
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS ON ESL/EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of using authentic materials on language learning outcomes in ESL/EFL learners. The study involved a control group that relied on traditional textbook materials and an experimental group that was exposed to authentic materials with the sample population of 111 students who took GEN60-116- English for Community Development course in term/1/ 2018 at Walailak University with the course duration of 13 weeks. Post-test results were analyzed and compared to pre-test scores for both groups. The control group's post-test scores were lower than their pre-test scores, suggesting that the traditional textbook approach may not effectively support language learning needs. In contrast, the experimental group's post-test scores surpassed their pre-test scores, indicating that exposure to authentic materials had a positive impact on their language learning outcomes. The study's findings align with the previous studies on the benefits of authentic materials in language instruction, as exposure to authentic materials can enhance vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall language proficiency. These results have significant implications for language teachers and curriculum designers. This study suggests that incorporating authentic materials in language instruction can enhance language learning outcomes, enabling learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its usage in authentic contexts.

Keywords: Authentic materials, pre and post-tests, traditional text book, ESL classroom, impact, language proficiency etc.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the use of authentic materials in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classrooms has been a topic of interest for language educators. Authentic materials are materials that are created for native speakers of the target language and represent real-life situations (Ur, 1996). They are intended to replicate the language and cultural context that learners will encounter

outside of the classroom. Examples of authentic materials include newspapers, magazines, advertisements, movies, TV shows, and other media. The use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has been viewed as a way to provide learners with exposure to authentic language use, develop their language proficiency, and increase their motivation to learn the language (Liao & Lee, 2020).

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Using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has been found to have several advantages. First, authentic materials provide learners with exposure to real-life language use, which is more challenging and complex than simplified textbook language. By being exposed to authentic language use, learners can develop their ability to comprehend spoken and written language, as well as produce their own language more accurately and fluently (Liao & Lee, 2020). Second, authentic materials are more engaging and interesting to learners than textbook materials, as they provide a window into the target culture and offer a variety of language styles and registers (Liu & Song, 2020). This can increase learners' motivation to learn the language and enhance their willingness to communicate in the target language (Chen, 2020).

However, using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms also presents some challenges. First, authentic materials may be linguistically and culturally complex, which can lead to difficulties in understanding and interpreting the materials (Huang & Eskey, 1999). Second, learners may lack the necessary background knowledge and cultural understanding to fully comprehend the materials (Liu & Song, 2020). As a result, teachers may need to provide additional scaffolding and support to help learners understand the materials. Third, authentic materials may not always align with the language proficiency level and learning objectives of the learners (Chen, 2020). Teachers need to carefully select and adapt the materials to meet the needs and interests of the learners and ensure that the materials are suitable for their language proficiency level.

Despite these challenges, research has shown that using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms can be effective in developing learners' language proficiency and increasing their motivation to learn the language. Studies have found that learners

who were exposed to authentic materials performed better on language tests and demonstrated higher levels of language proficiency than those who were exposed to textbook materials (Liao & Lee, 2020). Furthermore, learners who were exposed to authentic materials reported higher levels of motivation and interest in learning the language (Chen, 2020). The use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has been viewed as an effective way to provide learners with exposure to authentic language use, develop their language proficiency, and increase their motivation to learn the language. While there are some challenges associated with using authentic materials, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Therefore, language educators should consider using authentic materials in their teaching and continue to explore the effectiveness of using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms.

Background of the Study

The use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has been a topic of interest for language educators for decades, with numerous studies investigating the benefits and challenges of using such materials. For instance, in a study conducted by Kim and Elder (2019) on the use of authentic materials in Korean EFL classrooms, it was found that authentic materials enhanced students' motivation and engagement in language learning. The study also revealed that the use of authentic materials improved students' language proficiency, particularly in listening and speaking skills. Similarly, in another study by Taherian and Farzianpour (2020) on the use of authentic materials in Iranian EFL classrooms, it was found that the use of authentic materials increased learners' motivation, improved their language proficiency, and promoted cultural awareness.

On the other hand, studies have also highlighted the challenges associated with

the use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms. For example, in a study by Ekmeçci and Kayaoğlu (2021) on the use of authentic materials in Turkish EFL classrooms, it was found that some learners found authentic materials challenging due to unfamiliar vocabulary, complex syntax, and cultural references. Similarly, in a study by Hu (2019) on the use of authentic materials in Chinese EFL classrooms, it was found that some learners found authentic materials intimidating and difficult to understand.

Moreover, the availability of authentic materials may be limited in certain contexts, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries where access to native speaker materials may be difficult (Chang & Millett, 2021). Furthermore, the use of authentic materials may not be suitable for all learners, particularly those at lower proficiency levels or those with limited cultural knowledge (Tomlinson, 2012). While the use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has the potential to provide numerous benefits, such as improving learners' language proficiency and motivation, it is not without its challenges. It is important for language educators to carefully consider the appropriateness of authentic materials for their learners and to provide support and scaffolding to help learners overcome any challenges associated with using such materials. Further research is also needed to explore the effectiveness of using authentic materials in different contexts and with different learner populations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For many years, there has been a growing interest in the use of authentic materials in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classrooms. Researchers have investigated the effectiveness of incorporating authentic materials in different areas of language learning, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The use of authentic materials is believed to provide learners

with exposure to real-life language use, which can enhance their language proficiency and motivate them to learn the language (Tomlinson, 2012). Authentic materials, such as newspapers, magazines, advertisements, TV shows, movies, and other media, are designed for native speakers of the target language, making them a valuable resource for learners to experience the language in its natural context.

Studies have demonstrated that the use of authentic materials in listening activities can improve learners' listening comprehension skills (Vieira & Gómez, 2021). Similarly, the use of authentic reading materials, such as news articles, has been found to improve learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Chang & Millett, 2020). Authentic materials can also be used to develop learners' speaking and writing skills by providing them with models of authentic language use (Brown, 2007). For example, learners can analyze authentic texts to identify common structures and patterns in the language, which can be used in their own speaking and writing activities.

Despite the potential benefits of using authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms, there are challenges associated with their use. Authentic materials may contain unfamiliar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references that can be difficult for learners to understand (Tomlinson, 2012). Furthermore, not all authentic materials are appropriate for all learners, as they may contain mature or sensitive content that may not be suitable for some learners (Brown, 2007). Therefore, teachers should carefully select and adapt authentic materials to meet the learners' needs and language proficiency levels.

Listening

Research has shown that the use of authentic materials can be effective in improving learners' listening skills. For example,

Kim (2006) found that using authentic materials such as TV shows and movies can help learners improve their listening comprehension and increase their motivation to learn the language. Similarly, Chen and Lin (2013) found that using authentic materials such as news broadcasts and podcasts can improve learners' listening comprehension and increase their interest in the language.

Reading

The use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has also been found to be effective in improving learners' reading skills. For instance, Yalden (1987) found that using authentic materials such as newspapers and magazines can improve learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, Vukovic and Bratovic (2019) found that using authentic materials such as short stories and articles can improve learners' reading comprehension and increase their motivation to read in the target language.

Speaking

The use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has also been found to be effective in improving learners' speaking skills. For example, Ur (1996) found that using authentic materials such as TV shows and movies can provide learners with exposure to real-life language use and increase their confidence in speaking the language. Similarly, Li and Li (2016) found that using authentic materials such as advertisements and commercials can improve learners' speaking fluency and accuracy.

Writing

The use of authentic materials in ESL/EFL classrooms has also been found to be effective in improving learners' writing skills. For instance, Brown (2007) found that using authentic materials such as newspapers and magazines can improve learners' writing proficiency and increase their motivation to write in the target language. Similarly, Lee

and Kim (2015) found that using authentic materials such as online forums and social media can improve learners' writing skills and increase their motivation to write.

Research objectives

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of using authentic materials on language learning outcomes in ESL/EFL learners. The study involved a control group that relied on traditional textbook materials and an experimental group that was exposed to authentic materials. Post-test results were analyzed and compared to pre-test scores for both groups.

The findings of the study will provide language educators with empirical evidence on the benefits and challenges of using authentic materials in language instruction. The results may help language educators make informed decisions about incorporating authentic materials into their language instruction and provide guidance on how to effectively use authentic materials to enhance language learning outcomes. Therefore, the study aims at addressing the following research question:

RQ: What is the impact of using authentic materials compared to traditional textbook materials in ESL/EFL learners in terms of language proficiency, motivation, and engagement of Thai students?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims at investigating the impact of using authentic materials on development of in ESL/EFL learners. The study will use a mixed-methods research design, which will involve both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The study will be conducted in two phases: a pre-test phase and a post-test phase.

Participants

The participants in this study are second year undergraduate ESL/EFL learners enrolled in GEN60 -116 English for community

development course at Walailak University in term 1.2018, which covers 13 weeks studies. The study will include participants from different majors and linguistic backgrounds, and at different levels of language proficiency. The participants will be recruited through convenience sampling.

Data Collection

In the pre-test phase, the participants will complete a language proficiency test to assess their current level of proficiency in the target language. They will also complete a questionnaire to provide demographic information and their previous experience with using authentic materials in language learning. In the post-test phase, the participants will be randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group will receive instruction that includes authentic materials, while the control group will receive instruction using traditional textbook materials. The instruction will cover all language skills, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

During the instruction, the participants will complete weekly assignments and activities using the assigned materials. In addition, they will complete a weekly reflection on their experience with using the materials, including their perception of the materials' difficulty, usefulness, and engagement. At the end of the instruction, both groups will complete a language proficiency test to measure their language proficiency level. They will also complete a survey to evaluate their motivation and engagement in the language learning process, as well as their perception of the effectiveness of the instructional materials.

Data Analysis

In this study, we will analyze the quantitative data obtained from the pre-test and post-tests conducted on both the control and experimental groups. The data will be

analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, to assess the influence of incorporating authentic materials in language instruction. The study included a control group that relied on traditional textbook materials, and an experimental group that was exposed to authentic materials. We will compare the post-test scores of both groups to their respective pre-test scores to determine the impact of using authentic materials in language instruction.

Ethical Considerations

This study will follow ethical guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA). Participants will be informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential benefits. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured by assigning unique identification numbers to each participant and keeping their personal information confidential. Participants will be informed that they have option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and there are no risks associated with this study as only their test results will be used for data analysis without direct participation of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-test	Vocabulary (10)	Listening (10)	Reading (10)	Writing (10)	Total (40)
Max	9.00	9.00	10.00	9.00	31.00
Min	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	10.00
Average	5.60	5.32	5.49	5.13	21.54
SD	1.47	1.39	1.68	1.87	3.91

Table 1. Shows the pre-test results of the participants' English skills

Control group Post test	Post > Pre		Post = Pre		Post < Pre	
	No. of Students	%	No. of Students	%	No. of Students	%
Vocab	63	57	38	34	10	9
Listening	66	59	32	29	13	12
Reading	79	71	20	18	12	11
Writing	69	62	30	27	12	11
Overall	70	63	33	30	8	7

Table 2. Shows the post-test results of

control group using traditional textbook materials

Experimental group – Post test	Post > Pre		Post = Pre		Post < Pre	
	No. of Students	%	No. of Students	%	No. of Students	%
Vocab	87	78	10	9	14	13
Listening	79	71	10	9	22	20
Reading	90	81	5	5	16	14
Writing	79	71	16	14	16	14
Overall	94	85	3	3	14	13

Table 3. Shows the post-test results of experimental group using the authentic materials.

Language learning methodologies have evolved over time, with educators exploring various approaches to enhance language acquisition. One such area of investigation is the use of authentic materials in language instruction. This discussion aims to examine the research results presented in Table 2 and Table 3, which highlight the significant differences in post-test results between a control group utilizing traditional textbook materials and an experimental group exposed to authentic materials. The analysis will focus on the domains of vocabulary, listening, reading, writing, and overall language proficiency.

Results Analysis

Table 2 presents the post-test results of the control group, which relied on traditional textbook materials for instruction. It is noteworthy that the post-test scores for this group were lower than their corresponding pre-test scores in all four criteria. A substantial proportion of students exhibited decreased performance in vocabulary (38%), listening (32%), reading (20%), and writing (30%). These outcomes suggest that the traditional textbook approach may not have effectively supported the students' language learning needs. In contrast, Table 3 displays the post-test results of the experimental group, who were exposed to authentic materials. Notably, their post-test scores surpassed the pre-test scores across all criteria. Merely a few students demonstrated lower performance compared to their pre-test

scores. This indicates that the utilization of authentic materials had a positive impact on the language learning outcomes of the experimental group.

In contrast, Table 3 displays the post-test results of the experimental group, who were exposed to authentic materials. Notably, their post-test scores surpassed the pre-test scores across all criteria. A mere few students demonstrated lower performance compared to their pre-test scores. This indicates that the utilization of authentic materials had a positive impact on the language learning outcomes of the experimental group.

The study findings are consistent with previous research on the benefits of authentic materials in language instruction. Exposure to authentic materials can enhance vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall language proficiency. Authentic materials, such as articles, videos, and podcasts, provide learners with exposure to real-life language usage, which can help them to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its usage in authentic contexts. This suggests that incorporating authentic materials in language instruction can enhance language learning outcomes and enable learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language.

The study has significant implications for language teachers and curriculum designers. The study suggests that teachers should consider using authentic materials in their language instruction to enhance language learning outcomes. Incorporating authentic materials into the curriculum can provide students with an opportunity to develop their language skills in authentic contexts. This can help to increase their motivation and engagement, as well as provide a more practical and realistic experience of the language.

Moreover, the study findings highlight the importance of using authentic materials in language instruction for ESL/EFL learners. The study's results indicate that exposure to authentic materials can have a positive impact on language learning outcomes. The study findings suggest that teachers should consider incorporating authentic materials into their language instruction to enhance language learning outcomes, enabling learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its usage in authentic contexts.

Implications of Authentic Materials

The findings from these research results align with the views of Brown and Lee (2015), who emphasize the benefits of authentic materials in language instruction. Authentic materials provide learners with real-life language examples, exposing them to various vocabulary, structures, and contexts. This exposure allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its usage in authentic contexts. The study's outcomes confirm that exposure to authentic materials can enhance vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall language proficiency.

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of language learning, as it enables learners to comprehend and express themselves effectively. The experimental group's significantly higher post-test scores in vocabulary indicate that authentic materials facilitated a more extensive and meaningful acquisition of new words and expressions. This aligns with the research by Peacock and Ho (2003), who found that authentic materials contribute to the expansion of learners' vocabulary repertoire.

Listening comprehension is another critical skill for language learners, as it enables them to understand spoken language in various contexts. The experimental group's

higher post-test scores in listening demonstrate that exposure to authentic materials enhanced their ability to comprehend spoken language, possibly due to the authentic and natural language use presented in such materials. This finding is consistent with the research by Chiang and Dunkel (1992), who reported that authentic listening materials positively impact listening comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension is essential for learners to comprehend written texts effectively. The experimental group's higher post-test scores in reading suggest that authentic materials aided in the development of reading skills, as learners engaged with real-world texts that reflected the language's natural use. This observation aligns with the research by Dupuy and Krashen (1993), who found that authentic materials enhance reading comprehension abilities.

Writing skills are crucial for learners to express their thoughts and ideas effectively in written form. The experimental group's higher post-test scores in writing indicate that exposure to authentic materials facilitated the development of writing skills. Authentic materials provide learners with models of authentic writing, allowing them to observe and emulate appropriate language use. This finding supports the research by Brandl (1995), who reported that authentic materials positively influence writing development.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of using authentic materials on language learning outcomes in ESL/EFL learners. The study involved a control group that relied on traditional textbook materials and an experimental group that was exposed to authentic materials. Post-test results were analyzed and compared to pre-test scores for both groups. The results presented in Table 2 and

Table 3 provide evidence of the positive impact of authentic materials on language learning outcomes. The experimental group that was exposed to authentic materials achieved better results in all four criteria compared to the control group that relied on traditional textbook materials. The use of authentic materials positively impacted vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall language proficiency.

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of language learning, and the use of authentic materials was found to facilitate a more extensive and meaningful acquisition of new words and expressions. This finding aligns with previous research that has shown that authentic materials contribute to the expansion of learners' vocabulary repertoire (Peacock & Ho, 2003). Authentic materials present learners with real-life language examples, exposing them to various vocabulary, structures, and contexts, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its usage in authentic contexts.

Listening comprehension is another critical skill for language learners, and the use of authentic materials was found to enhance learners' ability to comprehend spoken language. This result may be due to the authentic and natural language use presented in such materials. Previous research has also found that authentic listening materials positively impact listening comprehension skills (Chiang & Dunkel, 1992).

Reading comprehension is also an essential skill for learners to comprehend written texts effectively. The use of authentic materials was found to aid in the development of reading skills, as learners engaged with real-world texts that reflected the language's natural use. This finding aligns with previous research that has found that authentic ma-

terials enhance reading comprehension abilities (Dupuy & Krashen, 1993).

Writing skills are crucial for learners to express their thoughts and ideas effectively in written form. The use of authentic materials was found to facilitate the development of writing skills by providing learners with models of authentic writing. Learners can observe and emulate appropriate language use, allowing them to improve their writing abilities. This finding is consistent with previous research that has reported that authentic materials positively influence writing development (Brandl, 1995). The use of authentic materials positively impacted learners' language proficiency in multiple domains. This result can be attributed to the authenticity and relevance of the materials, which enabled learners to engage with the language in meaningful ways. The use of authentic materials provides learners with real-life language use examples, exposing them to various vocabulary, structures, and contexts. This exposure allows learners to develop a deeper understanding of the language and its usage in authentic contexts.

In summary, the study findings presented in Table 2 and Table 3 provide strong evidence of the positive impact of authentic materials on language learning outcomes. The use of authentic materials can enhance learners' vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing skills, and overall language proficiency. These findings underscore the importance of utilizing authentic materials in language instruction to support learners' language learning needs. Educators should consider integrating authentic materials into their language instruction to enhance language acquisition and improve language learning outcomes.

Limitations and Suggestions for future research

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of using authentic materials on language learning outcomes in ESL/EFL learners, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the study's sample size is relatively small, with only 111 students participating in the study. While the study findings are statistically significant, a larger sample size would provide greater confidence in the results. Secondly, the study was conducted in a specific context, namely the English for Community Development course at Walailak University. The results may not be generalizable to other contexts or courses, and further research is needed to examine the impact of using authentic materials in different language learning settings. Thirdly, the study only examined the short-term impact of using authentic materials on language learning outcomes. Future research could explore the long-term impact of incorporating authentic materials into language instruction. Lastly, the study did not address the challenges or limitations of using authentic materials in language instruction. While authentic materials can enhance language learning outcomes, they may also present challenges for learners who are not familiar with the cultural context or linguistic features of the materials.

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of using authentic materials on language learning outcomes, further research is needed to address the limitations of the study and to explore the long-term impact of incorporating authentic materials into language instruction in different contexts.

Based on the findings thereof, future studies could explore the following areas:

1. Long-term effects: This study focused on the immediate impact of using authentic

materials on language learning outcomes. Future studies could investigate the long-term effects of integrating authentic materials into language instruction to determine whether the positive impact is sustained over time.

2. Cultural differences: The use of authentic materials may vary across different cultural and linguistic contexts. Future studies could examine the effectiveness of authentic materials in diverse contexts to determine whether the positive impact is consistent across cultures.
3. Pedagogical practices: The study demonstrated that the use of authentic materials can enhance language learning outcomes. Future studies could investigate the most effective ways to integrate authentic materials into language instruction and identify best practices for using these materials to maximize their impact on language learning outcomes.
4. Learner characteristics: This study focused on ESL/EFL learners in general, without examining individual learner characteristics. Future studies could investigate the impact of authentic materials on language learning outcomes for specific learner groups, such as different age groups or proficiency levels, to determine whether the positive impact is consistent across different learner characteristics.
5. Different types of authentic materials: This study used a variety of authentic materials, including newspaper articles, podcasts, and videos. Future studies could examine the effectiveness of different types of authentic materials in language instruction to determine which types are most effective in enhancing language learning outcomes.

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