

USING A TASK-BASED APPROACH AND AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO ENHANCE FLUENTLY ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF THAI HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS STUDYING ENGLISH AS A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MARIE UPATHAM SCHOOL, NAKHONPATHOM, THAILAND

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were twofold: 1) to compare the posttest mean scores of English proficiency tests between students who received task-based instruction with authentic materials and those who received PPP instruction, and 2) to compare the mean scores of students' attitudes before and after receiving task-based instruction with authentic materials. Employing a non-equivalent control groups design, the sample comprised 100 eleventh-grade students from Marie Upatham School during the first semester of the 2024 academic year, selected through purposive sampling. Fifty students were allocated to both the experimental and control groups. The instruments used included eight weeks of lesson plans utilizing task-based instruction with authentic materials, pre-post English proficiency tests, and a questionnaire on students' attitudes toward task-based instruction with authentic materials. Data analysis involved independent-sample t-test and paired-sample t-test. The results indicated that students who received task-based instruction with authentic materials outperformed those who received PPP instruction in posttest English proficiency scores. Furthermore, students' attitudes significantly improved after receiving task-based instruction with authentic materials. This study offered valuable insights into enhancing English proficiency through task-based instruction with authentic materials, providing innovative perspectives for

educators and researchers to optimize teaching practices and educational outcomes.

Keywords: Task-based approach; authentic materials; PPP instruction; attitude

Introduction

English, as a global language, assumed enormous importance in today's interconnected world. It served as a lingua franca in various domains, including commerce, diplomacy, science, and technology. In the realm of education, English proficiency was not only a skill but also a key asset for accessing a wealth of knowledge and opportunities on a global scale. Proficiency in English enabled individuals to engage with diverse perspectives, access international academic resources, and participate actively in a globalized workforce. Thus, the effective teaching of English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) became crucial in educational settings worldwide. In this context, exploring innovative teaching methodologies was essential to address the diverse learning needs of students and to enhance their language acquisition skills. In recent years, English classrooms underwent a shift in language teaching methods, moving from teacher-centered guidance to a more student-centered approach. This change acknowledged the importance of addressing learners' needs and their ability to utilize language effectively in real-life situations.

In the Thai educational context, even after years of studying English, a significant number of Thai students encountered difficulties when it came to English communication. Their poor performance in English could be attributed to various issues and potential factors. Within the researcher's current work at Marie Upatham School, high school students also encountered obstacles in language proficiency. Common problems included students' lack of confidence in using English and their struggle with effective communication. Additionally, grammatical errors, especially related to tenses and sentence structures, as well as pronunciation difficulties, were frequently observed. Observations revealed that teachers often dominated classroom communication, resulting in passive learning environments where students absorbed information rather than actively engaging in language interactions. This imbalance in classroom discourse unintentionally limited students' opportunities for active language use.

Furthermore, the school had employed traditional presentation-practice-production (PPP) instruction for many years. At recent years, there was a growing trend of criticism towards this approach. The PPP instruction was criticized for its excessive focus on accuracy, neglecting the students' need to use language for communication purposes (Pratista, 2022). This might have led to limitations in speaking proficiency, lack of confidence, reduced motivation, and ineffective communication skills among students. Namsaeng and Thuratham (2023) mentioned that while procedural knowledge was recognized as a positive aspect of PPP instruction, it remained problematic for students because learning was perceived as a linear process, focusing on isolated language chunks rather than holistic comprehension. Moreover, Willis (1996) highlighted various problems associated with PPP instruction. One issue was that students occasionally completed tasks or role plays during the production stage without employing the target form. They also had a tendency to excessively rely on the target form, resulting in highly unnatural conversations. PPP instruction created a false impression of proficiency since students could often confidently produce the required forms in class. However, outside of the classroom, they either used them incorrectly or did not use them at all.

With the mentioned criticisms, the PPP instruction had been questioned as to whether it was still the popular teaching approach, leaving a gap in the educational field. As we could see, many teaching and learning approaches had been invented, especially in the era of English for communication. One of the effective methods in communicative language teaching (CLT) was task-based instruction. It was a recent framework that focused on performing functional tasks and exchanging meaning. This concept, introduced by Prabhu in 1987, suggested that students learned better when they focused on the task itself rather than just the language. Prabhu (1987) argued that task emphasis was vital for improving language acquisition. Long (2019) also stated that the objective of task-based instruction was to provide students with their present and future real-world communicative needs. Additionally, Bhandari (2020) argued that students were exposed to various meaningful tasks to enhance their language ability. Through language tasks, they learned both the subject matter and communication skills that were related to their life experiences. Several studies demonstrated positive results and benefits when using the task-based approach (Sertpunya, 2015; Nghi, 2023).

While many studies demonstrated the benefits of task-based instruction, it also faced criticism. Ellis et al. (2020) outlined various criticisms from external and internal perspectives. For example, tasks were unable to serve as the main units of a curriculum. Task-based instruction did not assist students in learning a new language, and there was an absence of grammar focus in the instruction. Also, doing tasks encouraged indexical and minimal use of the target language as well as was not suitable for low-proficiency students. As a result, students tended to use their mother tongue when performing tasks, making it less effective in environments with limited language learning resources. Additionally, some proponents of task-based instruction had many questions about the instruction. For instance, which types of tasks were most appropriate for such courses, what a task complex consisted of, and how tasks could be sequenced effectively. Furthermore, what the role of explicit instruction could have been. Although task-based instruction had been widely used in communicative language teaching, the approach also encountered a lot of criticism. This remained a gap to fill out whether it was still an effective method for real-world communication.

Additionally, incorporating authentic materials into task-based instruction was deemed crucial in determining the types of tasks to be included. Authentic materials encompassed a wide range of resources such as videos, audios, and written texts created by native speakers for genuine communication (Romero-Molina & Alfonso-Vargas, 2023). They demonstrated real language usage in authentic contexts, bridging classroom learning with real-world language use. Many research studies on the use of authentic materials to enhance students' communication skills showed positive results (Heryatun et al., 2023; Mandarsari, 2023; Alisherovna, 2023). Therefore, integrating authentic materials into students' learning journey immersed them in real-life language situations and maintained their engagement with topics relevant to their interests. Consequently, including authentic materials was crucial for helping students achieve language proficiency.

As mentioned above, task-based instruction has shown numerous advantages, and the use of authentic materials could further enhance students' language learning. Therefore, the researcher evaluated the feasibility of conducting a study employing task-based instruction combined with authentic materials. The objective was to explore new teaching methods or knowledge to

address the problems, as well as to compare it with traditional PPP instruction. Through this, the researcher sought to determine the most effective method and investigate students' perspectives on task-based instruction with authentic materials.

Research Objectives

1) To compare the post/test mean scores of English proficiency tests between students who received the task-based instruction with authentic materials and those who received the PPP instruction.

2) To compare the mean scores of students' attitudes before and after receiving the task-based instruction with authentic materials.

Literature Reviews

The task-based approach, introduced by Prabhu (1987) in the 1980s, prioritized practical application and understanding in language acquisition. It emphasized guiding students in using the target language meaningfully and authentically through conversational practice. Prabhu classified tasks into three categories: information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap activities. Information-gap tasks involved exchanging information to achieve communication objectives. Reasoning-gap tasks challenged students to employ their reasoning abilities to solve problems. Opinion-gap activities encouraged learners to express their interests, beliefs, or attitudes, enhancing their logical thinking abilities.

Willis (1996) adapted the paradigm of task-based instruction, comprising three core elements: the pre-task phase, task cycle, and language focus. In the pre-task phase, learners engaged in preparatory tasks aligned with the subject matter and were provided clear objectives to guide their learning journey. The task cycle, the subsequent phase, included the task itself, preparation, and reporting. Learners shared their learning experiences through written compositions or presentations, reflecting on both linguistic and non-linguistic competencies acquired. Throughout this phase, instructors primarily facilitated and supported students rather than dictating their actions. The final phase emphasized language exploration and instruction, enabling learners to delve into fundamental aspects of the text and practice new vocabulary, sentence

structures, and forms. These three stages aimed to furnish students with ample linguistic resources.

Authentic materials, also known as contextualized materials, were items encountered in our everyday lives (Martinez, 2002). These materials encompassed a wide range of resources such as newspaper articles, movies, advertisements, maps, comic books, brochures, video CDs (VCDs), and digital versatile discs (DVDs). They primarily served as tools for communication among people. For instance, newspapers conveyed local and international news, while VCDs and DVDs provided entertainment. Furthermore, Baird and Redmond (2004) suggested that authentic materials could be broadly divided into spoken form, such as films, radio, and weather forecasts, and written form, including recipes, articles, and application forms.

Many researchers strongly advocated for the use of authentic materials for several reasons, as supported by scholars like Berardo (2006). These materials offered various benefits, including keeping content current and enhancing learner motivation, comprehension, and satisfaction. They served as a source of inspiration for language learning, provided cultural insights, exposed students to real-world language usage, and promoted creative teaching approaches. Tomlinson (2011) emphasized that students tended to learn a language more rapidly when they had self-confidence. Thus, authentic materials contained valuable language data and promoted better communication skills in students.

Willis (1996) described the PPP instruction as follows: During the Presentation stage, the teacher introduced a language item within a context to aid understanding. This could involve presenting pattern sentences, acting out short dialogs, or using audio materials. In the Practice stage, students repeated and practiced the target language, either individually or in pairs, until they mastered it. Activities included drills, sentence completion, and question-and-answer exercises. Finally, in the Production stage, students were tasked with using the learned language in a free context, often through role play or communication tasks.

Attitude became evident as a crucial factor in the study of English as a foreign language. If students had a positive attitude toward the target language, the teaching methodology, and the learning materials used, it could really help

them do better in learning the language. The concept of attitude, when examined through different lenses, revealed multifaceted dimensions. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) defined attitude as how a person saw or felt about certain things related to language learning, such as people, objects, ideas, and other aspects. Further elaborating on this notion, Baker (1992) described attitude as a theoretical concept that helped us understand how people behaved and the strength of their commitment toward certain things. Numerous previous studies consistently highlighted the critical role of attitude in determining the ultimate success of second language learners (Azizi et al., 2022; Tsunemoto & McDonough, 2021).

Research Methodology

This study employed a non-equivalent control groups design (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

The population consisted of 310 high school students at Marie Upatham School during the first semester of the 2024 academic year. Following the recommended sample size and sampling guidelines by Fraenkel et al. (2019), the sample comprised 100 eleventh-grade students from the fundamental English class (E32101) during the same semester. These students were selected using the purposive sampling method (Fraenkel et al., 2019) due to their readiness for the study. Tenth-grade students might have lacked experience and focus, while twelfth-grade students were preoccupied with university preparation. Hence, eleventh-grade students, having acclimated to high school and gained adequate experience, were considered the most suitable cohort for participation. The students were divided into two groups: 50 in the experimental group and another 50 in the control group. Students in the experimental group received the task-based instruction with authentic materials, while students in the control group received the PPP instruction.

1. Lesson Plans: The eight-week lesson plans were developed based on two different instructional frameworks: task-based instruction with authentic materials and PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) instruction. The former was utilized for the experimental group, while the latter was employed for the control group. Both sets of plans underwent content validity verification by five experts. The Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) scores ranged between 0.05 and 1.00, confirming their validity.

2. English Proficiency Test: The researcher utilized the TOEFL JUNIOR as the English proficiency test in this study. This choice was based on the test's reputation for reliability and global recognition, particularly among students aged between 10 and 17, which was deemed appropriate for high school students. The test served as both the pretest and posttest assessments, with questions reshuffled. Each test consisted of three sections: listening comprehension, language form and meaning, and reading comprehension, each containing 20 questions. These pretest and posttest assessments were administered to students in both the experimental and control groups.

3. The Attitude Questionnaire: The researcher utilized a questionnaire adapted from Hadi's study (Hadi, 2013) as a model for developing a questionnaire specific to this study. The questionnaire aimed to assess students' attitudes toward the task-based instruction with authentic materials both before and after receiving the treatment. Consequently, it was administered to students in the experimental group. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and comprised four sections: learning activities, content, benefits, and suggestions. Its content validity was examined by five experts in the field, who assessed its Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), yielding scores ranging from 0.05 to 1.00. Additionally, its reliability, measured using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1990), was found to be .088.

Data Collection Procedures: The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2024. Initially, both the experimental and control group students took the pretest. Subsequently, the experimental group students received instruction through the task-based instruction with authentic materials, while the control group students were taught using the PPP instruction. Each group followed their respective lesson plans for a period of eight weeks. Following the instructional period, both groups participated in the posttest assessment. Finally, students in the experimental group were invited to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis: 1. The principal method for analyzing the quantitative data of the first hypothesis involved employing independent-sample t-test to compare the posttest mean scores of English proficiency tests between students who received the task-based instruction with authentic materials and those who received the PPP instruction. 2. For the quantitative data of the last hypothesis,

the primary approach entailed using paired-sample t-test to compare the mean scores of students' attitudes before and after receiving the task-based instruction with authentic materials.

Results

The results of the study were presented in the following sections

1. Results of the first objective, which aimed to compare the posttest mean scores of English proficiency tests between students who received task-based instruction with authentic materials (experimental group) and those who received PPP instruction (control group), were as follows:

The independent-sample t-test was employed to calculate the posttest scores between the experimental group and the control group. Findings revealed that the mean score of the experimental group was 37.06 (S.D. = 4.08), while the mean score of the control group was 34.10 (S.D. = 3.49) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Group Statistics

Group Statistics					
group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score	Experimental	50	37.0600	4.07786	.57670
	Control	50	34.1000	3.49489	.49425

The findings of the independent-sample t-test revealed a t-test value of 3.90, with 98 degrees of freedom, and a significance level (sig) of less than .001 (see Table 2). Consequently, the results indicated that the posttest mean score of students who received task-based instruction with authentic materials was higher than that of students who received PPP instruction at the 0.05 level of significance, thus supporting the first hypothesis.

Table 2. Independent Samples Test

Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		F	Sig.			
Score	Equal variances assumed	1.577	.212	3.897	98	<0.01
	Equal variances not assumed			3.897	95.757	<0.01

2. Results of the last objective, which aimed to compare the mean scores of students' attitudes before and after receiving task-based instruction with authentic materials, were as follows:

The paired-sample t-test was employed to compare the mean scores of the pretest-questionnaire and posttest-questionnaire of the students in the experimental group. The findings revealed that the mean score of the pretest-questionnaire was 3.10 (S.D. = 0.71), and the mean score of the posttest-questionnaire was 4.38 (S.D. = 0.32) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	4.3810	50	.32401	.04582
	Pretest	3.1048	50	.70958	.10035

The findings of the comparison between pretest-questionnaire and posttest-questionnaire scores revealed a t-test value of 14.91, with 49 degrees of freedom, and a significance level (sig) of less than .001 (see Table 4). Consequently, the results indicated that the mean score of the posttest-questionnaire was higher than the mean score of the pretest-questionnaire at the 0.05 level of significance, thus supporting the last hypothesis that the mean score of students' attitudes after receiving task-based instruction with authentic materials was higher than before.

Table 4. Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidences Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair1	Posttest- Pretest	1.27620	.60542	.08562	1.10414	1.44826	14.905	49	<.001

Discussions

The findings of the first objective reveal that the posttest mean score of students who receive task-based instruction with authentic materials is higher than that of students who receive PPP instruction at the 0.05 level of significance, thus supporting the first hypothesis. As presented in the results section, there are several reasons why students receiving task-based instruction with authentic materials outperform those who receive PPP instruction.

To begin with, task-based instruction highlights learning activities where students actively participate in meaningful language practice, either individually, in pairs, or in groups. This affords students the chance to employ the target language in genuine communication settings. Moreover, students can naturally practice language skills with their peers and collaborate to complete tasks, aligning with the assertion made by Wu et al. (2016) that this approach fosters active engagement in meaningful activities, leading to enhanced communication skills in real-life situations. In contrast, PPP instruction focuses excessively on accuracy and fails to facilitate the students' need to use language for communication because the topics for study are predetermined by the teacher and the textbook. Consequently, students do not have the opportunity to practice the target language in authentic situations.

Additionally, task-based learning activities offer students abundant opportunities for collaborative work while also encouraging them to freely express their ideas. This collaborative setting nurtures a sense of ownership and

engagement among students, motivating active participation and contributions to discussions. Consequently, students feel empowered to utilize their linguistic abilities and engage in meaningful communication, leading to successful language learning outcomes. This aligns with findings by Harper & Widodo (2020), which highlight the significant improvement in student-centered language teaching through the task-based approach. By prioritizing student autonomy and interaction, this method enhances communication skills and cultivates enthusiasm for language acquisition. Furthermore, the collaborative tasks not only facilitate language learning but also cultivate essential social and interpersonal skills such as teamwork, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Students benefit not only from their teachers but also from each other, creating a dynamic and interactive learning atmosphere that optimizes language acquisition opportunities.

Conversely, PPP instruction operates on the assumption that learning progresses linearly, starting from no knowledge, advancing through limited sentence-based utterances, and culminating in immediate production. However, human learning tends to follow a more unpredictable and non-linear trajectory. Consequently, students do not feel empowered to utilize their linguistic abilities, leading to unsuccessful outcomes. Additionally, problems occur in PPP instruction, as mentioned by Willis (1996), such as students managing to complete tasks or role plays at the production stage without utilizing the target structure, and sometimes overusing the target structure, resulting in very unnatural dialogs and unsatisfactory outcomes.

Thirdly, incorporating authentic materials like songs into tasks prompts students to select their favorite songs and deliver presentations to the class, discussing reasons for their choices, song meanings, and benefits. Moreover, they are tasked with updating peers on current top-chart music, fostering language learning motivation, and catering to personal preferences. Another example is using movies, which exposes students to real-life language usage and cultural insights simultaneously, resulting in rapid improvement in English proficiency. This aligns with Berardo (2006) describing of how integrating authentic materials into learning activities offers various benefits, including keeping content relevant, enhancing learner motivation, comprehension, and satisfaction.

Finally, Willis (1996) revises the task-based approach paradigm, which consists of three key components: the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. Building on this, students actively engage in authentic language practice during the task cycle phase, prioritizing conveying meaning in communication over grammatical accuracy. This aligns with Ellis et al. (2020) focusing on the task-based approach's focus on task completion rather than explicit grammar instruction, leading to enhanced fluency in communication. Furthermore, the language focus phase, serving as the final stage, offers students opportunities to study language structures and vocabulary, refining both fluency and accuracy in communication.

The findings indicate that the mean score of the posttest-questionnaire is higher than the mean score of the pretest-questionnaire at the 0.05 level of significance, thus supporting the last hypothesis that the mean score of students' attitudes after receiving task-based instruction with authentic materials is higher than before. This can be explained as follows:

Regarding learning activities, students perceive these tasks as opportunities for critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving. Within the group setting, they freely exchange ideas and share experiences, enhancing the learning process. Additionally, students engage in English conversations with peers and assist each other in learning the language by clarifying meanings of challenging words and using appropriate vocabulary. Moreover, they find pleasure in completing assigned tasks and expressing themselves creatively in English.

Regarding content, students express authentic materials like movies, songs, and news are directly applicable to their everyday lives. This immersion in genuine scenarios makes these materials more captivating than traditional textbooks. Furthermore, real-world materials like movies help them encounter authentic language usage and understand diverse English accents and cultures.

Regarding benefits, students note that task-based instruction with authentic materials primarily contributes to expanding their English vocabulary and improving proficiency. Additionally, they experience heightened motivation, enjoyment, and increased autonomy in learning the target language.

In final recommendations, students express general satisfaction with the instruction and suggest that teachers extend preparation time for presentations and allocate more time for practicing English communication. This stems from some student s' limited English proficiency and the potential for feeling overwhelmed by information, requiring extra time to organize and rehearse. Furthermore, as students enjoy conversing in English with peers during these activities, they believe that additional time could facilitate even more practice.

The aforementioned evidence indicates that students have developed positive attitudes toward task-based instruction with authentic materials in every aspect, showing higher levels than before receiving this approach. This information is significant for researchers aiming to refine teaching methodologies and supports the perspective of Baker (1992), who posited attitudes, considered as a theoretical construct, offer insight into people's actions and the depth of their commitment to specific subjects.

Conclusions

The study underscores the effectiveness of task-based instruction with authentic materials in enhancing language learning outcomes and fostering positive attitudes among students. The results reveal that students who receive task-based instruction outperform those receiving PPP instruction, showing rapid improvement in English proficiency and a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. Moreover, the collaborative and student-centered nature of task-based instruction promotes active engagement and autonomy in learning, leading to increased satisfaction and enthusiasm among students. These findings highlight the importance of innovative teaching methodologies that prioritize meaningful interaction, authentic language use, and student empowerment. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights to the field of language education and underscores the significance of adopting student-centered approaches to teaching and learning.

New Knowledges

The study's key findings highlight the effectiveness of task-based instruction with authentic materials in enhancing language learning outcomes. Compared to traditional PPP instruction, task-based approaches lead to higher proficiency levels, improved critical thinking skills, and greater engagement among students. Authentic materials such as movies and songs are particularly impactful, providing relevant and enjoyable learning experiences. Additionally, task-based instruction promotes student autonomy, motivation, and enjoyment in language learning. These insights underscore the importance of student-centered approaches and meaningful interaction in language education, offering valuable guidance for educators seeking to optimize language teaching methodologies.

Recommendations

Recommendations from this study:

1. Provide opportunities for student autonomy: Allow students to take ownership of their learning process by providing opportunities for them to make choices, set goals, and explore topics of personal interest within the language curriculum.

2. Extend preparation time for presentations: Recognize the importance of adequate preparation time for student presentations, allowing students with varying levels of English proficiency to effectively organize and rehearse their presentations.

Recommendations for future research:

1. Explore different types of authentic materials: Further research could explore the effectiveness of different types of authentic materials, such as podcasts, social media content, or virtual reality simulations, in language teaching and learning.

2. Investigate cross-cultural differences: Explore how the effectiveness of task-based instruction with authentic materials may vary across different cultural and linguistic contexts, taking into account factors such as learner preferences and educational backgrounds.

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