

A STUDY OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND PHARMACY IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current situation of using authentic materials in improving speaking competency of the students at Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy (TUMP) with the main aim to propose some solutions for increasing the efficiency of using real language in developing students' English speaking skill. In order to do that, a descriptive method with two questionnaires were carried out at TUMP. 294 subjects of the study were chosen at random from second-year students in nursing, pharmacy and medicine and 8 subject teachers who have much experience in teaching English at TUMP were included in this study. The results of the study showed that a majority of students have positive attitude toward authentic materials and they are of almost importance in speaking classes. It helps to bring contact in the classroom. However, it is concluded that a large number of students don't use authentic materials outside classroom. The study also has some suggestions in order to help both teacher and students in improving students' speaking competency, such as dealing with students' confidence, fear of guilt, or psychological inhibitions, challenge of large and mixed ability classes, barriers of cultural differences and teachers' creation in designing extracurricular activities as well as resources for students to actively explore and practice speaking skill.

Keyword- authentic material; speaking competence; speaking skill; speaking classes; language proficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of authentic materials as a result of the spread of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach in EFL classes is not new because the purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to benefit from using it in the real world, in real situations. According to Lasen Freeman [1], one of the characteristics of communicative language teaching is using authentic materials. Communicative language teaching approach is believed to change the view of syllabus designers toward English subjects, from just a language which students learn like other subjects in the school, to a very important tool of communication inside and outside the classroom. It is a common assertion that authentic materials are among the most important tools a teacher can and must use in class in order to make his/her teaching go smoothly and be effective in transmitting the necessary knowledge to all students. Certainly, using authentic materials has both its advantages and disadvantages. Their proponents the most often argue that they are more interesting than traditional materials, such as textbooks and their components, because they are up-to-date and provide a precious source of target culture thus making the lesson more enjoyable and motivating. Due to the fact that they demonstrate a true picture of the target language and the culture, they are useful when developing communicative competence.

In recent years, teaching situation and the presence of authentic materials in foreign language curricula have shown that this kind of material plays an extremely important role in teaching with the feature to help learners master communication skills. Moreover, they are better than any other teaching materials when they fully meet the needs and motives of the learners. It is believed that authentic materials have so many advantages in teaching foreign languages that we can not deny them, one of the main characteristics is that the language used in this type of material is completely authentic and communicative.

Authentic materials defined by Nunan [2] are texts designed for non-teaching purposes, which is taken from real life by the natives and when introduced into the classroom it is kept in shape, there is no change from the original state. Tomlinson [3] argued that the material could be in the form of a textbook, a working book, a cassette, a CD ROM, a video, a copy, a newspaper, a piece of paper on a whiteboard or anything that represents or informs the language learned. Its purpose is to allow students to hear, read, speak and create the language as they do in the target culture. Moreover, Herod [4] also considers that learning activities using authentic materials are designed to be imitated real world situations.

In the last few years, the actual teaching and presence of true linguistics in foreign language programs has shown that they play a very important role in teaching with the ability to help learners have the ability. mainstream communication. Hadley [5] in his study affirmed the use of actual or simulated tourist documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, restaurant menus, labels, tables, newspapers, magazines ... will make students more familiar with the language than any other material. In addition, the material is much better than any other teaching material, meeting the needs and motivations of the learner. It is believed that the language really has many advantages in teaching foreign languages that we can not deny them, one of the main characteristics is that the language used in this type of material is completely authentic and communicative. Therefore, in his study, Brandl [6] argues that real languages reflect real life situations. According to him, authentic materials help students communicate with real language in the context in which it occurs naturally; more closely align with the needs of students and create a connection between classroom and student needs in the real world; Supporting a more creative approach to teaching, allowing teachers to develop their full potential, designing activities and tasks that are more in line with the teacher's teaching style and learning style. the student.

In helping learners develop their speaking competence which is deemed such a sophisticated skill, it is evident that students' speaking skill maybe benefited by using authentic materials (AMs) in terms of performance and proficiency and present them with opportunities to use their own knowledge and abilities at any stage (Merchi, [7]). In addition to, AMs manifest a significant influence on students' motivation and their speaking achievement (Rocha, [8]). The history of using AMs in language teaching comes from the communicative language teaching (CLT) movement of the 1970s because CLT advocates for the vital role of communicative competence over the production of correct grammatical forms and "places importance in providing learners with opportunities to practice language in meaningful, authentic setting" (Mustapha & Yahya,[9]).

The goal of learning a foreign language is not just to understand or express grammatical structures or sentences, but to learn the skills needed to properly use a language. Learners must find their own ways of acting in the process of cognitive activity in the process of observing phenomena. Thus, according to Gilmore, A. [10] allowing students to interact and work with real language, exposure to real and concrete communication is essential because it helps the student sets the appropriate assumptions, the context, the conditions for students to achieve the goal of communication skills. And that is what the lecturers of Department of Foreign Languages have been doing with the desire to improve the English speaking capacity of students of Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy.

In Vietnam, although English has been widely taught as a compulsory subject for students from primary to tertiary levels for a long time, the actual ability to speak English of a majority of Vietnamese students is still far from satisfactory expectation. They are not confident with their English competence and face with a number of difficulties in speaking English (Bui, [11]; Luu, [12]; Nguyen, [13]). Thus, the issues of how to develop speaking skills for Vietnamese students have attracted an increasing attention of researchers over the years. One suggestion is to use authentic materials because they are original, interesting, motivating and useful (Peacock, [14]). Authentic materials can keep students informed about new things and bring the real world into the classroom; as a result, they motivate students and help them to develop their speaking skill (Guariento & Morely, [15]). Besides, using AMs helps teachers create new exciting and effective activities which can increase students' interest, and expectedly, they will be able to learn speaking better (Peacock, [14]). In the other way, the use of AMs in teaching speaking can help teachers improve their students speaking skills as well as preparing them for real-life situations. Despite this fact, in many high schools in Vietnam, the use of this type of materials has not received full attention when both teachers and learners only rely on the certain teaching materials given by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) with the aim of getting as high scores as possible in the exams. Although textbooks have taken on much more

authentic look, “many tasks are poorly designed and many language forms are taught and practiced out of context” (Nguyen-Minh, [16]). In addition, “many of their speaking activities are found non-communicative, failing to elicit negotiation of meaning and presenting

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unrealistic and unnatural discourse” (Nguyen-Minh, [16])

English B1 level is one of the prerequisites for graduation of students of Thai Nguyen University in general and University of Medicine and Pharmacy in particular. However, by examining the actual teaching and learning outcomes of students, it can be seen that the majority of students have difficulties in all B1 exam skills, especially speaking skill. The number of students who use English in communicative situations is very limited, even though they have learned a lot of vocabulary and sentence structures in classrooms. Usually, most students do not know how to start their speaking, lack of ideas, can not use their grammar, vocabulary and sentence structures.

From these above mentioned reasons, we conducted a study with the aim to describe the current situation of using authentic materials in learning foreign language of students at TUMP and to propose some solutions for increasing the effectiveness of using authentic materials in developing students' English speaking skills.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Subjects of the study

The subjects of the study includes 294 subject students who are the second year students of nursing, medicine and pharmacy, 8 subject teachers who have much experience in teaching English at Thai Nguyen university of medicine and pharmacy and willing to take part in the study.

2.2. Research method

This study made used of descriptive method of research to determine the current situation of using of authentic materials in studying English at University of Medicine and Pharmacy.

According to Glass and Hopkins [17] descriptive research involves gathering data that describes events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts and describes the data collection. This method describes or present picture of a phenomenon being studied. The purpose of using this method is to acquire accurate, factual, systematic data that can provide actual picture of that data set reviewed. Statistical tools are allowed to be utilized for as long as it sufficiently fit the requirement for data analysis.

2.3. Data collection instruments

In order to achieve the aims of the study and collect necessary data for the study, two data collection instruments including questionnaires for both teachers and students and the observations of the classes were used.

- questionnaire designed for second year students at Thai Nguyen university of medicine and pharmacy

- questionnaire designed for teachers of oral expression in addition to the classroom

Richards et. Al [18] defines questionnaires as an effective way of collecting information about “affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences, and enable a teacher to collect a large amount of information relatively quickly”. Regarding the purpose of this study as a survey, the researcher employed the questionnaire as the main tool to collect data from the teachers and students thanks to the below reasons: First of all, It is quick to collect information; the second reason is that data can be collected from a large portion of a group; The third reason is that questionnaires are more objective because the responses are gathered in a standardized way; Finally, It can be combined with other instruments to increase the validity of the results. (Milne, [19]).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

3.1 Questionnaire on students

3.1.1 Students' attitude toward authentic materials

Questions	Attitude			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1- I prefer to use English authentic materials rather than speak those provided in the course book.	5.1%	91.2%	4.7%	0%
2. Authentic speaking materials help me improve my language proficiency	26.1%	72.8%	1.1%	0%

3. Authentic materials help to build students' confidence in speaking English	17.4%	51.8%	23.3%	7.5%
4. The authentic materials I spoke in class are easier and more interesting than non-authentic materials.	39.8%	60.2%	0%	0%
5. Authentic speaking materials help develop my speaking ability more than non-authentic do	18.8%	81.2%	0%	0%
6. Authentic speaking materials increase my familiarity with the use of grammar rules in their original context and my knowledge of vocabulary items which I need in real situations	7.1%	91.2%	1.7%	0%

Table 1: Students' attitude toward authentic materials

It can be clearly seen from the table 1, a majority (91.2% and 5.1%) of students agreed and strongly agreed that they prefer to use English authentic materials rather than speak those provided in the course book.

72.8% and 26.1% of the participants opted for "agree" and "strongly agree" means that authentic materials have an impact on the improvement of their speaking proficiency then they are exposed to such materials, they not only practice speaking skill, but they also practice other skills. While only 1.1% opted for "disagree" may be these participants think that the authentic materials do not help them improve their speaking ability.

Likewise, the data of Item 3 showed that two-thirds of the students indicated that authentic materials are beneficial to build their confidence in English speaking.

Regarding to the students' attitude toward authentic materials in comparison with non-authentic materials, all students agreed and strongly agreed that the authentic materials they spoke in English class are easier and more interesting than non-authentic materials.

Coming to the statement regarding the usefulness of authentic materials, 81.2% of students agreed and 18.8% of them strongly agreed that authentic materials help to develop their speaking ability more than non-authentic do.

The results from the table also show that a large number of students agreed and strongly agreed that authentic speaking materials increase their familiarity with the use of grammar rules in their original context and their knowledge of vocabulary items which they need in real situations, at 91.2% and 7.1% respectively. Meanwhile, a small minority of students disagreed with this idea.

3.1.2 Students' questionnaire on using authentic materials

3.1.2.1 Students' participation in activities in speaking lessons

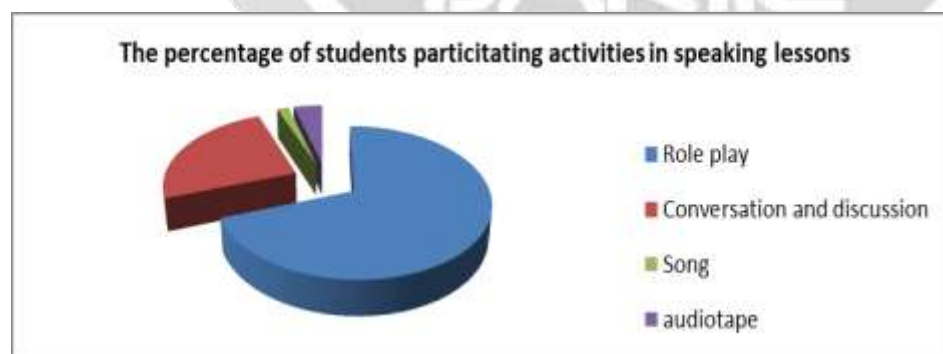


Fig -1: The percentage of students participating activities in speaking lessons

3.1.2.2: Students' attitude toward using the most useful materials in the classroom

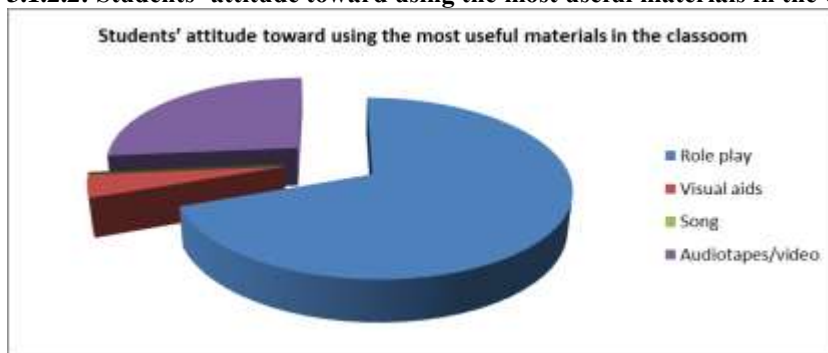


Fig -2: Students' attitude toward using the most useful materials in the classroom

It can be shown clearly from the figure 2 that 69.4% of the participants opted for the role-plays since it is the preferred activity by this question. The study found out the most useful material and its impact on the students extrinsic and even intrinsic motivation on the part of the students, while 78 of the participants opted video/audio tapes this represents 26.5%. However, only 12 participants opted for visual aids such as, picture, board, and etc. The noticeable thing is that songs are not used in the classroom as material.

3.1.2.3. Frequency of teachers' use/introduction of authentic materials in speaking lessons

This item in the questionnaire was designed to investigate how often the participating teachers deployed AMs in their speaking teaching. Figure 3 below presented and analyzed the data for this item.

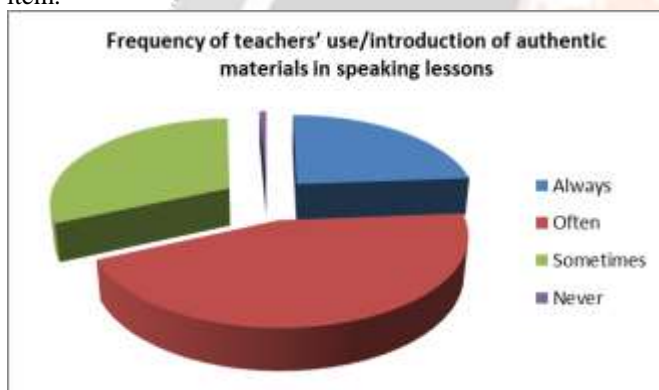


Fig -3: Frequency of teachers' use/introduction of authentic materials in speaking lessons

As Figure 3 illustrated, the two third of the students agreed that their teachers often and always use authentic materials in speaking lessons, accounting for 44.5% and 23.8%, whereas 32.3% of the students opted for "sometimes". However, only 2 students opted for "rarely".

3.1.2.4. Students' frequency of using authentic materials outside classroom

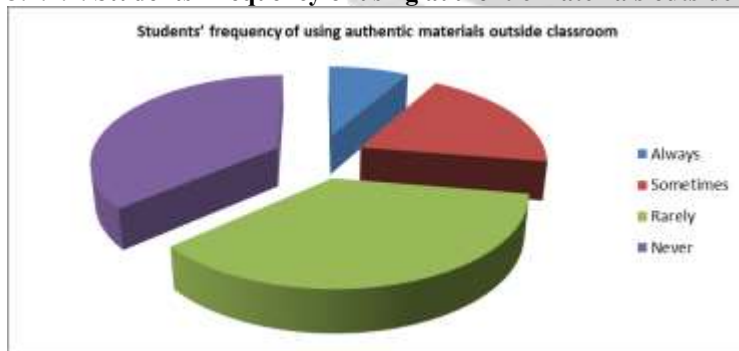


Fig -4: Students' frequency of using authentic materials outside classroom

The results from Figure-4 shows that according to the 36.4% of participants, authentic materials are never used outside classroom to improve their speaking skill and 36% are rarely used, whereas a modest 19.4 percent of

students answered that they sometimes used authentic materials outside classroom. What is noticeable is that only 8.2% of students who are asked answered that they always practise speaking skill outside classroom with authentic materials.

3.2 Teachers' questionnaire

3.2.1 Teachers' attitude toward using authentic materials in speaking lessons

	Motivating and interesting	effective	Boring	needless	Total
N	8	8	0	0	8
%	100%	100%	0%	0%	100%

Table 2: Teachers' attitude toward using authentic materials in speaking lessons

The findings illustrates that all teachers 100% agree that authentic materials are both motivating and interesting, and effective. They are significant because of their positive effects on the teaching process; they integrate the authentic language and classroom environment. Widdowson 1998 also says: "of course, what is authentic and natural in native speakers of the target language is not so to learners in the classroom what is important is that these materials are used in a way that is real for learners" (qtd in. Larsan, and Freeman, 2000, p. 133).

3.2.2 Frequency of teachers' using authentic materials in speaking classrooms

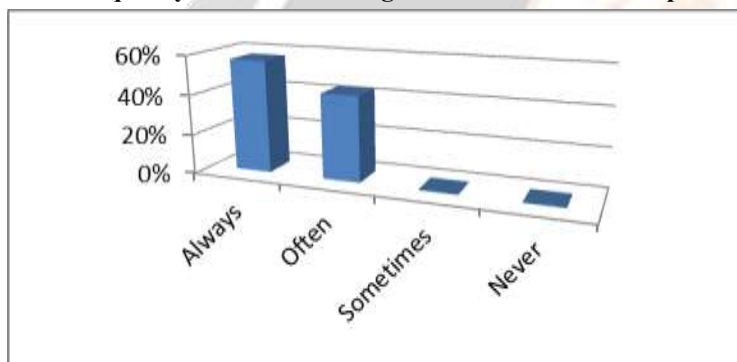


Chart -1: Teachers' frequency of using authentic materials in speaking classrooms

As can be clearly seen from Figure 5, all teachers agreed that authentic materials are among the remedial devices to improve student' speaking skill in their classroom. What is remarkable is the clear distinction in frequency of using Authentic Materials is nearly the same. More than half of teachers (accounting for 57%) always use authentic materials in speaking classrooms. Likewise, The propotion of teachers who use them is nearly the same, accounting foe 43%. However, noone sometimes or never use AMs in classroom. The results of the study from the figure above pointed out that all teachers always and often prepare authentic materials to teach speaking skill for their students and their attitudes towards the use of authentic materials as a remedial devices to improve speaking skill.

3.2.3 The most useful materials used by teachers in the classroom

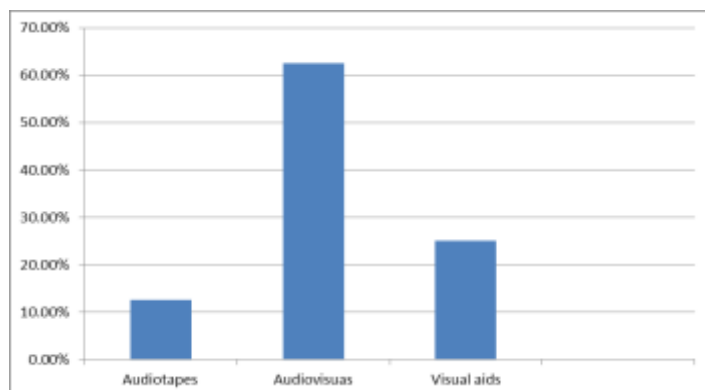


Chart -2: The most useful materials used by teachers in the classroom

Looking at the above chart in more detail, the percentage of the teachers' using audio-visual aids in teaching oral expression is the highest with 62.5%, whereas audiotapes and visual aids are considered to be less useful in classroom, with 12.5% and 25% .

3.2.4 Teachers' opinions about students' using authentic materilas

The findings of this research reveal that the majority of the teachers find their students are really involved during the use of audio-visual type this represents 75% of the whole sample, obviously because students respond more to something which is heard and seen. On the contrary, only one teacher (accounting for 12.5%) opted for the audiotapes and another one (accounting for 12.5%) for visual aids.

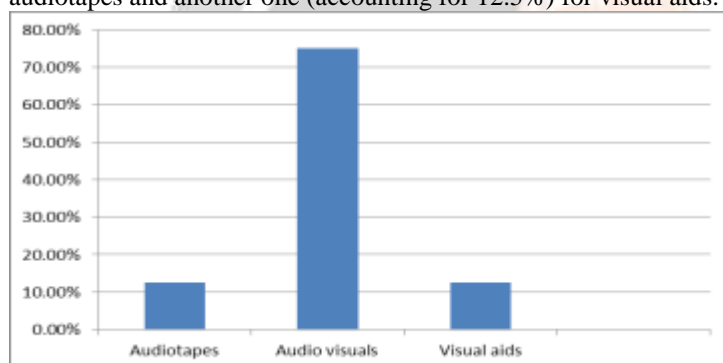


Chart -3: Teachers' opinions about students' using authentic materilas

3.2.5 Teachers' opinions about using activities in teaching speaking skill



Chart -4: Teachers' opinions about using activities in teaching speaking skill

It is clearly shown from the figure that role-play is most used activity by teachers (75%) when they teach speaking skills. There is no doubt that role-play allows students to simulate real-world situations in the classroom, and that is

a meaningful way of learning. The role play provides students with the opportunity to express themselves while no teacher uses movies or songs when teaching students.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study aims to investigate the current situation of using authentic materials to improve English speaking competence of students at Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy. In common, the results of the study show that most participants did agree that using AMs in speaking classrooms should be received much attention and totally approved its special importance to developing students' speaking performances. They had a positive attitude towards the use of authentic materials in teaching and learning English speaking skill and that the AMs really plays a very important role in the speaking classroom. They positively considered that AMs can help their students strengthen their speaking ability in terms of increasing students' motivation and self-confidence, broadening their knowledge of natural language and cultural issues. Especially the results of the study show that AMs are often used in the classroom of speaking skills, namely the use of audiovisual equipment or role playing activities that simulate real-life situations in everyday communication that brings about inspiration, fun and motivation for most students. However, research results also showed that a large number of students do not use AMs to practice and improve speaking skills outside the classroom but only with what the teacher provides in the classroom. That is one of the reasons for the restrictions that students have to improve their speaking ability.

Based on the research results, we propose the following ideas:

1. It is clear that AMs are beneficial to students' speaking learning; regardless the aforementioned hindrances, English teachers are suggested that they should take advantage of AMs to introduce possible natural language functions and raise motivation to their students. The teachers can choose some AMs that suit their students' language proficiency, teaching purpose, and curriculum demands.
2. In order for students to use authentic materials in English speaking practice effectively, teachers should anticipate the challenges which students face such as psychological problems, anxiety, lack of confidence, fear of guilt, or psychological inhibitions may arise.
3. Large and mixed ability classes are also a great challenge for teachers when choosing the right kind of material. When organizing group activities, role play, teachers should pay more attention and attention to groups of lower-level students to make the right choices, thus encouraging students to actively participate and more active in speaking activities.
4. Cultural differences are also one of the barriers for students to access authentic language, so teachers need lectures on cross-cultural issues and some culture aspects of communication, related to what students practice in speaking and the need to invest time and creativity in lecture design.
5. In order to make students more motivated and active in using and applying authentic material in speaking outside of class, teachers should be able to help and design extracurricular activities as well as resources for students to actively explore and practice.

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