing issues from multiple perspectives and articulating these viewpoints with sound reasoning. Moreover, it highlights the importance of employing evidence not only to reinforce one's arguments but also to critically engage with opposing claims. Ultimately, it entails assessing the credibility and reliability of the evidence used to reach well-founded conclusions (Kuhn & Udell, 2003).

2.5. The Relationship between Authentic Materials and Critical Thinking

Learning a foreign language, especially English as a global means of communication, provides students opportunities to develop diverse essential skills. Authentic materials, including news articles, magazines, videos, and other real sources, serve as effective tools for improving language proficiency. Beyond language learning, these materials offer wider benefits. They create a real-life language setting that assist learners not only expand their vocabulary and apply their critical thinking skills (Amirovna & Shakhzoda, 2024). Authentic materials provide the contextual and cognitive depth needed to activate higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy has received significant praise for its frequent use in writing learning objectives, designing curriculum assessment systems, analysing teaching methods, and constructing tests.(Ching & Da Silva, 2017).

This hierarchical framework categorizes cognitive skills from basic recall to advanced creation, helping teachers structure learning outcomes effectively. In English language education, it guides teachers to design

activities that move learners from understanding vocabulary and grammar to evaluating ideas and creating meaningful spoken or written text (Syarifudin, 2020).

Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and Action Verb Wordlist (Newton et al., 2020)

Level	Description (Simplified for EFL Context)	Sample Action Verbs (from Master List)	Example in English Teaching
1. Remembering	Recalling or recognizing basic facts and information.	define, list, identify, recall, repeat, name, label	Students list daily activities using simple present tense.
2. Understanding	Explaining ideas or interpreting meaning in own words.	explain, summarize, classify, describe, interpret, discuss	Learners summarize a short story or dialogue.
3. Applying	Using information in new situations or real-life contexts.	demonstrate, use, implement, solve, perform, illustrate	Students use target vocabulary in a role-play conversation.
4. Analyzing	Breaking information into parts to explore relationships.	compare, contrast, differentiate, examine, infer, categorize	Students analyze the structure of an argumentative essay.
5. Evaluating	Making judgments or justifying decisions based on criteria.	justify, critique, assess, argue, support, evaluate	Students evaluate opinions in a debate or peer presentation.
6. Creating	Generating new ideas, products, or ways of understanding.	design, compose, construct, invent, develop, produce	Students create their own short video, dialogue, or blog.

3.   METHODS

The research aimed to explore English Education Student's perspectives on the use of authentic texts in English language classrooms. A qualitative descriptive research design was selected for this purpose. The purpose is to explore English Education students' perspectives on the use of authentic texts in English language classrooms, particularly in promoting students' critical thinking skills. Focusing on students'

experiences, perceptions, and reflections related to the use of authentic materials in their English teaching practice.

a. Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions of using authentic materials to support students' critical thinking. The qualitative design was selected as it facilitates comprehension of the participants' experiences, challenges, and strategies in their own words. Hong et al., (2018) proposes that qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to comprehensively describe and interpret human experiences. The study utilised an open-ended questionnaire as its primary instrument, as this method of data collection has been shown to provide rich and detailed responses that are not possible to capture through closed questions (Qualitative et al., 2009). The design of the study concentrated on the identification of common themes related to the utilisation of authentic texts by pre-service teachers in their teaching practice, as well as their perception of the benefits and challenges associated with this use.

b. Research Participants

The participants of the study comprised English Education students who had successfully completed teaching internships and had experience in the utilization of authentic materials within authentic classroom settings. In order to meet the recommended sample size for qualitative open-ended questionnaires, the study invited a minimum of 20–25 pre-service teachers, following the suggestion of (Stadtländer, 2009) that qualitative studies should involve enough participants to capture varied perspectives. However, participation was voluntary. The method involved the selection of individuals based on their direct experience with authentic texts and involvement in teaching activities.

c. Data Collection Method

Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire, which gave participants the opportunity to express their ideas freely. The questionnaire contained prompts that asked pre-service teachers to describe their experiences and challenges when using authentic materials during their teaching practice, as well as their views on the matter. Such questionnaires are recommended in qualitative studies since they encourage participants to provide detailed explanations, examples and reflections (Dörnyei, n.d.). To ensure flexibility and comfort for

participants, the questionnaire was distributed online. Before responding, participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their answers would remain confidential.

d. *Data Analysis*

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the steps suggested by Braun, (2006). Initially, the researcher perused all responses meticulously to become acquainted with the data. Subsequently, initial codes were generated by identifying significant ideas, patterns and meaningful statements within the participants' responses. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and refined into themes representing the main findings. Thematic analysis was chosen because it enables researchers to interpret qualitative data in a clear and systematic way, while still allowing flexibility (Nowell et al., 2017)

e. Research Instrument

Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed online A total of ten teachers voluntarily participated in the study after providing informed consent. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) constructivism, Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, Borg's (2006) teacher cognition theory, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, the questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended questions divided into five categories:

1. Teachers' Attitudes (4 items)
2. Teachers' Strategies (7 items)
3. Teachers' Challenges (2 items)
4. Teachers' Reflection (2 items)

These categories were designed to examine how teachers perceive authentic materials, how they integrate them into classroom practice, the obstacles they experience during implementation, and the ways they evaluate their own teaching decisions. The structure of the instrument allowed participants to express detailed explanations based on their personal teaching experiences, supporting the study's aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of teacher perspectives in the EFL context.
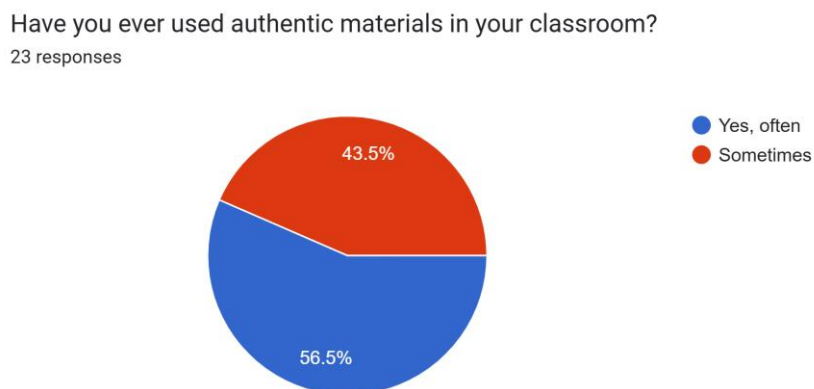
4. RESULT

4.1. *Levels of Students Taught by Pre-Service Teachers*
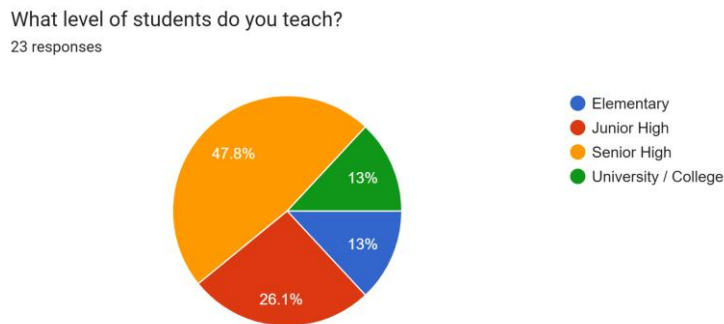
Figure 1. Distribution of Student Levels Taught by Pre-Service Teachers

The data show that the 23 pre-service teachers have experience teaching students at different educational levels during their practicum or teaching practice. The largest group, accounting for 47,8%, reported teaching at one main level. Another 26% taught at a different level, while the remaining two groups, each representing 13%, also worked at other levels. This distribution indicates that pre-service teachers are exposed to various classroom contexts, allowing them to implement authentic materials in diverse teaching situations. This variety also makes the findings more representative of the broader experiences of pre-service teachers during their training.

### 4.2. *Frequency of Pre-Service Teachers' Use of Authentic Materials*

Figure 2. Frequency of Authentic Material Use Among Pre-Service Teachers

The results also show that authentic materials are widely used during teaching practice. A majority of the pre-service teachers (56%) stated that they often used authentic materials in their lessons. The remaining 43,55% used them sometimes. These findings suggest that pre-service teachers recognize the importance of integrating real-world texts and resources into the classroom. Their frequent use of authentic materials reflects their effort to make learning more meaningful, engaging, and relevant to their students. It also demonstrates that their teacher training programs may be encouraging the use of such materials as part of modern pedagogical practice.

4.3. *Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Authentic Materials and Critical Thinking*

Do you think using authentic materials is related to developing students' critical thinking?
23 responses

● Yes
● No

100%
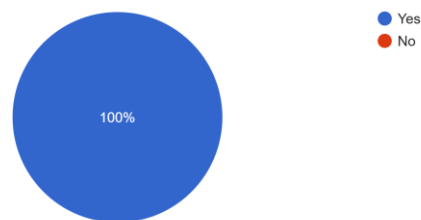
Figure 3. Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Authentic Materials and Critical Thinking

All participants (100%) agreed that authentic materials contribute to developing students' critical thinking skills. This complete agreement highlights a strong belief among pre-service teachers that authentic materials help students analyze, interpret, and evaluate information more effectively. Their unanimous response suggests that they view authentic materials not only as a tool for improving language skills but also as a means to promote higher-order thinking. This perception is important because it demonstrates that even at the early stage of their teaching careers, pre-service teachers already understand the broader pedagogical value of using real-life materials in English language teaching.

5.   DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the open-ended questionnaires focusing on the challenges and strategies experienced by pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers when using authentic materials to promote critical thinking during their teaching

practice. The responses highlight several significant challenges, specifically the difficulty in selecting adequate authentic texts, providing support for students with limited language proficiency, and managing classroom time while addressing curriculum expectations. To address these issues, pre-service teachers reported using strategies involving simplifying materials, preparing guiding questions and connecting content to students' everyday experiences.

The analysis indicates that pre-service teachers generally demonstrate a high level of pedagogical openness toward integrating authentic texts into EFL instruction. Their responses reveal that authenticity is perceived not merely as an additional resource but as a pedagogical orientation that supports cognitive engagement, contextualized language exposure, and learner agency. Many respondents articulated that authentic texts "make students think harder" and "help them connect English to real life," reflecting an early professional awareness of the need to move beyond structural, form-based instruction. This finding aligns with the global shift toward critical literacy frameworks, where learning is grounded in real-world meaning-making rather than decontextualized language drills (Detwiler, 2025)

The qualitative data shows that pre-service teachers use a mix of basic support methods, activities that encourage student interaction, and tasks that help students think more critically when they work with authentic texts.(Ikhsanudin, 2025). Several pre-service teachers noted that authentic texts encourage students to question, interpret, and evaluate information behaviors associated with critical thinking. Interestingly, despite their limited experience, many pre-service teachers expressed confidence in using authentic texts even in resource-limited settings. This enthusiasm suggests a developing sense of teacher identity grounded in innovation, adaptability, and student-centered pedagogy.

For further information, English education students hold positive perspectives on the use of authentic materials in the EFL context. Their responses support previous research that emphasizes the importance of teaching materials connected to real communication. The respondents believe that effective materials should provide language input while guiding learners toward comprehension of how English is used in real situations. This suggests that they value materials that promote both linguistic development and meaningful learning experiences.

The data further reveal that the respondents possess a clear understanding of the concept of authentic materials. They describe authentic materials as real texts such as news articles, videos, posters, advertisements, and online content produced for genuine communication rather than instructional purposes. Their views correspond with earlier studies arguing that authentic materials offer richer exposure to language and stronger cultural insight than standard textbooks. Although respondents note that authentic materials tend to be challenging, they still consider these resources beneficial for supporting learner confidence, engagement, and careful interpretation of messages.

The integration of critical thinking in EFL classrooms is another strong pattern in the data. Numerous respondents explain that authentic materials enable students to develop skills such as interpreting information, forming opinions, evaluating ideas, and providing explanations. They design activities that require students to discuss issues, solve problems, and respond to guiding questions. These practices align with previous research showing that critical thinking develops when learners interact with real texts requiring analysis and reflection rather than simple recall. Authentic materials further support students in validating information by encouraging them to examine evidence, compare sources, and judge the reliability of content.

The relationship between authentic materials and critical thinking is reinforced through the respondents' descriptions. They state that authentic texts naturally stimulate deeper thinking due to their real messages, multiple viewpoints, and meaningful contexts. For instance, analyzing news reports encourages learners to identify important points and evaluate the writer's intention, while examining advertisements enables them to recognize persuasive techniques. These findings correspond with earlier studies that argue authentic materials provide strong opportunities for reasoning, interpretation, evaluation, and information verification.

Despite the recognized benefits, respondents describe several challenges. Numerous pre-service teachers experience difficulties selecting materials that correspond to students' English proficiency levels. Authentic texts often contain unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar, and cultural references that younger learners may struggle to interpret. Facilities present another obstacle; several classrooms lack projectors,

stable internet access, or appropriate multimedia equipment, limiting the use of digital materials. Pre-service teachers further report that preparing authentic materials requires considerable time and effort, especially during demanding practicum periods. Students' limited familiarity with authentic texts results in reduced comprehension and participation.

To address these issues, the respondents employ multiple strategies. Scaffolding is a frequent approach, in which teachers provide vocabulary lists, guiding questions, and structured steps to support comprehension. Numerous respondents adapt materials by shortening texts, selecting simpler sources, or including visuals to strengthen clarity. Collaboration with mentor teachers and peers contributes to finding suitable materials and designing effective activities. Interactive techniques such as group discussions and case-based learning encourage students to process content and exchange ideas. Continuous observation and formative assessment allow teachers to review learner progress and adjust their instruction when required.

The findings indicate that pre-service teachers acknowledge the strong potential of authentic materials to support language development and critical thinking. Although they encounter several challenges, they demonstrate adaptability through careful planning and supportive strategies. These results reinforce previous research and confirm that authentic materials, when thoughtfully selected and guided, possess the potential to contribute significantly to learners' language skills, analytical abilities, and capacity to validate information within the EFL classroom

6. CONCLUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that pre-service teachers acknowledge the significant role of authentic materials in English language teaching, while also facing several practical challenges in their implementation. Their main difficulties include selecting materials that match students' proficiency levels, adapting complex content, managing limited preparation time, and working within the constraints of available school resources. To respond to these challenges, pre-service teachers employ strategies such as simplifying materials, offering guided support to learners, incorporating visual and multimedia aids, and consulting mentors for further direction. Despite the obstacles, their attitudes toward authentic materials remain strongly positive, as they view these resources

as meaningful, relevant, and capable of enhancing students' critical thinking skills.

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