

## The Effect of Using Group Work and Authentic Language Strategies on Learning Vocabulary in Vocational Schools (An Experimental Study)

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أثر استخدام العمل الجماعي واللغة الواقعية على تعلم المعاني في المدارس المهنية

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### الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة أثر استخدام استراتيجيات العمل الجماعي واللغة الواقعية في تطوير تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس المهنية العراقية مما يؤثر بدوره على أداء الطلاب. طلاب المدارس المهنية لا يتقنون اللغة الإنجليزية، ويواجهون مشاكل في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. تبحث هذه الدراسة في مدى فاعلية استخدام العمل الجماعي والمواد الواقعية في تعزيز مستوى طلاب المدارس المهنية. ويهدف إلى استكشاف تأثير استخدام استراتيجيات العمل الجماعي واللغة الواقعية على إنجازاتهم الطلاب. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة تم افتراض ما يلي: (١) استخدام العمل الجماعي والمواد الواقعية يطور أداء الطلاب. (٢) العلاقة بين سجلات التحصيل العالي في المدارس المهنية العراقية واستخدام العمل الجماعي والمواد الواقعية قوية جداً. في هذه الدراسة هناك مجموعتان من الطلاب تم اختيارهم عشوائياً لتمثيل طلاب التعليم المهني. تم توزيع المشاركين الى مجموعتين احدهما تجريبية و الاخرى ضابطة. تم تدريس المجموعة التجريبية باستخدام العمل الجماعي والمواد الواقعية لمدة ثلاثة أشهر في حين لم تتعرض المجموعة الضابطة لهذه الأساليب. في البداية، شاركت المجموعتان في الاختبارات قبل استخدام المعالجة. وبعد تعرض المجموعتين للاختبارات بعد المعالجة، أظهرت مقارنة متوسطات درجات المجموعتين أن أداء المجموعة التجريبية أفضل من أداء المجموعة الضابطة. لذا، فإن تأثير استخدام العمل الجماعي واللغة الواقعية يعد إيجابياً، كما أن العلاقة بين الدرجات العالية للطلاب وتطبيق العمل الجماعي والمواد الواقعية قوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المهني، الأداء، العمل الجماعي، التجريبي، اللغة الواقعية

### Abstract

This study deals with the effect of using the strategies of group work and authentic language on learning vocabulary in Iraqi vocational schools. The students in the vocational schools have no mastery of English, they face problems in learning English. This study investigates the effectiveness of

using group work and authentic material on enhancing the vocational schools students. It aims at exploring the effect of using strategies of group work and authentic language on students' achievements and showing the relation between using such techniques and students high scores. It is hypothesized that: (1) The use of group work and authentic material develops students' performance. (2) The relationship between high achievement records in Iraqi vocational schools and using group work and authentic materials is very strong. The procedures of this study are presenting background about group work and authentic language, this study is experimental, therefore, the sample of this study is divided into two groups: experimental group and control group. The experimental group is taught by using group work and authentic material whereas the control group was taught by the traditional method. The two groups are exposed to pre-test and then to post-tests. The results of the post-test verify the hypotheses of this study because the experimental groups' performance is better than that of the control group. Thus, the effect of using group work and authentic language is positive as well as the relationship between the students' high scores and applying group work and authentic material is strong.

**Keywords:** Vocational, Performance, Group work, Experimental, Authentic Language

## 1. Introduction

It is worth mentioning that the use of authentic language and group work is not new, it has been used since 1970s because of the spread of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Since language is a means of communication, there should be two important elements in classrooms to achieve communication and enhance learning the target language, they are authentic language and group work. According to (Martines, 2002,24), authentic materials represent the actual language that used by native speakers, it is not prepared for teaching purposes. So, the authentic language is the language use which refers to communicative meaning of language not usage that refers to the rules and structures for making language. For group work, it can create more chances for the best thinking and can develop students learning and achievement. Group work enhances communication and other professional development skills, as well as using authentic language can expose students to actual language outside classrooms and prepare them for real life situations. Unlike classroom text books, authentic language can be more connected to students' lives. (Freeman, 2000,129).

Changes in the society have affected negatively on students' performance, they can't master and comprehend what they are taught in classrooms as well as they have no desire to learn and they feel bored and uncomfortable. So, this study tries to apply the strategies of group work and authentic material to make students more active and comfortable and they feel that they need to learn. This study shows teachers a wider outlook on using group work and authentic language in teaching EFL students in Iraqi vocational schools.

Research Questions:

- 1- Is there any effect of using authentic materials and group work on students' achievements ?
- 2- How do authentic material and group work affect the students' performance, skills and behaviors ?

In relation to the preceded questions, this study aims at:

- 1- Indicating the effect of using group work and authentic language on students' achievement.
- 2- Showing the relationship between high achievement records in schools and applying the strategies of group work and authentic materials by teachers on their students.

It is hypothesized that:

- 1- The use of the strategies of group work and authentic language enhances students' achievement.
- 2- The relationship between high achievement records in Iraqi vocational schools and applying the strategies of group work and authentic materials by teachers on their students is very strong.

This study is an experimental one to show the effect of using group work and authentic on students' achievements, skills and behavior. It is limited on the fifth vocational class students. The present study has many benefits for teachers to help their students to increase and enhance their academic competence and making them more cooperative and confident in themselves, this leads to improved and faster learning. Curriculum designers should also take into consideration the real and actual materials that what the students need to know to communicate with others.

## 2. The Definition of Group Work

The simplest definition of group work is a group of people who work together. For Cohen (1994:1) and (Jeffs et al., 2005:20), group work represents cooperation and working together in small groups that allow each student to play a positive role and use critical thinking in solving problem or achieving a task in a certain amount of time.

### 2.1. The Advantages of Using Group Work

One of the main advantages of group work is to help a student to break difficult and complex problems into smaller parts to be easier on the students achieve the task that assigned to them. Moreover, it makes students more comfortable and enjoyable. (Amanda, 2011:30) There are crucial benefits of group work:

### **2.1.1. Supplying the Input and Output Opportunities**

Interaction among students is created and developed by the cooperative language learning that creates a negotiation among participants to enhance the input and output of information. Using group work enables students to produce longer and more complex sentences than they do when they are alone. (Zhang,2010: 40 ; Haynes, 2011: 43)

### **2.1.2. Increasing Effective Climate**

Students benefit from an effective learning environment when they work in groups. In addition to encourage student interaction and creating a comfortable learning atmosphere, the teacher can lead class discussions on subjects that the students are passionate about. (Jaques et al., 2006: 55)

### **2.1.3. Increasing a Variety of Language Functions**

Language functions are increased when the group practice the certain skills: (Zhang, 2010: 30)

- a- Requesting
- b- Clarifying
- c- Making Suggestions
- d- Encouraging
- e- Exchanging conversation during group work
- f- Negotiating

### **2.1.4. Encouraging Learners' Independence and Responsibility**

Group work fosters cooperative learning that makes students enable to improve their abilities: critical thinking, solving problems, communicative skills brainstorming and etc. Moreover, this experience is resulted in shifting them from interdependence to independence. (ibid)

## **2.2. Forming Group Work**

For Richard et al. (2011:40), the process of generating work inside a group initiates a four-stage cycle:

### **2.2.1. Forming**

When the students first meet, the teacher explains the assignment and expectations for the group.

### **2.2.2. Norming**

In this stage, students starts to exchange ideas, thoughts, opinions and values. The function of the teacher is equally crucial, he encourages his

students to do their best and keeps them move in the right direction towards their goal.

### 2.2.3. Storming

In this stage, problems will arise from the different ideas that are presented by different people who disagree since each one was created differently and has a different thought. The teacher can play the role of peer mediator to guide students towards their goal.

### 2.2.4. Performing

This is the final stage of group work, students are able to complete and achieve their task after they share their ideas. The teacher tries to motivate and keep his students concentrate on their task.

## 2.3. Refinements on Group Work

According to (David, 2011: 13), when students work in a group, they need to focus on the following factors:

### 2.3.1. Environmental Influences

The students are not able to work because of the separation of each student which causes a delay in getting their goal.

### 2.3.2. Goals

Since none of the other group members are participating and they rely on the intelligent student to do both their and his work, there is tension and pressure on that student.

### 2.3.3. Roles

Members of the group are not aware of their responsibilities or role within the group.

### 2.3.4. Competition vs. Cooperation

The reason behind the students' failure is that instead of maintaining focus and working together with their fellow group members to accomplish a goal and finish the project, each student is more concerned with winning a task and outsmarting the other pupils.

### 2.3.5. Feedback

The primary cause of group work failures is the absence of mutual feedback between students and teachers. This thought fills in the gaps and provides them with a gist of what is lacking. The learner is guided in the correct direction and redirected by this strategy.

### 2.3.6. Lack of resources

The absence of necessary resources causes the group's failure in completing the task. This indicates that they lack the knowledge or resources necessary to finish their endeavor.

### 2.3.7. Lack of respect

Members of a group that do not appreciate one another are the reason why group work fails. People are not respected for their ideas, opinions, ethnicity, nationality, or customs. These lead to issues, which impede a group's success.

### 2.3.8. Time management

When people in a group don't manage their time well and don't spend it properly, the group may fail. The group spends all of their time concentrating on and accomplishing one item at a time.

### 2.3.9. Processes

The group's failure stems from the fact that the leader occasionally has the final say.

### 2.3.10. Bad behavior

One member's actions lead the group to fail rather than the entire squad.

### 2.3.11. Poor Listening

Group members' disregard for instructions from instructors or group leaders is another factor contributing to group failure.

## 3. The Definition of Authentic Language

The English language textbooks used in Iraqi vocational schools are created with the usual pedagogical goals in mind, which include vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures that many students find oppressive. Language is more than just a set of terms and grammar rules that children need to learn; it is a tool for communication. The following are the key meanings of authentic materials:

"Authentic learning" is a new pedagogical phrase proposed by Herrington and Oliver (2000:20). This term teaches students to confront and handle real-world events and has a direct connection to their everyday lives. Authentic learning materials and activities are made to mimic real-world scenarios, claims Herod (2002:12). Furthermore, materials "which have been produced for purposes other than to teach language" are defined as authentic by Nunan (1988:56).

According to Jacobson et al. (2003: 13), authentic materials are printed materials that are utilized in classrooms in a manner consistent with their real-world applications. Put differently, authentic texts are defined by Stubbs (1996:43) as "actual, attested, and such that they have real authentic instances of use". Authentic materials are defined as "ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes" by Carter & Nunan (2001:68).

### 3.1. Authenticity

Rost (2005:4) states that one of the words that researchers discuss dubiously is authenticity. Kilickaya (2004:16) claims that numerous researchers have thoroughly examined genuineness. They consequently defined this troublesome phrase in various ways. For language teachers and materials designers who are willing to use authenticity in language instruction in EFL classes, defining "authenticity" is a crucial component.

Authenticity and the use of real materials in EFL classrooms have been the subject of numerous researches. Many studies find that authenticity matters because it makes students feel more at ease when speaking the target language in natural settings. Conversely, pupils can not receive as much practice in real life if teachers employ less real-world resources with them. According to Hedge (2000:12), the concept of authenticity gained traction in the 1970s when language training adopted a communicative approach.

### 3.2. Types of Authenticity

Breen (1985:45) states that authenticity has four types:

#### 3.2.1. Text Authenticity

Text authenticity: describes a text's true characteristics. In the context of language acquisition, authentic texts refer to any information source that aids in the development of an authentic understanding by students.

#### 3.2.2. Learner Authenticity

The capacity of learners to understand the content contained in the text as naturally as native speakers do in the real world is referred to as authenticity of learning.

#### 3.2.3. Task Authenticity

The term "authenticity of the tasks" refers to the selection of assignments that enable learners to participate in genuine conversation and pursue genuine learning objectives.

#### 3.2.4. Authenticity of the Classroom

Breen (1985: 67) states that when a classroom is authentic, students can engage in public and interpersonal sharing of language learning content, the sharing of problems with such content, and revealing of the most effective means and strategies to overcome such problems.

A vital component of teaching and learning a foreign language is the use of instructional materials. These days, everyone has access to resources for instructional materials. One of the most significant and abundant sources of real materials is thought to be the internet.

According to Genhard (1996:68) there are three categories of authentic materials:

- a- Listening resources that are authentic, such music, radio news, cartoons, etc.
- b. Realistic visual elements, like images, postcards, street signs, and articles from publications and newspapers.
- c. Real printed items, such train tickets, restaurant menus, sports reports, newspapers, etc.

### 3.3. Selecting Authentic Materials

In order to be ready to handle circumstances, the students may encounter in the real world, they must use authentic resources. It is the responsibility of the teachers to select appropriate, real-world assignments to aid in the learning process. In order to select assignments that will be beneficial to their students, teachers require a set of criteria to make their job easier.

McGrath (2002:78) lists eight factors to take into account when selecting relevant authentic texts:

- a. Affectivity with the course book and the demands of the students;
- b. Interest in the subject;
- c. Cultural fitness;
- d. Logistical factors
- e-Cognitive requirements
- f) Language requirements
- g. Qualitative
- h. Utilizable

The appropriateness of the text's content, its exploitability, and its readability are the three primary factors taken into consideration while selecting texts for use in the classroom.

When the incorrect teaching materials are utilized, pupils find it difficult to learn a foreign language. To be successful in learning any language, students need to be motivated and encouraged. Therefore, educational resources must pique students' interest and inspire them. If the teaching resources are not interesting and motivating, students won't learn anything.

Numerous researchers look into how these kinds of materials affect students. Over the past few decades, it has proved to be successful to teach language in classrooms using real materials. More information about the value of real materials to aid in language learning and instruction is provided by numerous scholars (Shrum and Glisan, 2000: 65; Guariento and Morley, 2001: 33 and Paltridge, 2001: 67).

The following are some justifications for utilizing real materials in the classroom:

- a-They get students ready for the real world.



- b-They satisfy the needs of students.
- c- They have a positive impact on students' motivation.
- d- They support educators in implementing efficient teaching strategies.
- e- They give accurate cultural information.

According to Genhard (1996:45), using actual materials helps to "contextualize" language acquisition. Furthermore, genuine resources aid in bridging the gap between the language taught in the classroom and the language utilized by actual individuals in actual circumstances.

One thing to keep in mind is the learners' level while utilizing real content. To maximize the advantages of utilizing real materials in the classroom, this is essential. Put another way, learners may become demotivated and lose interest in learning the target language if the resources are beyond their level or aptitude. It is stated by Kim (2000:77) and Kilickaya (2004:98) that only advanced and intermediate learners can benefit from the utilization of real resources. According to alternative perspectives held by Miller (2005:76) and McNeil (1994:43), realistic resources can be utilized with students at lower levels as well. It is imperative that teachers comprehend that the utilization of authentic resources can yield benefits only when the materials are employed in the educational setting within the intended context.

#### 4. Data Collection Procedures

##### 4.1. Participants

The sample of this study consists of forty participants that are chosen randomly from the fifth class in the vocational school. The population of this study is divided into two groups to represent experimental group that is taught English language by using group work and authentic materials whereas the controlled group is taught English language as a foreign language by using other common techniques in the traditional method.

**Table 1: Displays the sample of this study**

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
<b>Controlled</b>	Vocabulary test to both groups	Teaching vocabulary in traditional method	Vocabulary test to both groups
<b>Experimental</b>		Teaching vocabulary by using group work and authentic materials	

## 4.2. Instruments

The necessary information was gathered by using four instruments: a questionnaire, a vocabulary test, an interview with teachers, and a solutions placement test.

### 4.2.1. Solutions Placement Test

The solutions placement test has been prepared in conjunction with teachers and is intended to evaluate students' proficiency in both receptive and productive skills as well as their knowledge of the main language. This can help educators better understand the academic level of their students. (Edwards, 2022: 2)

The solution placement test was given by the researcher to the participants in order to assess their degree of competency and create a homogeneous group. The goal of this placement test is to assist educators in determining which Solution level—elementary, pre-intermediate, or intermediate—is best for their students.

### 4.2.2. Vocabulary Test

The entire quantity of words that make up a language, along with the rules for combining them, is known as its vocabulary. (ibid)

The vocabulary test in this study was designed by the researcher that suits the vocational schools students' level. There are two sections to this test, with twenty items in each. It has forty items as a result. There was no penalty for guessing, and each item was worth one point. The first section consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions to answer. In this section, a statement lacking a word was supplied to the students, who had to select one of the four provided vocabulary items to finish the sentence. There were 20 items in the second section, which was a multiple-choice paraphrasing. Students selected the word from the list of four that most closely matched the meaning of the sentence that had one underlined word in it.

The vocabulary and English usage of the students would be tested in this portion. There were two administrations of this vocabulary test: a pre-test and a post-test. In order for the researcher to identify the initial differences between the groups, the students were pre-tested using the test. Following this, they were exposed to the procedure, wherein the experimental group was given special treatment (group work and authentic material), while the control groups received no treatment at all. Lastly, the researchers gave the participants this vocabulary exam once again to look into the impact of group work and real material on vocabulary acquisition.

### 4.2.3. Interview

In this study, the interview is conducted with teachers to know the effect of using group work and authentic material in teaching English in general with more concentration on vocabulary from their point of view. Their opinions were in favor of using group work and authentic material as well as they emphasize on the positive effect of such strategies on enhancing students' performance .

### 4.2.4. Questionnaire

In this study, a questionnaire is designed for students to know whether they can benefit from using group work and realistic material that they need actually in daily life situations or not. Group work represents competition and cooperation that enable them to share their experiences with others and this makes learning faster from their point of view. For using authentic material that represents the realistic language that makes them learn eagerly and encourages them to learn more to meet their needs. The students think that using group work and authentic material increases their communication with others.

The educational atmosphere in vocational schools is influenced by the students' collective sense of futility and hopelessness. When compared to students in academic education, those in vocational school exhibit greater unfavorable attitudes regarding themselves. This consequently impacts their motivation and level of study engagement (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). A significant factor influencing the success of English language acquisition is self-efficacy and self-regulation. Thus, the use of group work strategies is essential to increasing student participation and improving the quality of the English class.

### 4.3. Results and Discussion

In order to answer the two research questions that state: (1) Is there any effect of using authentic materials and group work on students' high scores achievements? and (2) How do authentic material and group work affect the students' performance, skills and behaviors?. Besides, verifying the two hypotheses that state: (1) The use of the strategies of group work and authentic language enhances students' achievement. (2) The relationship between high achievement records in Iraqi vocational schools and applying the strategies of group work and authentic materials by teachers on their students is very strong.

The pre- and post-test results for the two groups were compared independently. Initially, the pre-test results of the students were examined to determine whether the vocabulary knowledge of the two groups was

similar. Second, the post-test results of the participants were examined to demonstrate the impact of group work and real content.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of the pre-test administered to both groups of the fifth vocational students before using group work and authentic material.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the pre-test**

Groups	NO. Correct answers	%	NO. Incorrect answers	%
<b>A(Experimental group)</b>	18	45	22	55
<b>B(Controlled group)</b>	17	42.5	23	57.5

As it is obvious, there is not significant differences between the students' score in pre-test before using group work and authentic material. Table 3 shows that the number of correct answers for the experimental group is (18: 45%) whereas that of the controlled group is (17: 42.5%), this shows the similarity in the students' performance. Thus, there is no meaningful distinction between the two groups achievement in the pre-test before using group work and authentic material in teaching vocabulary.

Consequently, it can be said that prior to the treatment's administration, the two groups' vocabulary knowledge was nearly equal. The post-test results of the subjects were examined to find the answer to the first study question and to look into the treatment's impact. The post-test descriptive statistics for fifth-class vocational students are shown in Table 4, following the delivery of the treatment.

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the post-test**

Groups	NO. Correct answers	%	NO. Incorrect answers	%
<b>Experimental</b>	35	87.5	5	12,5
<b>Controlled</b>	20	50	20	50

Table 4 shows the number of correct answers of the experimental group (35: 87.5) is considerably higher than that of the controlled group (20:50). This analysis indicates that the performance of the experimental group that is taught by using group work and authentic material is better than that of the controlled that was taught by using the traditional method. Thus, because of the great positive effect of using group work and authentic on enhancing the vocational students' achievement in learning vocabulary. Besides, there is a strong relationship between high achievement records

in Iraqi vocational schools and applying the strategies of group work and authentic materials by teachers on their students is very strong , the two research questions that state: (1) Is there any effect of using authentic materials and group work on students' high scores achievements ? and (2) How do authentic material and group work affect the students' performance, skills and behaviors?, are answered. Besides, the two hypotheses that state: (1) The use of the strategies of group work and authentic language enhances students' achievement. (2) The relationship between high achievement records in Iraqi vocational schools and applying the strategies of group work and authentic materials by teachers on their students is very strong, are verified.

#### 4- Conclusion

The study reaches to the following conclusions:

- 1- There is a strong positive effect of using authentic materials and group work on students' high scores achievements. Thus, the first hypothesis that states: "The use of the strategies of group work and authentic language enhances students' achievement". is verified.
- 2- The findings of this study also verify the second hypothesis which reads: " the relationship between high achievement records in Iraqi vocational schools and applying the group work and authentic material techniques by teachers on their students is very strong".
- 3- Vocational curriculum lacks authentic materials that student need to face what they are expose to in real life outside classroom. So, students are not interested in English lesson. The English language education and the demands of the pupils in English are not aligned.
4. One of the fundamental causes of English language education's failure to provide the intended results is the curriculum's discontinuity across levels.
5. The results of this study show that students perceive the number of English classes as being relatively low in terms of the quantity of the lessons.
- 6- Positive outcomes like an increase in efficiency and self-awareness as well as problem-solving should be taken into consideration when considering the addition of alternative assessments to the current evaluation system.
- 7- Working in groups is a useful tool for language learning. As a result, additional time should be used to activate it. It helps pupils learn, grow in their ability to understand sound, and evaluate themselves.

## 5- Recommendations

1. Comprehensive curricular modifications are necessary to support English language instruction; as a result, more lesson hours ought to be set aside for this purpose. To address the issue of limited practical teaching resources, some portions of the lessons may be available online.
- 2- It is worth mentioning that the vocational curriculum should have authentic and real material to enhance and develop English language learning.
3. Group work in foreign language instruction has been accepted as a method for encouraging communicative contact in the classroom and is thought of as an expansion of the ideas behind communicative language instruction. Thus, teachers should be directed to use it in teaching English language.

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