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Using Authentic Materials in a Spanish Class: Impact on Students'

Cultural Knowledge and Vocabulary Development

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### **Abstract**

A Spanish classroom offers the opportunity to use authentic materials as teaching resources. Materials such as songs, movies, poems, and newspapers, just to mention a few, may be used. These materials, if chosen carefully, may enrich students' cultural knowledge, vocabulary, reading and writing skills, amongst others. On the other hand, non-authentic materials such as textbooks with audios and written pieces can be used as well. This study attempted to determine if there was any impact on using authentic materials on students' cultural knowledge and vocabulary development. The participants included 19 high school students enrolled in a Spanish class for native speakers. It was the goal that through different means of data collection, the results may contribute to research in this needed field.

Foreign language teachers aim for their students to fall in love with the language and culture they teach. Each unit is carefully designed so that students may learn grammar, vocabulary, and a piece of the culture from which reflects the culture. It is not always an easy task to create lessons that students will enjoy and that will incorporate all the factors previously mentioned. There are many important language skills that students must learn in a foreign language classroom such as writing, speaking, listening, and reading, amongst others. However, cultural knowledge and vocabulary development should also be considered highly important. There are many concerns as to how to ensure that students meet these goals. Questions such as what types of materials should educators use? And which of these materials will have a positive impact on students' learning? Just to name a few, are part of the concerns.

To answer those questions, teachers may decide to use authentic, non-authentic, or both types of materials. Authentic materials are defined as materials that were created for native speakers of the language (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Iravani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Spirovska, 2009). On the other hand, non-authentic materials are those that have been manipulated to meet the needs of second language learners (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Iravani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Spirovska, 2009;

Sanchez-Lopez, 2006). Studies show that both kinds of materials have positive impact on students' learning.

Since research shows that both types of materials are effective in the classroom ((Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Iravani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Sanchez-Lopez, 2006), then which of them would be more effective in a Spanish classroom? In many cases, Spanish teachers emphasize their lessons primarily on what the textbook directs them to do. Unfortunately, teachers do not use other resources available that may be helpful to their students and that they can use with their classes for free. This is important to notice, especially in a Spanish class where cultural knowledge and vocabulary development play an important role when it comes to acquiring the language. Incorporating authentic materials may only help teachers meet the cultural and vocabulary goals created at the beginning of the year (Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014). How might using one type affect students versus using the other one? For example, if students analyze a song that was written for native speakers, they may find vocabulary words that may have never been in their textbooks because those words are only used in certain cultures or not in everyday language, but may still be important language to understand.

Since a main goal in a Spanish class is for students to become as fluent as possible and to acquire the language as much as they can, it is important for them to be exposed to authentic materials. Teachers have control over the way that they decide to use the materials. Whether it is a song, poem, or a newspaper, educators must carefully choose what they will use and how they will use it. If the materials are aligned with the goals, positive outcomes may be expected in the Spanish classroom.

The importance of studying the impact of which types of materials to use comes from a personal experience. When taking Spanish in high school, the class used a textbook for every single activity. Some of the students were bored of the textbook because it was very unrealistic; it did not have a connection to real life scenarios, it seemed as everything was just to pass a test. It was always the same old elementary vocabulary from Spanish I all the way to Spanish at the advanced level. The idea behind this strategy was to reinforce the vocabulary year by year. Also, in each class students were learning about the same cultures and it was always the same thing: the colors of the flags, the capital of the country, the location of the country, etc., all of these are important; however, one day a teacher brought real life connections to the classroom; she brought a song. The song was created for native speakers, and it was not manipulated to fit the ears of second language learners. The class enjoyed the music, and also the fact that they could expand their vocabulary and their cultural knowledge because the song provided an opportunity to do so.

Based on that experience, the desire to conduct a study in which authentic materials were used to deepen students' cultural knowledge and vocabulary development was triggered. To help guide this study, the following question was created-How does using authentic materials impact students' cultural knowledge and vocabulary development? The main purpose was to determine to what extent using authentic materials may help students begin to understand and appreciate deeper aspects of the culture and language they are studying. By teaching lessons in which various materials were used, a comparison through a series of data collections was made. This study was conducted in a high school Spanish class in which 19 students participated. The study lasted four lessons, which is equivalent to two weeks in the students' schedule.

### **Literature Review**

Many studies have been done to test the impact of using authentic materials and non-authentic in a foreign language classroom, including in Spanish classes. These studies have had different goals such as testing for reading and listening comprehension, writing skills, vocabulary development, amongst others. In order to better understand this topic, a series of studies have been analyzed and included in this review. These studies include participants that are either taking foreign language classes in high school or in their first semester in college. The articles reviewed here were collected using different databases such as JSTOR, Educational Research, and Google Scholar. For the purpose of this paper, most of the articles are from the year 2009 until 2014, with the exception of three that are from the years 1997, 2006, and 2007. These studies emphasize how students' language skills may improve in using authentic materials. Some of these skills include listening, reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary comprehension, and motivation. However, very little is known or researched about the impact that these materials may have on students' cultural knowledge, creating it a gap in the literature.

### **Authentic and Non-Authentic Materials**

It is important to understand what authentic and non-authentic materials are in order to understand this literature review. Authentic materials refer to resources that were created for real-life goals in mind and whose main target are native speakers and not second language learners (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Irvani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Spirovska, 2009). Examples of authentic materials include: newspapers, television shows, television commercials, television news, songs, films, poems, cartoons, magazines, literacy texts, computer games, and radio programs (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Irvani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Spirovska, 2009; Sanchez-Lopez, 2006). The content in these materials must be designed directly for native speakers. For example, a movie could be recorded in English, however, if it is translated to a second language, Spanish for instance, it must be translated to fit the nature of the language. In other words, the translation must reflect phrases that can relate to Spanish native speakers. Also, these materials should reflect some type of custom from any of the cultures that are being studied (Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Spirovska, 2009; Sanchez-Lopez, 2006). On the other hand, non-authentic materials are materials that are created specifically for second language learners. These materials may include any of the above but have been manipulated to fit the needs of a language learner, as well as textbooks, workbooks, audio, and videos whose purpose is to teach a second language (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Irvani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Spirovska, 2009; Sanchez-Lopez, 2006). In other words, the structure of sentences and dialogues in videos, for example, will be very simple, so that students may understand the content.

### **Language Proficiency**

The literature on this topic suggests that in order to become language proficient, Learners of a Second Language (L2) must be exposed to authentic materials and, if it applies, extensive reading of such materials (Guo, 2012). Two studies with similar approaches are included here. One study uses authentic materials online such as newspapers, menus, and brochures, amongst others (Guo, 2012). The other uses comic books, newspapers, magazines, and short romance stories (Garcia & DeFeo, 2014). In both cases, there are two different sets of students; one exposed to authentic materials and one exposed to non-authentic materials. The results of both studies were very similar for they both had positive impact on students' language proficiency. By giving a presentation, students demonstrated language proficiency by using advance vocabulary and verb tenses acquired in their readings (Garcia & DeFeo, 2014). In the other study, students who received authentic materials showed a much higher gain in vocabulary and language proficiency on their tests than those who used non-authentic materials (Guo, 2012). Both of these studies show that using authentic materials in a foreign language classroom have positive effects on language proficiency of the students.

### **Vocabulary Development**

In addition to language proficiency, research also suggests that using authentic materials has great impact on vocabulary development. Some researchers believe that using authentic materials will bring students into contact with new words (Guo, 2012). The importance behind this idea is that there might be words that will never be found in non-authentic materials. By being in contact, repeatedly, with these new words, students may also reinforce previously known words and make new vocabulary words connections (Guo, 2012). On the other hand, there are studies that suggest that a positive effect on students' vocabulary will depend on the

type of authentic materials. For example, a study shows that students who were exposed to news on television, showed very little vocabulary development because of the complexity of the words (Bahrani & Sim, 2012). However, the same study states that being exposed to cartoons had a better effect than television news. Even though the results are positive, it is important to notice that research indicates that in order for these effects to be positive, students must be exposed to these materials extensively, consistently, and intensively (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Guo, 2012).

### **Reading Comprehension and Fluency**

Research also supports the use of authentic materials in a foreign language classroom to improve students' reading comprehension and fluency. Guo (2012) affirms that, "Both common sense and research have shown evidence that students improve their reading by reading" (p. 198). Therefore, the more students are exposed to reading authentic materials, the more their reading comprehension and fluency will increase. However, in order for this to take place, students must be involved in extensive reading of the materials. There is no one definition of extensive reading, but Guo (2012) affirms that "it is meant that students read for a significant amount of time" (p. 198). The selection of these materials is important for students' comprehension and fluency to increase. Researchers show that providing students with simple authentic text such as menus, brochures, comic books, and magazines, they will begin to relate these materials and that little by little they will show comprehension and fluency. (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Spirovska, 2009). Once students are comfortable with their beginning materials, they should be challenged little bit more and be given newspapers, poems, and books (Garcia & DeFeo, 2014). Throughout this process, teacher's observation and guidance is vital.

**Reading comprehension and fluency barriers.** A barrier to reading comprehension and fluency faced by teachers is getting students to read the materials during their own time (Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012). Part of this barrier has to do with the selection of the materials. If the students feel no connection between themselves and the materials, then their desire to read the materials may not be high. This is where the instructor plays an important role. If the instructor selects materials that students can relate to, it can have a positive impact and may encourage reading for pleasure; thus, improving comprehension and fluency moving the barrier out of the way (Mousavi & Iravani, 2012; Peacock, 1997; Spirovska, 2009). Therefore, teachers should always keep in mind what their students might like to read in order to eliminate any reading barriers.

### **Listening Comprehension**

In the same way that authentic materials may help reading comprehension and fluency, these materials may also enhance listening comprehension. Ghaderpanahi (2012) affirms that “listening is probably the least explicit,” language skill emphasized, “making it the most difficult one to learn” (p. 146). Because listening comprehension plays such an important role in communication, it is unfortunate that it is not emphasized as much as other skills. (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Sabet, 2012). With that in mind, researchers have been exploring ways to improve this area, especially in a foreign language classroom. Research shows that exposure to authentic materials has positive results on students’ listening comprehension (Barekat, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Mousavi, 2012; Sabet, 2012). Some materials that have been part of different studies include shows on television, movies, music, and radio show tapes. (Barekat, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Mousavi, 2012; Sabet, 2012). These materials have been helpful and have shown improvement on students’ listening comprehension in these studies.

Even though these have positive impact, teachers must be aware of when to introduce them to their students. Due to the speed of the spoken language in the authentic materials, it is important to introduce them at an early stage in student's language learning. In other words, the earlier students are exposed to these materials, the faster they will get accustomed to the target language speed (Mousavi, 2012; Sabet, 2012). By doing so, students' listening comprehension may increase and they may have a more positive experience and concept of learning a new language. The reason for that idea is due to the fact that when students are learning a new language they are, most of the time, exposed to audios from the textbooks (non-authentic materials). The problem with the non-authentic material audios, in most cases, is that the speed is not real in comparison to native speakers' actual speed of speech (Mousavi, 2012; Sabet, 2012). Then, when they try to listen to real world audio (authentic material) the speed increases drastically. Therefore, as suggested by research, exposure to authentic audio at an early stage creates a positive impact on students' listening comprehension skills and, as supported by research, may have a positive effect in their desire to learn a new language.

**Listening comprehension challenges.** Although research supports that using authentic materials does have a positive impact on listening comprehension, it also shows that there are challenges to keep in mind. One of the challenges is the speed in which the audio, whether is a song, radio show, television show, or movie, is recorded (Ghaderpanahi, 2012). For example, Bahrani and Sim (2012) found in their study that some of their materials were too fast for students to follow. It is important to remember that authentic materials target, native language speakers, for whom the speed of the language is not a problem. In order to tackle this challenge, researchers suggest that it is a good idea to do some pre-listening activity. This activity could be pointing out some key vocabulary words and making sure that students identify them while the

audio is playing, and also talking about what the audio or visual is about before playing it (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi, (2012). These strategies may be implemented in any foreign language class.

Similarly, another challenge is all the different dialects that are present in any language. For example, Spanish is spoken in many different countries in the world. Even though the vocabulary may be universal, the way the words are pronounced varies from country to country. As was mentioned previously, a pre-listening activity may help students by pointing out how certain words are pronounced in the country from the selection if developed (Garcia & DeFeo, 2014). Although listening comprehension might take longer than the other language skills to learn, using authentic materials may aid the process by being exposed to them at an early stage of language study.

### **Writing Skills**

As well as helping listening comprehension, authentic materials can help the process of writing in a foreign language. Studies show that when students are exposed to these materials, they gain new vocabulary, which they can include in their writing (Garcia & DeFeo, 2012). In addition, their sentence structure improves the more they see these sentences in the authentic pieces, the more comfortable they become trying to use them (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Mousavi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2012). Important areas in which student's writing skills have improved, according to research, include: longer pieces of written texts, more complex and extensive sentences, the usage of all different verb tenses, and extended vocabulary (Garcia & DeFeo, 2012). These skills may be obtained by using both types of materials, however, using non-authentic may do it poorly in comparison to authentic materials. Part of the reason may be that non-authentic materials are, most of the time, written in a very simple structure. It is

important to keep in mind that the quantity of the written pieces may not always be as long as wanted (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Mousavi, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2012). The reason is because some students may focus on the quality of the words and sentence structure than on the length (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Mousavi, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2012; Guo, 2012). Consequently, instructors need to keep in mind that if they want students' final work to reflect something academic, and demonstrate a true comprehension of the language, the students must be exposed to academic structures so they can model them in their writing.

### **Impact on Motivation**

Besides having an impact on language skills, using authentic materials may have a positive impact on the motivation of learning a second language. Research supports that using authentic materials helps students' "levels of on-task behavior, concentration, and involvement in the target activity" more than non-authentic materials (Peacock, 1997, p.152). Part of the reason may be that by not manipulating the resources, students truly get the full picture. For instance, with an audio tape from a textbook, the sound may be robotic, as opposed to a real audio in which the sound is equal to the way real people speak. In addition, many of the videos produced with the non-authentic materials are not realistic and students tend to find them boring because it has been manipulated sounding dull; thus not appealing to students' motivation. In contrast, authentic videos show more realistic audio and video clips and tend to be more engaging (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Peacock, 1997). However, students might feel overwhelmed by the speed of the audio and just give up in their motivation and completely shut-down during the activity.

**Ways to increase motivation.** If using authentic materials have a positive impact on motivating students to learn second language, it is important to know what kind of materials to use. Studies show that selecting themes and resources in which students are interesting may increase students' motivation to participate more in class (Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Peacock, 1997; Son, 2007). Garcia and DeFeo (2014) suggest that themes such as love and interpersonal relationships appeal to students and increase their motivation because they can relate to them. Therefore, when selecting materials, educators should consider their students' interest and see how those materials may be incorporated into the lesson so that it engages students and still meets the goals planned.

Additionally, incorporating resources such as technology that use authentic materials may help students' motivation. Miller and Hegelheimer (2006) state, based on their research, that incorporating computer games is fun for students and it still focuses on learning a language. For example, there are games in which students have to use important skills such as writing, reading, listening, and even speaking. Because the game is created for native speakers, students must put all those skills to test when completing the tasks (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006). The result of their studies suggest that authentic computer games have a positive impact on language skills as well as it increases motivation and engagement on students to learn a second language.

### **The Internet and Authentic Materials**

In addition to computer games, research says that the internet is a valuable source that needs to be incorporated in a foreign language lesson for it serves a mean of bringing in authentic materials into the classroom (Son, 2007; Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006). In his study Son (2007) states that "The World Wide Web offers a global database of authentic materials that can enhance learning and teaching" (p. 21). By incorporating the internet in their lessons,

teachers can find reliable materials such as newspapers online, music videos, podcasts, movies, amongst others, and also create their lessons interesting to students. Research shows that students enjoyed using the internet with the materials aforementioned and that they retained more from doing so than by listening to a teacher lecture (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Son, 2007). Research also supports that using the internet may tackle different aspects of the language skills such as grammar, reading, listening, vocabulary, and others, in less time than if the teacher was delivering the lesson. The use of the internet in a foreign language classroom is vital to education and it may be helpful if the educator selects the proper resources.

**Problems with using technology.** The internet can be useful to use authentic materials in a foreign language classroom; however, there are a couple of factors to keep in mind that may have a negative effect. One aspect to take into consideration is that some students do not feel comfortable using the internet or technology overall (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Son, 2007). There are some students that have never been exposed to using a computer in their lives for various reasons. Therefore, if authentic materials will be used through the internet or technology, teachers need take into account that not everyone might feel comfortable and that alternatives should be provided (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Son, 2007). Some ways that alternatives may be provided include printing off the paper the students are to read online, or providing a headset to listen to an audio in a CD, amongst others, (Miller & Hegelheimer, 2006; Son, 2007).

### **Cultural Knowledge**

Another advantage of using authentic materials may be enhancing students' cultural knowledge. When students learn a second language they are also learning culture and customs that are linked to that language (Bakerat & Nobakhti, 2014; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014). It is highly

important to emphasize all the different cultural aspects that come with learning a new language. Barekat & Nobakhti (2014) state that, “language is an aspect of culture because it is basically learned and shared by man as a member of society” (p.1059). With that in mind, research supports that using authentic materials may have a positive impact on students’ cultural knowledge (Bakerat & Nobakhti, 2014; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Son, 2007; Sabet, 2012). Due to all the different cultures that one language might have, it would be impossible to teach all of them. In that case, teachers need to select the ones that he/she finds best fitted for the class.

### **Gaps in Literature**

Even though there are many great aspects that experts have studied in using authentic materials, there are some gaps that have not been studied at all or need further research. The first one is cultural awareness. Although the last paragraph states that using authentic materials may have a positive impact on students’ cultural knowledge, the main focus is never just the cultural aspect. There still needs to be more research to be done in this area alone. For example, in a Spanish class, authentic materials can be used to specifically emphasize the cultural aspect of a certain region, their music, clothing, behavior, etc. This may be done by selecting resources in which such customs are represented.

Another aspect that has not been researched within the cultural awareness range is the different linguistics features. Spanish is a language with different dialects. In many cases, each region gets a sense of belonging (or culture) by speaking their own dialect. Therefore, by focusing in this area, students may understand what the language truly represents in their culture. By incorporating authentic materials in the classroom from different regions with their respective dialects, students may enhance their cultural knowledge as well as practice other language skills previously mentioned in this literature review.

In addition to the cultural aspect and the linguistics features, another gap is understanding real world vocabulary. Research does show that studies have been conducted to test students' vocabulary development. However, the emphasis on this vocabulary development is on academic vocabulary (Bahrani & Sim, 2012). The area of non-academic vocabulary development has not been researched and it is an element of language development important for students to know because it is used in real world situations. For any of the gaps mentioned in this literature review, authentic materials such as music videos, movies, poems, paintings, books, and any other sources of material created for native speakers, may be used. The content would be deepened and the vocabulary broadened through the introduction of authentic materials in the foreign language classroom. The educators must select adequate materials for their classroom so that students do not learn the language in isolation but rather get a full picture of language and cultural development.

### **Methods**

To help guide this study the following question was created- How does using authentic materials in a Spanish language classroom impact students' cultural knowledge and vocabulary development? Experts in this field have identified various gaps that need to be studied further, some of which include cultural awareness, listening comprehension, and vocabulary development, amongst others (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Barekat & Nobakhti, 2014; Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Guo, 2012; Garcia & DeFeo, 2014; Mousavi & Irvani, 2012). After reviewing the gaps, I have decided to study cultural knowledge and vocabulary development. Using authentic materials to study these gaps is important because if the materials are chosen carefully, it may provide students with a great range of cultural knowledge and vocabulary.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted in a high school in Virginia. The school is located in a fringe rural area and it serves students in grades 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>. The school's student body is made up of 51% males and 49% females, and it has a total minority enrollment of 43%, which includes Hispanic, Black, Asian, Native American, and Other. Out of the total enrollment, 15% of students receive

either free or reduced lunch. For this study, 19 students participated. The participants were of ages 15 to 18 and range from grade levels 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. Ten of the 19 students were male and nine were females. None of the students were in special education, and all the students are considered native speakers of Spanish because they come from families who may speak Spanish at home. The class was taught every other day all year long in the block format. A consent form was sent home in both Spanish and English to be signed by the guardians so that students had permission to participate in this study. Also, students signed an assent form if they agree to participate in this study.

### **Data Collection**

This study utilized a mixed-methods design. The first two methods of data collection provided the quantitative data. First, all students were given a pretest to set a baseline to determine student understanding of cultural knowledge and vocabulary. The cultures included Spain, the Andes, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and the Spanish speaking countries in the Caribbean. A series of lessons were instructed using authentic and non-authentic materials in the classroom setting. A posttest was given to the students. This test helped to demonstrate to what extent the introduction of authentic materials had on students' understanding of cultural knowledge as well as vocabulary development. A Likert-type scale survey helped to provide students' feedback on whether or not the materials were properly suited to meet the aforementioned gaps. Lastly, the third method of data collection provided qualitative data through an interview of four students. This part helped obtain more details and personal feelings towards the use of authentic materials in the classroom. It also provided students' perspective on how the materials helped or did not help them understand cultural aspects and vocabulary development. This data was collected during the beginning of my student teaching internship. I

taught four lessons total. Each lesson tackled different cultures through the use of different materials each time.

### **Procedure**

Before teaching any of my lessons, a pre-test was given to students. This test included questions that measured students' cultural knowledge of different Latin American countries. Some of which included customs, clothing, and music, as well as other cultural elements the students may not be familiar with from these countries, such as the different dialects of Spanish in these countries. The test also included questions in which students needed to be able to recognize vocabulary words and know how to use them in proper context. These words were related to the cultures that were studied so that students could make connections. After the lessons were taught, the posttest with the same questions was given again.

Additional to the posttest, all students completed a survey after all the lessons were taught. In the survey, students were able to say how much they like or dislike the content, the materials used to teach the content, and whether or not they had any impact on their learning. The posttest and the survey were given on the same date.

Finally, I randomly selected four students, two males and two female, for an interview. The interview, however, was conducted on a one-on-one basis and not all four at the same time. During the interview, students were able to express their own personal opinion about the lessons and the authentic materials used. Unlike the survey, during the interview students were allowed to say more than just like or dislike; the researcher asked questions such as why or how the introduction to authentic materials impacted their understanding. In other words, if student's reply to a question was "I felt that the video helped me" then a post question asked was "why or how did it help you." Interviews were conducted during students' lunch time period that lasts 30

minutes in the library, which provided a safe and quiet place to conduct interviews. Only important quotes were transcribed from the interview. However, common themes were found from all four interviews and are discussed later in this paper.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected, the analysis was as follows. For the pretest and posttest, students' scores were compared in a chart and then the difference in percentage was found. For the interviews, codes were found to create categories and themes in regards to students' opinions. As students were being interviewed, I was writing notes and highlighting some common codes that I had previously heard from a different student. There were words that were not exactly the same but were related, therefore, I put those in one category or theme. At the end, an explanation of how the different categories or themes are connected is given.

### **Findings**

As previously stated, authentic materials are those designed for native speakers and not for language learners. The question how does authentic materials impact students' cultural knowledge and vocabulary development? Was created for the guidance of this research. Having defined authentic materials and the importance that they might have, various materials were selected to conduct this study. The materials used included songs, poems, music videos, news broadcasts, and radio interviews. After the lessons were taught, the following quantitative and qualitative results were found.

### **Quantitative**

A pretest and posttest were given to students to determine the impact that authentic materials had in cultural knowledge and vocabulary development. The following table shows the results, in percentage, of this study.

<b>Student</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>	<b>Difference</b>
A	60%	100%	+40%
B	55%	90%	+35%
C	15%	75%	+60%
D	0%	90%	+90%
E	35%	90%	+55%
F	5%	85%	+80%
G	15%	75%	+60%
H	20%	100%	+80%
I	40%	90%	+40%
J	20%	100%	+80%
K	25%	100%	+75%
L	15%	95%	+80%
M	10%	100%	+90%
N	20%	95%	+75%
O	25%	80%	+55%
P	30%	100%	+70%
Q	35%	100%	+65%
R	5%	100%	+95%
S	5%	80%	+75%

The table above shows that before students were exposed to authentic materials, only one of them knew 60% of the vocabulary and culture; one knew 55%; four knew 35%-40%; twelve knew only 5% to 20%; and one knew 0% of the material. After students were exposed to four lessons, the results obtained had a positive impact on students' knowledge. Based on the posttest results, seven students showed an increase of his/her knowledge from 80% to 95%; seven 60% to 75%; and five showed an increase of 40% to 55%.

A survey was also given to the students to determine their personal opinion on whether or not authentic materials were acceptable in a Spanish classroom. The following table shows the results of the survey.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>I like authentic materials</b>	16	2	0	0	1
<b>Overall, I learned more from authentic materials</b>	11	7	0	0	1
<b>Authentic materials created a broader vocabulary for me</b>	12	7	0	0	0
<b>I learned more about cultures with authentic materials</b>	16	3	0	0	0
<b>Authentic materials helped stay engage in class</b>	15	4	0	0	0
<b>I would like to keep learning from authentic materials</b>	17	1	1	0	0
<b>Authentic materials positively affected my attendance</b>	18	1	0	0	0
<b>Authentic materials are easy to follow</b>	10	7	0	0	2
<b>Authentic materials are a fun way to learn new information</b>	13	6	0	0	0
<b>Overall, I found authentic materials to be interesting</b>	15	9	0	0	0

\*The numbers in the table above reflect the number of students that took the survey and not the percentage.

A total of ten questions were asked in the survey with five choices for the students to choose from which included: strongly agree, agree, undecided, strongly disagree, and disagree. All students either strongly agreed or agreed that authentic materials broadened their vocabulary and their knowledge about cultures. Also, they all stated that using these materials has a positive impact in their attendance to class. When asked if they like authentic materials only one student

disagreed, but the rest either strongly agreed or agreed. One of the most important questions was if they would like to keep learning from authentic materials. To this question, 17 students strongly agreed, 1 agreed, and 1 was undecided. Overall, the results of this survey show that these materials are well received by the students and that they help them in various ways.

### **Qualitative**

Instructor observation and student feedback identified positive impacts from using authentic materials in the classroom. After all lessons were taught, interviews were conducted and the following themes were found that support teacher's observation.

### **Fun and Engaging**

Students were asked during the interview to list a group of adjectives to describe their experience during the lessons in which authentic materials were used. One hundred percent of the students used the adjectives "fun and engaging". When asked why, some of their answers included "it is not the same boring textbook routine", as well as "it makes me want to pay attention because I can make real life connections", and "I feel like I'm learning instead of memorizing". Students also emphasized that the fact that these materials were challenging, in a good way, made the lessons engaging because it pushed them to have to learn the vocabulary and the cultural aspect behind the materials.

Even though for some students following the songs and the radio interviews was a challenge, they were motivated to come to class and engaged in the lessons. Proof of that is their attendance during this period. Students, who were typically absent from this class, were present for all these lessons. When asked if the materials used had anything to do with them not being absent they replied yes. They stated that the materials were fun to learn from and they did not

want to miss the lessons. There were four lessons taught. During these lessons, only one student was absent on the first day. For the other lessons, all students were present (19 out 19).

### **Real World Connections**

Another common topic that was shared by all students interviewed was real world connections. Students were asked if they would like to see authentic materials being used more they said yes. When asked why, their main response was that they felt that could make real world connections through the use of the materials. An example was the use of songs in the lessons. Many of the students were very surprised that they have heard those songs many times in their lives before but had never been exposed to learning the vocabulary or message behind the song. As they were learning the vocabulary, they were making the real world connection. Some of them even stated that they were surprised how many vocabulary words they did not know from a song that they have been listening to and singing for a while. Part of the reason may have been that these students have only listened to the songs because they like the sound of the music. However, they had never stopped to think if they truly know what the song was saying.

In addition to making the real world connection through learning new vocabulary, students stated that they were also able to do that through being immersed into the cultural aspect. Since many of the songs and videos have a cultural aspect behind them, students said that it helped understand Hispanic cultures better. Many of the students mentioned that showing authentic videos in which real life events happened, allowed them to fully understand how much more they needed to learn about the culture that was being exposed. They said that in many language classes, because everything they do has to be “work from the textbook and nothing else”, they feel that they lose the “real life events that teach us culture”. Students declared that

by being exposed to these materials, they now have a different view of the world. They said that they do not need to make a generalization that each country is as a textbook pictures it but that each country has more to offer and is unique.

### **Discussion**

All the positive outcomes of the aforementioned data are attributed to the materials used and the format of the lessons. Each material challenged the students and exposed them to explore new topics or new vocabulary in a different way that they have previously been taught. Because both quantitative and qualitative results were positive, a discussion about students' learning outcomes can be made. The positive results also open doors for incorporating these materials in future instruction as part of whole units or just lessons.

### **Broader Vocabulary**

The use of authentic materials created a broader vocabulary for students. In a previous study conducted by Garcia and DeFeo (2014), vocabulary development was studied finding positive results. Similar results were found in this research. Students' work showed a greater and broader vocabulary development as a consequence of using authentic materials. Students were exposed to newspapers, poems, and songs from different parts of Latin America and Spain. As a result, they adopted different vocabulary from all these parts and used them in their written pieces of work or during class discussion. However, their gain in vocabulary went beyond the classroom setting, as one of the students stated, "these vocabulary words help me communicate better with my parents at home and in the supermarket with other fluent speakers." In conclusion, using these materials helps students to create a vocabulary that can be used inside the classroom and outside, making the "real life connection" that students previously mentioned.

### **Cultural Exposure**

The use of authentic music videos, news broadcast, and interviews exposed students to a variety of cultures. Throughout the years of teaching Spanish, teachers always teach the culture that is given to them by the textbook. In many cases, using these resources is acceptable, depending on the quality of the textbook. However, for the most part textbooks just show the overall stereotypical idea of a certain culture from a certain country or region manipulating the context to fit language learners. In a previous study conducted by Barekat and Nobakhti (2014), positive results were obtained. They found that using authentic materials such as movies and television shows had a positive impact on cultural awareness in a foreign language classroom. Similar results were obtained in this research. As students heard and watched the materials, they were often stating how they had a different view of a certain culture. For example, many of the students commented about the different types of Spanish accents that there are based on these materials. One student stated, “We were never told that before, we thought that all Spanish was the same.” Questions and statements similar to the aforementioned ones were asked during this research.

### **Connections and Comparisons**

One element that was found but was not planned when this research was created was making connections and comparisons to students’ own cultures through the use of these materials. As students were exposed to the different vocabulary and cultures, they were making connections to their own. One of the most common ones was the one different type of Spanish that exist in the world. Students discussed how that is very similar to all the different dialects of English that exist in the United States and in other countries such as Australia and Great Britain. Students also compare how in Spanish there were different ways to refer to one item such as

potato and how the same may apply in the United States when it comes to Soda. In conclusion, using authentic materials may also play an important role to create connections and comparisons in a foreign language classroom, especially in a Spanish classroom.

### **Limitations and Implications**

Using authentic materials has shown that students do enjoy class time more than working from the textbook. However, in order for these materials to be acceptable, each teacher has to make sure that they know their students well. One implication that was found in this study is that some of the students found the songs and the poems hard to follow. Part of the reason is the vocabulary in the songs and poems; students were not familiar with them. A recommendation to solve this problem is to break down the materials before listening or reading the whole piece. Teachers may have their students highlight vocabulary that they do not know and have them look them up in the dictionary. Afterwards, they may have a brief conversation on what students believe the meaning behind the song or poem is based on the vocabulary words.

Another implication when trying to use authentic materials might be the freedom that teachers may have in their curriculum. In many cases, teachers have a deadline to meet, which makes it very hard for them to try to incorporate materials such as the ones mentioned before. A solution to this problem might be incorporating these materials piece by piece. Every Spanish class has a section reserved to teach culture, teachers may opt to include a music video, song, or even a poem that reflects the culture they are teaching. Teachers do not have to create a whole entire unit with authentic materials. They may incorporate these materials throughout the year in small pieces.

An important implication when teaching these materials may be the lack of preparation that teachers have in using authentic materials. Many teachers are never taught how to use these materials in their classes, therefore, they do not feel confident to use them. A solution to this problem might include a college course that emphasizes in the use of these materials with examples and resources for teachers to use in their classrooms. Another solution might be a seminar or class within the school county offered to teachers so that can be exposed to this idea.

### **Conclusion**

Using authentic materials in a Spanish classroom has positive effects in vocabulary development and cultural knowledge. Even though the lessons have to be carefully designed and the materials cautiously selected, it all pays off for it makes class enjoyable. Prove of that is that this study was pleasant for students, as shown by their scores and all the positive feedback they gave. The study was also pleasant for the instructor who received all sorts of complements as he was conducting this study. The instructor was surprised on how well these materials were received. In many occasions students approached him to ask if they “can we keep using these materials instead of the textbook”? While these materials were more challenging, students were intrigued about them and wanted to keep learning from them. In conclusion, our main goal as teachers is to educate our students in an atmosphere that they feel comfortable to make their learning experience enjoyable. Therefore, if using these materials may contribute to that cause, we, teachers, should incorporate them in our lessons.

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