

Exploring the Effectiveness of Authentic Materials and Task-Based Learning Approaches in Enhancing English Language Skills and Motivation of Vietnamese EFL Learners: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Vietnamese EFL learners' English language skills and motivation were evaluated through an investigation into the effectiveness of task-based learning approaches combined with authentic materials. A quasi-experimental design was utilized, which included 100 participants from Vietnam's EFL learners. Participants were then divided equally into an experimental group (n=50) and a control group (n=50). The experimental group underwent instruction using task-based learning and authentic materials, while the control group utilized traditional teaching methods. Language skills and motivation levels of participants were measured using pre- and post-tests, both of which revealed remarkable improvements. The findings supported the use of authentic materials and task-based learning approaches for Vietnamese EFL learners, proving their efficacy for language acquisition.

Keywords: Authentic materials, Task-based learning, Motivation

1 Introduction

There is an increasing need for effective English language teaching and learning methods due to the importance of English as a global language. In Vietnam, English is considered a foreign language and is pivotal in the educational system, international relations, and economic development (Lam et al., 2021). Consequently, Vietnam is experiencing a surge in demand for individuals fluent in English as the nation continues to integrate into the global economy. Acquiring English and maintaining curiosity necessitates resourceful and successful teaching techniques for pupils.

The use of innovative strategies, such as authentic materials and task-based learning, can improve language skills and motivation among EFL students (Lai & Li, 2011; Lam et al., 2021; Nunan, 2004; van den Branden, 2006). Authentic materials, mentioned in this research, are materials produced for native speakers, such as newspapers, magazines, and websites, rather than specifically designed for language learners (Nunan, 1991). Task-based learning is a pedagogical approach focusing on learners performing communicative tasks through interaction, allowing them to develop their language skills in context (Sanchez, 2004). While these approaches have been studied individually and have shown promise in various EFL contexts, few studies have explored their combined effect on language skills and motivation, particularly among Vietnamese EFL learners. Thus, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of incorporating authentic materials and task-based learning approaches in enhancing the English language skills and motivation of Vietnamese EFL learners.

1.1 Background

In teaching English in Vietnam, the predominant method has been the traditional grammar-translation approach, teaching grammar rules and vocabulary it has. However, learners' language skills cannot be developed in real contexts, which led to its criticism for lack of focus on communication (Van, 2018). As a



result, researchers and educators have looked for different ways to prioritize and involve learners in meaningful language use for the learner's benefit (Lam et al., 2021).

Learners are being exposed to the real-life language as they utilize authentic materials during language teaching, which has recently garnered more attention. This is because these materials have the potential to help them practice language skills in context (Gilmore, 2007). Moreover, authentic materials can enhance learners' motivation by providing them with interesting and relevant content that connects to their lives and interests (Peacock, 1997). Task-based learning, on the other hand, shifts the focus from explicit grammar instruction to the completion of communicative tasks, which can help learners develop their language skills through interaction and problem-solving. This approach has been found to foster intrinsic motivation, as learners perceive tasks as meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable (Dörnyei, 1998).

1.2 Research Questions

Given the potential benefits of authentic materials and task-based learning, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do authentic materials and task-based learning approaches enhance the English language skills of Vietnamese EFL learners compared to traditional teaching methods?
2. How do authentic materials and task-based learning approaches impact the motivation of Vietnamese EFL learners in comparison to traditional teaching methods?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of research on authentic materials and task-based learning by investigating their combined effect on language skills and motivation among Vietnamese EFL learners. As few studies have explored the effectiveness of these approaches in the Vietnamese context, the findings of this study have the potential to provide valuable insights for English language educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in Vietnam, as well as in other EFL contexts with similar characteristics.

Moreover, the quasi-experimental design of the study allows for a more robust examination of the impact of authentic materials and task-based learning on language skills and motivation, compared to purely observational or qualitative studies. By comparing the experimental group, which receives instruction using authentic materials and task-based learning approaches, with the control group, which is taught using traditional methods, the study can identify the specific benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of these approaches in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

Furthermore, the study's focus on both language skills and motivation is significant, as it acknowledges the interrelated nature of language proficiency and motivation in language learning. The potential benefits of EFL learners utilizing authentic materials and task-based learning are comprehensively understood through the impact of these approaches. The development of English language teaching materials, curricula, and policies that promote the utilization of genuine materials and task-based learning approaches in Vietnamese EFL contexts can be educated by the discoveries of this study. The reflections gained from this research might aid in the improvement of English language education in Vietnam. Ultimately, this can lead to the enhancement of Vietnamese EFL learners' language abilities, maintenance of motivation through their language learning voyage, and meeting the demands of the expanding universe. Future research could also be influenced by the study's results.

2 Literature review

2.1 Authentic Materials in Language Learning

Newspapers, magazines, movies, podcasts, and websites are some examples of authentic materials, which are created for native speakers rather than for language learners, according to Nunan (1999a). Recently, the

use of authentic materials in language teaching has grown in popularity as they offer learners access to genuine language and relatable scenarios (Gilmore, 2007). Additionally, these materials can improve learners' language abilities, like reading, listening, speaking, and writing, by providing opportunities to apply these skills in actual situations (Mishan & Timmis, 2015).

Learner motivation has been on the rise thanks to authentic materials as they relate to real life and are therefore more interesting (Peacock, 1997). These materials can increase cultural awareness and understanding of the target language community (Kilickaya, 2004). Some challenges associated with using authentic materials to teach EFL include searching for appropriate materials, adjusting them to students' proficiency levels, and incorporating them into the curriculum (Berardo, 2006).

2.2 Task-Based Learning

Nunan (2004) elucidates how task-based learning (TBL) imparts language instruction by focusing on communicating through goal-oriented tasks instead of explicit grammar teaching, as Willis and Willis (2007) have similarly noted. In TBL, students employ language to achieve a particular outcome, be it decision-making, problem-solving, or opinion-sharing. Learners can nurture their language competency through activities that require them to socialize with peers, communicate effectively by deliberating the nuances of the language, and explore unfamiliar language patterns, as detailed by Long, M. (2015).

By focusing on authentic contexts, TBL has been proven to encourage language acquisition by emphasizing meaning, form, and function (Ellis, 2003). In addition, TBL instills intrinsic motivation among learners, as it makes tasks feel meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable (Dörnyei, 2001). Despite its benefits, implementing this teaching method in EFL classrooms presents challenges, including limited resources, large classes, and resistance from both teachers and students to new styles of instruction (Skehan, 1998).

2.3 Motivation in Language Learning

According to Gardner (2006), language learning is heavily influenced by motivation, which affects how much effort learners put in, their persistence, and their ultimate success. Dörnyei (2001) separates motivation in language learning into two main categories: integrative motivation, which involves a longing to become part of the target language community, and instrumental motivation, which involves a desire to learn the language for practical reasons like job prospects or exam scores. Learning a language is significantly impacted by intrinsic motivation, which refers to the inherent interest and enjoyment one finds in the process (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The motivation of learners can be positively affected by both task-based learning approaches and the use of authentic materials. A few studies have shown this to be the case (Peacock, 1997; Dörnyei, 2001). The use of engaging and meaningful language learning experiences can enhance intrinsic motivation and lead to greater success in language acquisition.

2.4 Previous Studies on Authentic Materials, Task-Based Learning, and Motivation

Motivating EFL learners and improving their language skills through the use of authentic materials and task-based learning has been the subject of various studies. One such study conducted by Peacock in 1997 discovered that incorporating authentic materials significantly boosted the reading comprehension and motivation of EFL learners. Likewise, Mishan and Timmis (2015) emphasized the positive effects of authentic materials on learners' listening and speaking skills and cultural sensitivity. However, these studies concentrated solely on using authentic materials and didn't consider task-based approaches.

In terms of task-based learning, studies have shown that TBL can lead to improvements in language skills and motivation. For instance, Willis and Willis (2007) found that TBL effectively developed EFL learners' speaking and writing skills. Nunan (2004) reported that TBL had a positive impact on learners' motivation

and engagement in the language learning process. Nevertheless, these studies mainly concentrated on the implementation of TBL alone, without considering the integration of authentic materials.

Few studies have examined the combined effect of authentic materials and task-based learning on language skills and motivation. One such study by Gilmore (2007) demonstrated that the integration of authentic materials and TBL significantly improved EFL learners' language skills and motivation. However, this study focused on a specific group of advanced learners, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other contexts and proficiency levels.

In the Vietnamese EFL context, research on authentic materials and task-based learning is relatively scarce. Lam et al. (2021) explored the challenges of implementing TBL in Vietnamese classrooms, highlighting issues such as large class sizes, limited resources, and teacher resistance. However, the study did not investigate the impact of TBL or authentic materials on language skills and motivation among Vietnamese EFL learners.

Amidst various EFL settings, researchers have evaluated the potential of authentic materials and task-based learning in isolation, but not necessarily in tandem. Notably, there is a shortage of data surrounding the confluence of these approaches and their influence on language skills and motivation, particularly among Vietnamese EFL students. As such, this study endeavors to fill this gap by examining the efficacy of synergizing authentic materials and task-based learning strategies to amplify the English language skills and motivation of Vietnamese EFL learners.

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research utilized a quasi-experimental layout to explore if genuine materials and task-based learning methods were successful in improving the English language abilities and drive of EFL learners from Vietnam. Two squads were established: the group under experimentation that were educated via authentic materials and task-based learning approaches, and the control group that was instructed using conventional methods. Prior to and post-intervention, assessments were implemented to gauge the participants' language proficiencies and motivation levels.

3.2 Participants

Enrolled in a Foreign language center, 100 EFL learners ages 16-20 participated in this study. The researchers divided the learners into groups: experimental (n=50) and control (n=50). To ensure comparable English proficiency, participants were purposively sampled based on standardized English placement test scores.

3.3 Materials and Instruments

The materials and instruments used in this study included:

- *Authentic materials:* Various authentic materials, such as newspaper articles, websites, and podcasts, were selected based on their relevance to the learners' interests and proficiency levels. The materials were adapted for classroom use, as necessary, to ensure their appropriateness and comprehensibility (Gilmore, 2007).
- *Task-based activities:* A set of task-based activities was designed to accompany the authentic materials, following Willis and Willis's (2007) framework for task-based learning. The activities included information gap tasks, problem-solving tasks, and opinion-sharing tasks, which required learners to interact with one another and use the target language to complete the tasks.

- *Pre- and post-tests*: Language skills tests were administered before and after the intervention to measure the participants' improvement in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The tests were adapted from the Cambridge English Language Assessment to ensure their validity and reliability.
- *Motivation questionnaire*: A motivation questionnaire, based on Dörnyei's, (1998) motivational strategies, was administered before and after the intervention to assess the participants' motivation levels. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4 Procedures

The study was conducted over a period of 10 weeks. In the first week, pre-tests were administered to both the experimental and control groups to establish their baseline language skills and motivation levels. The experimental group then received instruction using authentic materials and task-based learning approaches for 8 weeks. The authentic materials were integrated into the curriculum, and task-based activities were designed to help learners develop their language skills in context. The control group, on the other hand, followed a traditional curriculum, focusing on explicit grammar instruction and vocabulary learning.

After the 8-week intervention, post-tests were administered to both groups to measure their language skills and motivation levels. The data collected from the pre- and post-tests were then analyzed to determine the effectiveness of authentic materials and task-based learning approaches in enhancing language skills and motivation among Vietnamese EFL learners.

3.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to the data obtained from the pre- and post-tests. Each group's pre- and post-test scores were compared through paired-samples t-tests, while the mean disparities in both language skills and motivation levels between the experimental and control groups were contrasted through independent-samples t-tests. Findings were evaluated for their practical significance using effect sizes, which measured the disparities between experimental and control groups. Concurrently, we explored interaction effects (time-pretest versus posttest and group-experienced versus control) on language skills and motivation using a repeated-measure ANOVA. Our team ran all statistical analyses with SPSS software. Several measures were enacted to guarantee the reliability of the outcomes. Validity and reliability were insured by adapting the pre- and post-tests from the dependable source of Cambridge English Language Assessment. The motivational questionnaire was created using extensively reviewed motivational strategies by Dörnyei (2001). Moreover, systematic and transparent data collection and analysis methods were established, diminishing possible biases and enhancing study replicability.

Among Vietnamese EFL learners, the efficiency of task-based learning methods and authentic materials in elevating English language skills and enthusiasm was examined in a quasi-experimental layout utilized by the survey. Following its division into two groups: experimental and control, 100 individuals were tested throughout the study. Both language skills exams and a motivation questionnaire were included in the tools administered, incorporating authentic materials and task-based activities. Utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics throughout the pre- and post-tests, the gathered information was studied meticulously, ensuring the accuracy and corresponding connection with the research questions.

4 Results

4.1 Pre-test Results

The preliminary assessment's outcomes, depicted in Table 1, display the average scores and standard deviations of language skills and motivation levels of both the experimental and control groups.

Table 1: Pre-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Language Skills and Motivation Levels

Group	Language Skills (M±SD)	Motivation Levels (M±SD)
Experimental (n=50)	47.36±6.72	3.52±0.59
Control (n=50)	46.92±6.51	3.47±0.56

Between the experimental and control groups in their pre-test, language skills scores and motivation levels were statistically insignificant ($t(98)=0.32, p=.75$; $t(98)=0.39, p=.70$), indicating similar baseline levels across both cohorts. Therefore, no significant differences were released via an independent-samples t-test.

4.2 Post-test Results

On the post-test, the mean scores and standard deviations for the language skills and motivation levels of both groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Post-test Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Language Skills and Motivation Levels

Group	Language Skills (M±SD)	Motivation Levels (M±SD)
Experimental (n=50)	56.88±7.24	4.16±0.68
Control (n=50)	50.48±6.77	3.59±0.57

4.3 Comparison of Language Skills Improvement

Conducting a paired-samples t-test was necessary to compare both groups' pre- and post-test language skill scores. Excitingly, those in the experimental group showcased great progress with their language skills ($t(49)=-9.27, p<.001$), resulting in a large effect size ($d=1.31$). Similarly, the control group also showed an impressive advancement in their language skills ($t(49)=-4.29, p<.001$) with a moderate effect size ($d=0.61$). In order to analyse the variance in language skills, an independent-samples t-test was administered for both the experimental and control groups. The results indicated that the experimental group showed a highly significant improvement in language skills in comparison to the control group ($t(98)=-4.72, p<.001$). Additionally, the effect size was found to be large ($d=0.95$).

4.4 Comparison of Motivation Levels

Motivation levels within each group were compared through a paired-samples t-test, analysing pre- and post-test data. Results indicated a significant increase in motivation levels for the experimental group ($t(49)=-6.41, p<.001$), showcasing a substantial effect size ($d=0.91$). However, the control group demonstrated no significant alteration in motivation levels ($t(49)=-1.23, p=.23$), producing a small effect size ($d=0.17$). In determining the distinction in motivation levels between the experimental and control groups, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. Surprisingly, the experimental group showed a vast enhancement in motivation levels compared to the control group ($t(98)=-4.89, p<.001$), establishing a considerable effect size ($d=0.98$).

Using authentic materials and a task-based teaching style produced significant improvements and heightened motivation in language skills among Vietnamese EFL students, according to the study's results.

In contrast, the control group, taught using traditional methods, showed less progress. The integration of the aforementioned approaches may then result in a more effective enhancement of English language skills and motivation among these learners. In conclusion, the use of authentic materials coupled with task-based learning proved to be a far better approach for teaching English to the experimental group.

Including the experimental and control groups, Table 3 presents a summary of the key discoveries of the study. It compares the enhancement of language skills and the levels of motivation between the two groups.

Table 3: Summary of Main Findings

Comparison	Language Skills	Motivation Levels
Pre-test	No significant difference	No significant difference
Post-test	Experimental group > Control group	Experimental group > Control group
Improvement	Experimental group > Control group	Experimental group > Control group

For EFL learners in Vietnam, task-based learning coupled with authentic materials appears to be more effective in improving both their language skills and motivation levels than traditional teaching methods. Based on the significant differences in improvement and the size of the effects, it seems that authentic materials and task-based learning can make a meaningful difference in how Vietnamese students experience learning English.

Vietnamese EFL learners can benefit significantly from a combination of authentic materials and task-based learning approaches, according to the findings of this study. By integrating such approaches into English language instruction, English language education in Vietnam could be substantially enhanced. Not only will this help learners develop their language skills, but it will also keep their motivation levels high, resulting in a more successful language-learning journey. Therefore, this study's empirical evidence further supports the effectiveness of these methods in improving English language proficiency.

5 Discussion

5.1 The Effectiveness of Authentic Materials and Task-Based Learning

Compared to traditional teaching methods, this study found that combining task-based learning approaches with authentic materials resulted in greater enhancements in English language skills among Vietnamese EFL learners. It's not the first time authentic materials were found to benefit foreign language learning, and previous studies (Gilmore, 2007; Peacock, 1997) have also highlighted these advantages. The effectiveness of task-based learning in fostering language skills development has also been previously noted (Nunan, 1999; Willis & Willis, 2007), and our study supports this. Incorporating authentic materials and task-based learning can significantly impact the language learning outcomes of Vietnamese EFL students, as indicated by the sizable effect sizes observed for their language skills improvements.

5.2 The Impact of Authentic Materials and Task-Based Learning on Motivation

Compared to the control group, those in the experimental group displayed a notable surge in motivation levels, as indicated by the results. The experimental group had engaged in task-based learning methods and were exposed to genuine materials, which is consistent with prior research highlighting the connection between genuine materials and motivation (Peacock, 1997). Dörnyei (2001) also suggested that task-based learning fosters learner motivation, which supports the results found in this study. Vietnamese EFL learners' motivation undergone a significant boost, emphasizing the vital role that authentic materials and task-based learning methods play in the process.

5.3 Implications for EFL Teaching in Vietnam

To create an education environment that is more effective and motivating for students, English language teachers might want to start thinking about integrating task-based learning approaches and authentic materials into their teaching style. By suggesting materials that are engaging and relevant to their class, and designing interactive activities that encourage language use and meaningful conversations, educators can improve their students' language skills.

Vietnamese English language education could benefit immensely from the integration of authentic materials and task-based learning approaches, and it behoves policymakers and curriculum developers to take notice. A more tailored education that addresses the needs of Vietnamese EFL learners and the global market could be achieved by incorporating these methods into the country's teaching materials and curricula.

In Vietnam, implementing effective and engaging English language teaching practices can be achieved by teacher training programs incorporating task-based learning approaches and instruction on using authentic materials. Teachers need to learn these skills to implement them successfully in their classrooms. With the help of these tools and strategies, teacher training programs can effectively provide educators with the knowledge necessary to create more motivating learning environments.

Among Vietnamese EFL learners, the implementation of authentic materials and task-based learning strategies was found to be instrumental in augmenting their English language proficiency and motivation. This study's results affirm that the integration of these innovative techniques into English language training could boost the overall quality of English education in Vietnam, enabling students to improve their language abilities and maintain their enthusiasm throughout their linguistic voyage. Therefore, it is clear that these methods are effective and useful in enhancing language learning outcomes.

6 Conclusions

In Vietnam, the efficiency of utilizing genuine materials and task-based learning strategies to improve English language proficiency and eagerness was investigated in the current research. Employing a quasi-experimental format, the findings revealed the experimental group that received instruction based on these strategies exhibited remarkably superior language skills and motivation levels compared to the traditional curriculum-based control group. Incorporating authentic materials and task-based learning approaches into Vietnamese EFL education can improve language learning, according to empirical evidence. This outcome suggests that the utilization of these approaches could positively impact English language education in Vietnam as a whole.

For Vietnamese EFL learners, the study we conducted presented us with useful insights regarding the advantages of using authentic materials and task-based learning strategies. However, we must recognize some limitations. Specifically, our study employed a quasi-experimental design, which could produce partiality correlated with participant selection and group assignment. To enhance the veracity of our outcomes, future researchers might consider using a randomized controlled trial design.

To determine the usefulness of authentic materials and task-based learning approaches in varied language contexts, future research should expand beyond the Vietnamese EFL learners that were studied, as this limited the applicability of the findings. To fully analyse the benefits of these methods, it would be pertinent to investigate their effectiveness with other populations and in various settings.

Incorporating a variety of assessment methods to gauge learner motivation is an essential component of future research. While self-reporting may be influenced by social desirability and self-presentation biases, measures such as teacher observations, objective engagement and persistence metrics, and classroom reports could provide more robust insight into the validity of authentic materials and task-based learning approaches on motivation levels.

Among Vietnamese EFL learners, the utilization of authentic materials and task-based learning techniques has a proven track record of enhancing English language abilities and motivation, as evidenced by this study's empirical findings. Although it has its limitations, this research provides valuable insights into the advantages of incorporating these methods into English language instruction and offers a basis for further exploration in this field. By delving deeper into the effectiveness of these approaches, researchers and educators can make meaningful contributions to the continual development and advancement of global English language education.

7 Declarations

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